

Community-Led Local Development

The added-value of cross-border local development in the Interreg Italy-Austria Programme 2014-2020



©Jean-Pierre Vercruysse

“South Tyrol is a little Europe in a big Europe”

Martha Gaerber, Managing Authority for the Interreg Italy-Austria programme

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List of abbreviations

CA	Certifying Authority
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
COHEMON	Cohesion Monitoring system
CPR 2014-2020	Common Provision Regulation for the period 2014-2020
CPR 2021-2027	Common Provision Regulation for the period 2021-2027
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESI	European Structural and Investment Funds
FLC	First Level Control
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
JESM	Joint Evaluation and Monitoring System
JS	Joint Secretariat
KEUR	Thousands of Euros
LAG	Local Action Group
MA	Managing Authority
MEUR	Million Euros
PO	Policy Objective
RCU	Regional Coordination Unit
SCO	Simplified Cost Option
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats
UN	United Nations

Glossary

- **Audit Authority:** The Audit Authority is a body independent from the Managing Authority. It is in charge of Second Level Control, which it undertakes by auditing a sample of the cost claims verified by the FLC. The Audit Authority can also carry out visits on the ground and audit LAGs or beneficiaries.
- **COHEMON** is an on-line monitoring system that is used by all stakeholders of the programme. It is structured around a database and has specific modules for specific users: budget allocation, commitments, cost claims, payments, etc. It also includes data on indicators which allow a quantitative monitoring of the implementation of the programme. Bolzano chose to develop a system which is common to the three Cohesion Funds (ERDF, ESF and Interreg) in the Region, instead of using the monitoring system JEMS developed by Interact for Interreg.
- **Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)** is a special delivery mechanism for the European Structural and Investment Funds and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). It devolves the selection of projects to the local level on the assumption that local communities know best what is good for their development. The CLLD method has been encapsulated in the text of the Common Provision Regulation since 2014.
- **Draft Budget.** The CPR 2021-2027 establishes in its article 53.2 that all projects under 200.000 Euros must use Simplified Cost Options (SCOs). The IT-AT programme for the new period foresees the use of the Draft Budget methodology, which means that in the future a detailed budget will be approved and payment will take place when the planned outputs have been achieved, without control of cost claims.
- **European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation.** Setting up an EGTC allows public entities of different Member States to come together under a new entity with full legal personality. Through an EGTC, public authorities can set up a single joint structure to implement projects, investments or policies in the territory covered by the EGTC, whether co-financed by the EU budget or not.
- **Fist Level Control.** The FLC is established in each participating region. Its team controls data on each item of spending in small projects before a payment is initiated. They control that all project expenditure is eligible according to the IT-AT eligibility rules, European regulations and national legislation. This is the First Level Control function established pursuant to Article 23 (4) of the ETC Regulation and Article 125 (4)(a) of the 2014-2020 CPR.

- **Functional Areas** are a way to address some limitations of CLLD: sometimes, the local area is too small for certain projects or does not include important assets such as access to cities for mobility projects. Functional Areas are a way to open the area towards new partners and new themes, to reach a critical mass or to connect with complementary assets.
- **Joint Secretariat:** The Joint Secretariat prepares all documents that need to be signed by the MA. They are the first level of contact for project partners, who will receive answers to their questions directly unless these need to be checked with the MA, the FLC or the Audit Authority. The JS prepare decisions and draft contracts and financial agreements. The team also undertakes communication tasks related to the programme.
- **Lead Fund.** The “Lead Fund” is a major simplification introduced by the CPR 2014-2020. It is an option for multi-funded strategies, where some costs are covered by one “Lead” Fund. In the 2014-2020 period, this option was restricted to costs related to management and animation; in the new period, all costs of implementation can be covered by the Lead Fund.
- **Local Action Group.** Under CLLD, this designates the local partnership that is implementing the local strategy. NB: the term “LAGs” is used to designate the cross-border partnerships, and the term “partners of the LAGs” to designate the Local Action Groups that are part of the cross-border partnership.
- **Regional Coordination Unit:** The Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) is a body established at the regional level to provide advice on the eligibility of projects before their formal approval by the LAGs.
- **Regional Management Associations:** The Regional Management Associations in Tyrol are voluntary associations established at local level. They pursue a goal-oriented cooperation between the local areas and the lander, the federal state and the European Union. In this regard, they promote the strategic orientation of regional development. They work by involving a wide range of stakeholders and target groups.
- **Simplified Cost Options (SCOs).** Articles 53-57 of the CPR 2021-2027 allows the use of a series of cost options that are an alternative to the reimbursement of eligible costs. SCOs are one of the most important simplification measures to reduce administrative costs and burden. They facilitate access of small beneficiaries to the ESI Funds thanks to the simplification of the management process and allow organisations to focus more on the achievement of the objectives.

Executive summary

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) has been applied in European policy since the early 1990s, when the European Commission launched the LEADER Initiative. This reflected the fact that innovative approaches to local development, prioritising local knowledge to address local problems with local solutions, was gaining growing importance across the world.

Since 2014, CLLD is a special delivery mechanism for the European Structural and Investment Funds and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). It devolves the selection of projects to the local level on the assumption that local communities know best what is good for their development.

Interreg is one of funds in which CLLD is used to support and finance cross-border projects by Local Action Groups. CLLD has only been applied since 2014 in the Italy-Austria (IT-AT) Interreg programme.

This report assesses the added-value that this method brings to local cross-border territories and highlights the results in order to support the upscaling of bottom-up and participatory approaches in Interreg. The report presents the results of a study-visit undertaken in July 2022 on the ground in the cross-border area between Italy and Austria. 42 meetings were undertaken with the Regional Authority in Austria and the Managing Authority in Bolzano, as well as on the ground in the four cross-border CLLD areas.

An important success factor is the common history which is still relevant today since the regions were unified at the end of World War I. Today these cross-border regions benefit from a large autonomy from the two capitals which creates an environment conducive for local development through local projects.

Multi-level governance arrangements in the framework of the IT-AT Interreg programme are complex because of their cross-border dimension. Many bodies are involved, including the Managing Authority, the Joint Secretariat, four Regional Coordination Units, mainstream agencies in charge of sectoral policies, and LEADER groups. This leads to coordination difficulties, and the need to work in two languages.

Recommendations for the future include: use the Draft Budget instead of reimbursement of eligible costs; adopt a monitoring system specific to Interreg; support the participation of the teams of the different administrations in LAG's

meeting; foster the use of Functional areas to address current limitations; and overcome language difficulties by training the teams.

The delivery mechanism is presented in detail, highlighting the difficulties and bottlenecks which create a high level of administrative burden and make the use of CLLD unattractive for stakeholders and potential beneficiaries. It is also necessary to show a high level of accountability for the use of public funds. Solutions such as the use of Draft Budget and other types of Simplified Cost Options are recommended as well as the streamlining of the monitoring and evaluation system.

The added-value of CLLD is assessed quantitatively by using monitoring data such as the number of projects financed by the LAGs or the amount of EU Funds disbursed. The level of commitment had reached 87% by August 2022 but the payments are taking place at a slower rate. The balance between small and medium projects varies between the LAGs, depending on both their experience and strategy.

The qualitative added-value is also analysed by looking at the way the specific features of CLLD are applied in the programme and on the ground.

- The *area-based approach* is implemented across the border, which is very innovative for CLLD. The use of Functional Areas in the next period could help solving some issues related to the size of the areas covered.
- The *bottom-up approach* is implemented mainly by the use of thematic working groups by the LAGs. These are used for the development of new strategies and oversee the implementation of thematic projects.
- The *partnership approach* is implemented through the setting-up of cross-border project selection committees but also by the obligation to include a partner from each Member State in each project.
- The *strategy* is the tool used to integrate the different dimension of the local development intervention. Current strategies are structured along the Europe 2020 strategy and will be taking into account the Green Deal in the next period. Strategies should be developed in a participative way, involving the local population in the assessment of the local needs.
- The *innovative dimension* should be defined locally and can be found in each project. Different types of local innovation are applied by the LAGs, including technological innovation, product innovation and innovation to add value to a local asset. The lack of networking is an obstacle to the dissemination of innovative ideas and approaches.

- *Networking* should be reinforced in future programmes to allow for sharing of project ideas but also problems and solutions related to the administrative burden. Technical assistance for networking should be provided for in the next period.
- *Cooperation* is fundamental to Interreg and takes place in each project supported by the LAGs, either as common actions or just as exchanges between stakeholders on both sides of the border.
- The *devolution of decision-making* on projects is applied, although it is made more difficult by the administrative burden which detracts the LAG's teams from their core task of animating the local area.

The report includes a description of the four LAGs and their areas, as well as a short presentation of 34 cross-border projects financed by the LAGs.

Introduction:

“Over the last 40 years, innovative approaches towards local development, prioritising local knowledge to address local problems with local solutions have gained growing importance across the world. Academic thinking has also evolved over the last few decades: new economic geographers emphasize the role of proximity as important in socio-economic development. They emphasize the role of local traditions, the importance of local knowledge and face-to-face exchange, the quality of local institutions, social habits, norms and routines, and the sociology of communication and interaction in local economic networks as essential ingredients.”¹

In addition, the European Commission has been exploring ways of involving citizens in decision-making such as Citizen’s panels and other forms of consultation such as green papers, on line surveys, etc².

Community-Led Local Development is at the crossing of these trends, giving a voice to local people to develop and implement those “local solutions to local problems”. It has been applied in Europe since the early 1990s, when the LEADER programme was launched to pilot new approaches to the development of rural areas. The LEADER method proved very successful and was adapted from 2007 and applied in [fisheries-dependent areas](#)³. Since 2014 the methodology was used to define Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), which is a special delivery mechanism for the European Structural and Investment Funds and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). CLLD is eligible under Interreg since 2014, but has only been applied to the IT-AT programme.

CLLD devolves the decision-making to the local level on the basis that local communities know best what is good for their development. The CLLD method has been integrated in the text of the Common Provision Regulation since 2014⁴.

“LEADER is an experimental field for local development”.
Commissioner Franz Fischler

Interreg is one of funds in which CLLD is used to support and finance cross-border projects by Local Action Groups.

¹ Community Driven Development and Community-Led Local Development. Comparing Experiences of the World Bank and the European Commission. *Dan Owen and Jean-Pierre Vercauteren*. EStIF Journal 4 | 2014.

² See for example the recent launch of the [JRC’s resource center on participative democracy](#) or the [series of initiatives](#) taken in the framework of the climate pact.

⁴ Articles 32-35 of the Common Provision Regulation No 1303/2013 of 17 December 2013

CLLD has only been applied in the Italy-Austria (IT-AT) Interreg programme since 2014. It is important to assess the added-value that this method brings to the local cross-border territories and to highlight the results obtained. To support a larger take-up of this approach within the Interreg programme, it is necessary to assess the difficulties that the stakeholders encountered and the solutions that were applied. The IT-AT programme has decided to apply CLLD again in the 2021-27 programme with an increased budget, which indicates that the first period was successful and that useful results could be observed on the ground.

The purpose of this assignment is to assist the Directorate D, DG REGIO, European Commission, to better understand the added-value of cross-border CLLD in the framework of Interreg. And in regard to the additional administrative burden on the Managing Authority (MA) and LAGs, to propose recommendations to implement the upscaling of bottom-up and participatory approaches in Interreg.

This report presents the results of a study-visit undertaken in July 2022 on the ground in the cross-border area between Italy and Austria: 42 meetings were held with the Regional Authority in Austria and the Managing Authority in Bolzano, as well as on the ground in the four cross-border CLLD areas. This was complemented by literature reviews and a study of the LAGs' web sites.

The first chapter begins with a presentation of the legal basis and texts that are relevant to CLLD, and presents the historical and political backgrounds which are important to understand the success of CLLD in the cross-border area between Italy and Austria.

The second chapter looks at multi-level governance in the framework of the IT-AT Interreg programme. It describes governance arrangements for the management of the programme and also specific governance arrangements with the relevant European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), with specific sectors and coordination with other EU Funds.

In the third chapter, the delivery mechanism is presented, highlighting the difficulties and bottlenecks and how these were overcome and the way in which the Draft Budget⁵ could simplify substantially the delivery mechanism in the future.

⁵ The Draft Budget methodology is a Simplified Cost Option (SCO) that is based on the allocation of a budget to a project. Payment is done if the expected results are reached without having to present a detailed cost claim.

The **fourth chapter** analyses the added-value of cross-border CLLD, looking at both quantitative results and qualitative outcomes. The qualitative aspects are analysed using the seven features of LEADER, which is a well-established way of identifying the added-value of CLLD.

Each chapter contains recommendations on the way CLLD could be better supported in Interreg 2021-2027.

A **detailed description of each LAG** is annexed, including a short presentation on some of the projects that were visited in the study-visit.



**MILCHHOF STERZING
LATTERIA VIPITENO**

“What one person can’t do alone; we can do together”⁶

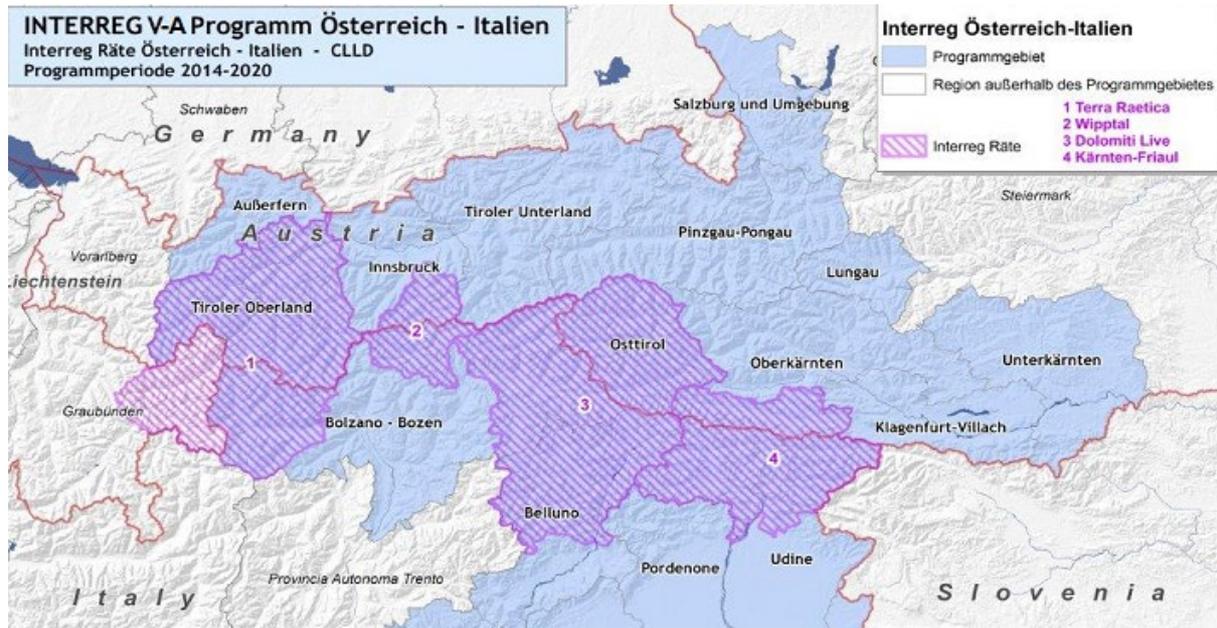
“We need to make Europe work locally to make it work at a higher level.”⁷

⁶ Motto of the Sterzing/Vitipeno Cooperative.

⁷ Ms Gina Streit, Dolomiti Live

1. Background:

This chapter describes the legal framework in which CLLD is applied and presents the different levels of legislation. The second section looks at the historical and political context of the region, which is important to understand the implementation of CLLD.



Map of the areas covered by the four LAGs, Interreg programme IT-AT 2014-2020.

1.1. Legal texts

The legal framework is composed of the overarching Common Provision Regulation, the ERDF and Interreg Regulations.

1.1.1. Common Provision Regulation (CPR):

- Period 2014-2020⁸: The CPR includes a series of Articles (32-35) establishing the basic principles of CLLD for application to the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds), including the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).
- Period 2021-2027⁹: Articles 31-34 of the new CPR present a simplified version of these basic principles, again applicable to all ESI Funds plus the EAFRD. Some specific features of CLLD have been updated to take into

⁸ Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 of 17 December 2013.

⁹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of 24 June 2021.

account the learning from the former period, in particular the rules related to the use of a “Lead Fund”¹⁰ in Article 31.5.

1.1.2. European Regional Development Fund:

The ERDF Regulation¹¹ for the period 2021-2027 includes in Article 3 (e) a new Policy Objective (PO5) that supports “a Europe closer to the citizen by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives.” That support can be provided through territorial and local development strategies, according to three forms as set out in Article 28 of the Common Provision Regulation 2021-27:

- Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs).
- Community-Led Local Development (CLLD).
- Another territorial tool supporting initiatives designed by the Member State.

CLLD is therefore eligible under the ERDF in the programmes that have allocated a budget under PO5.

1.1.3. Interreg:

The Interreg Regulation for the 2014-2020¹² period already included in Article 10 the possibility to apply CLLD “in cross-border cooperation programmes, provided that the local development group is composed of representatives of at least two countries, of which one is a Member State.” This formed the legal basis for the establishment of CLLD in the IT-AT programme.

The Interreg Regulation for the 2021-2027 period¹³ is a bit more specific in Article 21, which states that “the relevant local action groups are composed of representatives of public and private local socio-economic interests, in which no single interest group controls the decision-making, and of at least two participating countries, of which at least one is a Member State.”

The new Interreg Regulation foresees in Article 25 the creation of “Small Projects Funds”, a tool which was already used in the implementation of the IT-AT CLLD to reduce the administrative burden for the LAGs.

¹⁰ The “Lead Fund” is a major simplification introduced by the CPR 2014-2020. It is an option for multi-funded strategies, where some costs are covered by one “Lead” Fund. In the 2014-2020 period, this option was restricted to costs related to management and animation; in the new period, all costs of implementation can be covered by the Lead Fund.

¹¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of 24 June 2021.

¹² Regulation (EU) 1299/2013, 17 December 2013.

¹³ Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, 24 June 2021.

1.2. A common history:¹⁴

To understand the cross-border CLLD in the border region between North Tyrol, South Tyrol-Alto Adige, Ost-Tirol, Carinthia and Friuli-Veneto-Giulia, it is necessary to understand two complementary elements:

- This area has a common history and was a united territory until the end of World War I.
- On both sides of the border there is a strong tradition of political autonomy from the national capitals.

Tyrol is a region in the middle alpine area of Central Europe. Its history dates back to early human settlements at the end of the last glacier period, around 12,000 BC. The region was conquered by the Romans in 15 BC and the northern and eastern areas were incorporated into the Roman Empire as the provinces of Raetia and Noricum. The area was conquered by different peoples/tribes (Goths, Lombards, Charlemagne, House of Habsburg, etc.), but remained a united territory.

At the end of World War I, the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye of 1919 ceded the southern part of Tyrol to the Kingdom of Italy, including present-day South Tyrol, with its German-speaking majority. The northern part of Tyrol was retained by the First Austrian Republic. This border is still in place today and is the area covered by the cross-border CLLD Interreg programme.

Carinthia also had a turbulent history with a mixed Slovene and German-speaking population: it was separated after World War I, and the land was divided between Slovenia (which became Yugoslavia), Austria (Land of Carinthia) and Italy (Province of Udine).

CLLD is therefore, being established in an area where the local people still feel that they belong to the same territory. The opening of the borders after the accession of Austria to the European Union and the application of the Schengen Agreement have reinforced that feeling of belonging to the same area.

¹⁴ This summary is based on Wikipedia.

1.3. Political background: autonomy

In Italy, the **Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol** Region benefits from a large autonomy, whilst **Tyrol** is an independent region with broader decision-making powers in Austria. This autonomy is a positive factor for CLLD, which is based on the devolution of decision-making to the lowest relevant level. Also, these regions are far from the national decision-making centres in Vienna and Rome.

The Paris Treaty signed in 1946 secured special provisions for South Tyrol with regards to the development of language, economy and culture. However, by 1960 it had not been implemented yet and tensions in South Tyrol escalated: on the night of 11 June 1961 dozens of electricity pylons throughout South Tyrol were blown up. Negotiations between Rome, Bolzano and Vienna restarted and produced a “package” of measures, introduced as the Second Autonomy Statute in 1972. It secures equal rights and protection for all language groups in the land and devolves a series of responsibilities to the autonomous region, including education. The South Tyrol budget is around 5 billion Euros and 90% of the taxes collected remains in the region¹⁵.

“The Region is famous for the autonomy that was achieved after years of struggle. The Dalai Lama came twice to Bolzano to learn about the local approach to autonomy, hoping to enforce it in Tibet. In Bolzano, there are summer schools and visiting scholars working on the concept of autonomy.

The policy enforced by politicians at the regional level is to help people to stay in the mountains and to avoid the desertification of remote areas if people move to Bolzano and beyond. To achieve this objective, investment in infrastructure is essential, these must be better than in Bolzano. The result of this policy is that population is growing in remote areas, whilst it remains stable in Bolzano. CLLD is the right vehicle to strengthen this policy in remote areas. It helps finding activities to keep people where they are.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Source: Web site of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano – South Tyrol. <https://www.provinz.bz.it/this-is-south-tyrol/the-struggle-for-autonomy.asp>

¹⁶ Extracts from the interview with Arno Kompatscher, President of the Trentino Alto-Adige/Südtirol Region and of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, 11/7/2022.

2. Governance of the Interreg IT-AT programme 2014-2020/22

2.1. Management of the programme

This chapter describes the different stakeholders that are involved in the management of the IT-AT programme. The overall aim of this framework is to deliver the programme effectively and efficiently, whilst ensuring a high level of accountability of the European Funds: the next chapter will focus more on the technical tasks undertaken by these stakeholders.

2.1.1. Managing Authority

The Managing Authority (MA) for the cross-border IT-AT Interreg programme is in Bolzano, the political and economic centre of the region Trentino Alto-Adige/Südtirol. The MA is located in the offices of the Provincia Autonoma Di Bolzano – Alto Adige. The same office also manages the ERDF and the ESF. The region has a long experience of local development, with LEADER Groups that started under LEADER 1 in 1992 (LAG Alta Val Venosta, LAG Alto Bellunese).

The MA has developed a monitoring system called COHEMON¹⁷, which is used in the three programmes (ERDF-ESF-Interreg). The MA stated that CLLD requires additional resources, since it adds an extra layer in the partnership: small projects in particular are time-consuming to manage.

2.1.2. Joint Secretariat (JS)

The Joint Secretariat is hosted by the MA and prepares all documents that need to be signed by the MA. They are the first level of contact for project partners, who will receive answers to their questions directly unless these need to be checked with the MA, the FLC or the Audit Authority. The JS prepare decisions, draft contracts and financial agreements. The team also undertakes communication tasks such as the web site, which are of growing importance in the European Funds¹⁸.

¹⁷ COHEMON is an on-line monitoring system that is used by all stakeholders of the programme. It is structured around a database and has specific modules for specific users: budget allocation, commitments, cost claims, payments, etc. It also includes data on indicators which allow a quantitative monitoring of the implementation of the programme. Bolzano chose to develop their own system which is common to the three Cohesion Funds (ERDF, ESF and Interreg) instead of using the monitoring system JEMS developed by Interact for Interreg.

¹⁸ The new CPR foresees a much larger role for communication in it Articles 46 to 50.

The Joint Secretariat is composed of one coordinator, with five staff members: the requirement to be bilingual in Italian and German makes recruitment difficult.

2.1.3. Regional Coordination Unit (RCU)

The RCU is a body established at the regional level to provide advice on the eligibility of projects before their formal approval by the LAGs.

There is a RCU in Bolzano – Alto Adige and in Veneto-Friuli-Giulia for Italian LAG's partners; in Tyrol and in Carinthia for Austrian LAG's partners. This can create difficulties since these four offices might have different interpretations of the eligibility of certain actions foreseen by projects.

Once checked, medium-size projects are forwarded through COHEMON to the Joint Secretariat who will prepare the grant agreements to be signed by the MA. The RCU will also give an opinion on small projects, however, these will be directly approved by the LAGs.

Good practice:

The team of the RCU will attend some LAGs meetings in order to have an overview of their activities and to be prepared for the submission of project.

2.1.4. Certifying Authority (CA)

The job of the Certifying Authority is to check if the project can be committed within the budget of the Regional Authority. It is an autonomous body in charge of all ESI Funds in the Region.

2.1.5. Monitoring Committee

The Monitoring Committee attached to the programme¹⁹ is involved in the selection of the Local Development Strategies and therefore the LAGs. Unlike in other strands of the programme, they are not involved in the selection of

¹⁹ The Monitoring Committee should include public authorities, economic and social partners, bodies representing civil society, bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and non-discrimination, as well as research organisations and universities.

projects which remains the responsibility of the LAGs, to respect the devolution of decision-making foreseen in Article 34.3. of the 2014-2020 CPR Regulation.

2.1.6. Audit Authority

The Audit Authority is a body independent from the Managing Authority. It is in charge of Second Level Control, which it undertakes by auditing a sample of the cost claims verified by the FLC²⁰. The Audit Authority can also carry out visits on the ground and audit LAGs or beneficiaries.

They consider CLLD projects to be simpler than normal projects as they do not require the use of performance indicators, only result indicators. It was a political decision not to perform checks on management. On the other hand, information comes from ordinary citizens, which might be a challenge for the auditors who are more used to work on costs claims from large organisations.

2.2. Governance arrangements with the EGTCs

2.2.1. EGTC Tyrol- South Tyrol – Trento

The EGTC European Region [Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino](#) was registered in the European EGTC register on 13 September 2011 as the 21st European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation. They want to work closely with CLLD areas and support this grassroots democratic approach. A [cooperation agreement](#) was adopted at the end of 2017 to strengthen collaboration between the Euregio Tyrol-Alto Adige-Trentino EGTC and the CLLD regions "Terra Raetica", "Wipptal" and "Dolomiti Live". For the LAGs, this offers a better connection with the political level. They have also been allowed to use the EGTC logo for their communication. A new agreement is in preparation to take into account the new strategies that are being developed by the LAGs for the new period.

The EGTC was also involved in projects such as a cross-border hut in the Wipptal area that had to be rebuilt and needed a new form of management. The budget was too large for CLLD since the hut had to be bought before its renovation. The project became a joint investment between the Wipptal CLLD and the EGTC.

²⁰ They stated in an interview that the FLC was working very well, and that this was making the work of the audit authority easier.

2.2.2. Sensa Confine

The EGTC “[Sensa Confine](#)” brings together the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, the Veneto Region and the Land Carinthia since 2012. It provides the HeurOpen LAG with statistics covering its operational area, which are often very difficult to get, especially at the cross-border level. These are updated every year, allowing adjustments in the implementation of the strategy. In the next period, the HeurOpen partners intend to develop further their cooperation with the EGTC “Sensa Confine”, who see the cross-border CLLD HeurOpen as the pilot for new actions to be undertaken by the EGTC.

Good practice:

Developing good relations with the relevant EGTC is beneficial for the LAGs who receive a higher level of political support. It is also good for the EGTC who gain access to a more local level. This can lead to the implementation of common projects where each level can provide tailored support.

2.3. Thematic governance

For CLLD, it is important to have good working relations with mainstream agencies in charge of relevant sectoral policies. Thus, LAGs can ensure that their work is in synergy with the work programme of these agencies and that their actions are in line with their policy framework and do not contradict the actions of those mainstream agencies.

Below are a series of short reports on interviews undertaken with those agencies in Tyrol, illustrating the importance of these connections.

Tourism:

Tyrol is very dependent on tourism, which represents 25-30% of the economic activity. However, these are seasonal jobs and it is difficult to provide employment in other sectors to people living in remote rural areas. To prevent more people leaving rural areas, it is important to help them shift from tourism by creating new employment opportunities.

Climate change:

“Climate change must be at the centre of the Green Deal” ²¹

Climate change is an obvious field of action for LAGs who undertake local action to reduce the use of fossil fuel²² for example. They also need to adapt their territory to cope with the consequences of climate change like the reduced availability of water. In Austria, climate action is taken in the framework of a multi-level strategy:

- At the international level, the Paris agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN sets the high-level objectives.
- The European Union has set objectives within the series of initiatives included in the [Green Deal](#).
- In Austria, there is a national policy adopted by the coalition government, which includes the Green Party: it sets out an [energy and climate plan for 2030](#).
- The Tyrol Region, which is also led by a coalition government, including the Green, has adopted a [climate strategy](#) in May 2022, complemented by an action plan adopted in July 2022, composed of 190 actions to be undertaken at the regional level.

The "[Clean Alpine Region](#)" project supports Tyrolean tourism regions in implementing measures in the areas of climate protection, sustainability and energy. There are four pilot areas, including a LAG supported project (Kaunertal in the Terra Raetica area).

Forestry:

Forests play a vital role for the protection of ecosystems, the fight against soil erosion and the preservation of biodiversity. In Tyrol, forests are largely privately owned and cover 40% of the land area: Pests and diseases are a constant challenge and, due to their spread, 80% of the wood harvested was damaged in 2021.

²¹ Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

²² Although a large part of energy produced in Tyrol is Green, power generation from the Tyrol's rivers and streams alone is enough to meet the region's requirements for electricity from renewable energy sources.

Local forests are also important for tourism, in particular for bikers, an activity which has developed rapidly in recent years: 100.000 bikes were sold in Tyrol last year. The increase in the number of bikers has created conflicts between forest management, tourism, farming, etc.

The Forestry department has 50 people in Innsbruck who manage the forests through long-term planning. However, forests also need to be managed locally, and CLLD can play a role by supporting projects for better managed forests, including planting hardier varieties and a wider variety of species. The [Oh Tannenbaum project](#) in the Wipptal area aims to expand the use of the ancient fir tree, by collecting seeds and planting them in areas protected by fences to keep deers and bears at bay²³.

Migration crisis

The migration emergency has also been addressed, adapted and adjusted to the local needs and situation. In 2015, the project “Basic competences in Terra Raetica” organised language courses for the integration of migrant women, including the provision of childcare: though the budget was small, the outcomes were useful.

Good practice:

For CLLD, it is important to have good working relations with mainstream agencies in charge of sectoral policies. In this way, LAGs can ensure their work is in synergy with relevant agencies and their actions complement the policy framework.

2.4. Integration with LEADER

In Austria, the Regional Development Department Office of the Tyrolean state government, in charge of EU regional policy in Innsbruck sees itself as the “One-Stop-Shop Land Tyrol” to support local and regional development. The Department draws on the knowledge from other departments and brings it to the local level.

²³ It is described in more details in the description of the Wipptal LAG in annex.

“Smart villages, smart cities are important but we need to speak about Smart Regions”²⁴

This approach is applied to Interreg CLLD but also to other procedures of local development, which are “One-Stop-Shops” at the local level:

- 10 “[Regional managements](#)²⁵”, which are also LEADER Groups
- 10 “Volunteer Centres”
- 3 Interreg CLLD (HeurOpen depends from Carinthia)
- In total here are 2000 partners on the ground

These “One-Stop-Shops” implement the following EU funds:

- EAFRD (32 millions)
- ERDF (8 millions)
- Interreg CLLD (5 millions),

They also implement three non-EU Regional programmes:

- Economic development (19 millions),
- Climate (2 millions)
- The volunteer network (2 millions)

In total, these “One-stop-shops” implement a budget of 68 million Euros for the 2014-2020 period. The inclusion of non-EU funds in the budget of the One-Stop-Shops comes from the understanding that local development can’t rely only on EU funding, a national budget is necessary to support mainstreaming.

A similar approach for “[Inner Areas](#)” exists in Italy.

2.5. Multi-funding arrangements and use of the Lead Fund option

In Tyrol, LAGs are local development agencies that have access to six different sources of funding, as explained above. The delivery mechanism is seeking to apply common rules such as the Lead Fund option.

²⁴ Lienz local authority

²⁵ The regional management associations in Tyrol are voluntary associations established at the local level. They pursue a goal-oriented cooperation between the local areas and the lander, the federal state and the European Union. They work by involving a wide range of stakeholders and target groups.

CLLD groups have access to ERDF funding on the condition that it is anchored in a specific chapter of the local strategy. The selection of CLLD strategies has been undertaken in common between the MAs for LEADER and the ERDF. The public body responsible for LEADER is also an intermediate body for CLLD under the ERDF. Each project is allocated to only one fund. A common digital tool is used for implementation. There is a clear division of tasks:

- Local level: selection of projects, guidance and support for projects
- Regional level: Checks and control and formal administration such as contracts.

However, there are a **number of differences** between LEADER and ERDF, which make the implementation more difficult and have a negative impact on the motivation of the LAGs:

- Different regulations for EAFRD and ERDF, with different rules on publicity, equality, sustainability, fraud assessment, etc.
- Monitoring systems, application forms and check lists are different.
- Procurement laws and State Aid checks are different.
- Different co-financing rates are applied.
- Different monitoring, control and audit systems are used.

The Austrian LAGs who are also involved in Interreg have to use yet a separate management and monitoring system and are reporting to Bolzano instead of Innsbruck for that part of their “One-Stop-Shop” work.

The use of the Lead Fund option, usually from the EAFRD, simplifies the management of the running costs but not the management of the projects financed under both procedures.

There is no multi-funding for CLLD in Italy, since LEADER is managed at the national level. The MA considers that multi-funding would be very difficult to manage since they don't have the resources for it. Yet, Interreg and LEADER are delivered by the same local partnerships, but using separate delivery mechanisms.

Future of multi-funding in Austria:

In application of the new wording of Article 31.4 and 31.5 in the CPR 2021-2027, the rules applicable to the Lead Fund will be extended to all the operations supported under CLLD strategy. The Lead Fund authorities will be

able to handle all matters with LAGs and beneficiaries, except for making payments. Scope of the fund, eligibility rules for projects, monitoring data and indicators will remain fund-specific.

Preparations for the extended multi-fund are under way in Austria. The national legal framework is in preparation, which will specify that LEADER is the Lead Fund in Austria, which will allow the continuation of the current financing arrangements. A new common management, control and monitoring system is also in development.

2.6. Functional areas and CLLD areas

Functional Areas are a way to address some limitations of CLLD: sometimes, the local area is too small for certain projects or does not include important assets such as access to cities for mobility projects. Functional Areas are a way to open the area towards new partners and new themes, to reach a critical mass. These motivations are similar to those underlining the need for cooperation for LEADER groups.

Functional areas will benefit from an extra Interreg budget (up to 3 MEUR/LAG) that can be used for projects that extend outside the LAG area. This is a new approach which is piloted; there could be more funding in the future if it works.

Each LAG will propose some Functional Areas that go beyond the borders of their area. This will require new partners located outside the CLLD area.

- Terra Raetica has already applied this approach with their Swiss partners. They intend to expand towards Lombardia, where there is a big natural park.
- Both HeurOpen and Dolomiti Live intend to apply this approach in the framework of the “[EU Strategy for the Alps](#)”. This will allow the LAGs to include in their projects the network of larger towns and cities which act as hubs for their hinterland.

2.7. Conclusions and recommendations on governance

The governance of the programme is complex and should be streamlined. Procedures should be harmonised and better tailored to Interreg. A “one-stop-shop” approach could be made available for all the LAGs, as well as access to mainstream sectoral agencies such as the forestry Department or the tourist

board. More flexibility should be provided on the area-based approach through the use of Functional Areas.

The Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat are based in Bolzano. The office is understaffed because of the requirement for team members to be bilingual in Italian and German. There are no staff members working in Bolzano under delegation from Austrian authorities, which would have been very beneficial in a cross-border environment.

Recommendations:

- *Set a minimum number of people in the cross-border team in the Joint Secretariat.*
- *Provide language training to the team and support cross-border delegation of team members between agencies involved in the programme.*

The **use of the COHEMON** monitoring system developed by Bolzano for the cohesion programmes is deemed difficult by several stakeholders since it doesn't benefit from the same support as the JEMS system provided by Interact for Interreg. COHEMON is considered as time-consuming and not very users-friendly.

Recommendations:

- *Move to JEMS or provide additional support on COHEMON (training, development).*
- *Adapt COHEMON to make it more suitable for Interreg and develop a more user-friendly interface.*

The **Regional Coordination Unit (RCU)** provides advice on the eligibility of projects, but four different bodies carry out this task in four different regions associated in the Interreg programme. They might have different interpretations on the eligibility of certain actions, which makes cross-border projects difficult to implement.

Recommendations:

- *Encourage the participation of RCU's team members in LAGs meetings to be prepared to the project's submission.*

- *Harmonise the interpretation of eligibility rules between RCU's offices by creating a consultation system between them²⁶.*

For CLLD, it is important to maintain good working **relations with mainstream agencies** in charge of sectoral policies. In this way, LAGs can ensure their work is in synergy with these agencies and the projects supported fit within their policy framework.

Recommendation:

- *Provide LAGs with a facilitated access to mainstream agencies as part of the administrative support for CLLD.*

Multi-fund and integration with LEADER are supported in Austria, but not in Italy. This allows the Austrian LAGs to become “one-stop-shops” for the development of their area, giving the local population access to a range of European and national funding programmes. However, there are a number of differences between LEADER and the ERDF which make the implementation of multi-funding more difficult. The use of the Lead Fund option simplifies the management of the running costs but not the management of the projects supported by several funds.

Recommendation:

- *Keep the multi-fund approach and the Lead Fund, but facilitate their use by adopting the broader meaning given in the new Regulation²⁷, which include the implementation of projects.*

Functional Areas are a way to address some limitations of CLLD by opening the area towards new partners, new themes and to reach the critical mass needed for some projects. It is a simplification since the whole project can be implemented using only one rule/procedure.

Recommendation:

- *Propose to the LAGs to use the functional areas approach in the next programming period and provide a supplementary budget to encourage this approach.*

²⁶ This is a common problem which also affects the European Commission. A “clearing House” system is in place to harmonise the interpretation of rules between the DGs involved in delivering the ESI Funds.

²⁷ Article 31.5 of the Common Provision Regulation 2021/1060.

3. Delivery mechanisms

Many stakeholders have expressed concerns about the administrative burden related to the implementation of the strategies of the LAGs. To appreciate these concerns, it is important to understand the steps involved in the management of a project from the original idea to the final payment to the beneficiary²⁸.

NB: the term “LAGs” is used to designate the cross-border partnerships, and the term “partners of the LAGs” to designate the Local Action Groups that are part of the cross-border partnership. The different bodies involved in the delivery mechanism have been presented in section 2.1.

3.1. Selection of projects:

Small projects (maximum 50.000 Euros) are part of an umbrella project²⁹ allocated to the LAG when the strategy is approved: the LAG is selecting these directly. Medium size projects (50.000 to 200.000 Euros) are also selected by the LAG but have to follow the standard Interreg application procedure.

1. The calls for small projects are open by the LAGs after the approval of their strategy. The calls include information on the selection criteria that the LAG will use. Calls are open permanently.
2. The partners of the LAG undertake local animation to promote the call for project and help project holders develop their ideas and fill in draft project application forms.
3. Project proposals are presented to one of the partners of the LAGs. The first step is to fill in an Expression of Interest describing the project’s objectives, actions and cross-border added value. These can then be used to search for a cross-border partner with the help of the local LAG.
4. Small projects must involve at least two partners from different partner’s areas, from each member state. Local rules might impose that, for medium projects, it is necessary to involve three partners belonging to each of different LAG partner areas.
5. When the partnership is established, an “orientation meeting” is organised in the presence of the coordinators of the LAGs partners, where the project promoter presents the idea and can be asked for clarification on technical aspects. The orientation meeting is optional for small projects but

²⁸ The following section is based on interviews with LAGs and the MA in July 2022.

²⁹ These are foreseen by Article 25 of the Interreg Regulation 2021/1059 covering the 2021-2027 period.

compulsory for medium projects. It is usually possible to provide the services of an interpreter, to overcome the language barrier.

6. Once submitted, formal criteria are verified by the LAG's team, including contribution in achieving the outputs of the strategy and presence of cross-border added-value.
7. The project application is then loaded in COHEMON to ask the opinion of the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) on the eligibility of the actions foreseen (see below for the criteria used by the RCU in its assessment).
8. If approved, the project is submitted to the LAG's Project Selection Committee. The Project Selection Committee is made up of members from each partner's areas, designated to represent the socio-economic fabric of the cross-border area and comply with the European Regulation that specifies that no interest group can control the decision-making.
9. The Project Selection Committee meets usually every three months and project promoters are invited to present their project. This can be done face-to-face or by written procedure. There is usually an informal participation of the RCU so that they know more about the projects than the information inserted in COHEMON; they can also advise the promoters before they apply for the project in COHEMON.
10. The evaluation made by the Project Selection Committee is based on qualitative criteria such as synergies with other projects/programmes, innovation, economic, ecological and social sustainability, contribution to EU horizontal principles³⁰, etc.

Good practices:

- Provide an interpreter in meetings and translations.
- Define a minimum quota of women members in the project selection committee.
- Organise an informal participation of the RCU in the project selection committee to identify potential issues but also to allow the RCU's team to understand the motivation of the project's partners.

The requirement to have a partner in each Member State proved to be a problem in the HeurOpen LAG since the area covered by the Hermagor LAG is quite small and it is difficult to find a suitable partner in the territory. This should be solved in the 2021-27 period by the extension of the area to new local authorities.

³⁰ Articles 7 and 8 of the CPR 2014-2020 requires that any intervention using EU Funds should promote equality between men and women as well as respect the principles of sustainable development.

The administrative burden is quite high in these procedures which involves substantial delays. The HeurOpen LAG stated that the average time needed for a medium project to pass from the presentation to the approval by the LAG is 91 days, but it takes on average another 149 days before getting the grant letter: the total delay is over seven months. This is faster for small projects since the LAG takes directly the decision, reducing the delay to 51 days on average.

3.2. Management of the grant:

1. Once approved by the Project Selection Committee, the grant letter for small projects is issued directly by the LAG.
2. Medium projects follow the normal Interreg procedure, although they will not be approved by the Monitoring Committee in order to comply with the CLLD methodology which requires a delegation of decision-making to the LAGs³¹.
3. A start-up meeting is sometimes held with the project promoter, the CLLD management, the Regional Coordination Unit and the team of the First Level Control (FLC).
4. The management of each LAG's partner will provide ongoing support during the duration of the project.
5. Project partners have to advance all expenses and this can sometimes be a problem. Interim cost claims are normally possible.
6. A report on implementation is due at the mid term and at the end.
7. For small projects, each partner forward its cost claims to its own LAG's partner, who will upload them into the monitoring system. This was considered to be too complicated and from 2019, costs claim for small projects can be done by only one partner.
8. For small projects, the accounts are checked first by the LAGs and then by the First Level Control (FLC). Once the FLC has finalised its assessment, the grant is paid to the CLLD management, which in turn forwards it to the beneficiary: interim invoices follow the same procedure.
9. Medium projects follow the standard Interreg procedure.

Good practice:

Early involvement of the First Level Control (FLC) reduces the risk of non-eligible actions.

³¹ Article 34.3 of the CPR Regulation 1303/2013, 17/12/2013.

The financial report can be done by only one beneficiary for all the partners: all invoices are then paid by the main partner, also for the other partners. In which case, there is only one payment claim and one final report. This is a simplification, but only Terra Raetica uses it, the others LAGs prefer to use separate reports and cost claims. This probably due to the fact that Terra Raetica has many small projects, unlike the others LAGs.

The implementation of a small project will take around 2,5 years on average; the approval of the FLC about 4 months and the payment another 2-3 months. The use of Draft Budget should reduce substantially the work of the FLC, which is often seen as the bottleneck in the payment procedure.

3.3. Checks and controls:

Several levels of control are performed during the duration of a project. The different bodies involved have been presented in chapter 2, this section presents these checks in more details.

Regional Coordination Unit (RCU)

Before their approval, every project is submitted to the RCU which performs a series of checks:

- Does the composition of the project selection committee correspond to the requirements?
- Is the decision documented in the protocols of the meeting?
- Is the project selection based on the selection criteria of the CLLD strategy?
- Is the project consistent with the CLLD strategy?
- Are the costs indicated in the financial plan eligible?
- Is the classification of the partner's legal status correct?
- Does the project involve appropriate project partners? Do the project partners have proven technical, administrative and financial experience and capacity?
- Is the project considered as state aid and have the state aid procedures been followed?

The RCU also checks that co-funding is secured and adequate (for example, only public funds are accepted for public partners). These criteria don't include

opportunity checks and remain within the limits foreseen by Article 34.3 (f) of the CPR for the 2014-2020 period.

There seem to be complicated rules and regulations, especially in Italy, which can lead to a situation where the RCUs in different regions can have different interpretations of eligibility rules, which hampers cross-border cooperation.

First Level Control (FLC):

There is a FLC office in each participating region. They control the costs and invoices before a payment is initiated.

Invoices for small projects are sent by the beneficiary to the LAG, who performs a first check when introducing these in COHEMON. It goes then to the FLC. This represents a lot of work for the LAGs since there are many small invoices and local actors lack experience with the use of COHEMON. **Medium projects** are handled by the beneficiary who insert directly the invoices in COHEMON. Training for LAGs is organised once a year, but people change and move to new jobs, in which case the knowledge that has been acquired is lost: therefore, LAGs contact the FLC regularly for advice, rather like a helpline.

The FLC will control data on each item of spending in small projects, this takes around 100 days on average: they go back to the beneficiary when further information or clarification is needed. The same procedure is used for all projects in Interreg, whatever the size of the project. This means that small projects take the same time as larger ones.

Checks by the FLC include the following elements.

- Is the cost eligible?
- Is the invoice paid?
- Are they using a separate account?
- Is the product or service acquired necessary for the project?
- Have public procurement procedures been followed?
- Do invoices contain all information required?
- Has the project been implemented (need evidence such as photos, time sheets, etc.)?

They also perform spot checks on the ground, which is useful for them to understand how projects work.

They need to report on each criterion and this control report goes to the beneficiary for agreement. On average, 25% of cost claims are rejected by the FLC. Once agreed by the beneficiary, the report is sent to the certification body, where further checks are carried out on the budgetary aspects of the grant. The work of the FLC can be checked by the Second Level Control (Audit Authority).

Both eligibility checks and control of costs claims create an important administrative burden for the LAGs, taking the time that could be devoted to supporting projects on the ground. The use of Draft budget should provide some relief to the LAG's team since they will not need to pre-check the invoices and insert them in COHEMON before these are sent to the FLC.

Austria has adopted the Lead Fund approach and all management costs are covered by LEADER for the Austrian partners. The Italian partners don't have this option and need to keep Time Sheets to allocate their time between Interreg and LEADER, adding further administrative burden to their work.

3.4. Monitoring and evaluation:

Each CLLD LAG must be monitored on an ongoing basis and evaluated every 2 years. A global evaluation is also planned at the end of the period to see the impact of CLLD on the region. The results will be used to convince politicians and policy-makers on the value of cross-border CLLD and the need to support it, including by providing the necessary co-financing³².

In this period, there is a large choice of indicators, which are not always useful. The list will be reduced in the next period to around 10 common indicators. This **limited set of indicators** have been chosen since they provide useful information for politicians. In 2021-2027, indicators will include the following:

- Number of projects
- Amount of Public Funds committed and paid
- New products/services
- Jobs created/maintained (by gender)
- Energy produced in kw/h

³² This is a lesson from LEADER II, where the need to involve politicians was identified so that LEADER can influence their financial decisions but also make them the ambassadors of projects as they see the value of local approaches.

- Income for local authorities
- Number of people staying in the area (consequence of employment and living space)

Good practices:

- Reduce the number of monitoring indicators to the essential to allow better communication of the results.
- Choose indicators which can be used by politicians in their communication.
- A limited set of indicators will also reduce the administrative burden for LAGs linked to the collection of monitoring information.

3.5. The Draft Budget methodology, a simplification for the 2021-2027 period

The CPR (2021/1060) establishes in its article 53.2 that all projects under 200.000 Euros must use [Simplified Cost Options](#) (SCOs)³³. The MA has chosen to apply the draft budget methodology, which means that in the future a detailed budget will be approved and payment will take place when the planned outputs have been achieved: COHEMON will be modified to allow the use of draft budget.

This will represent more responsibilities for the LAGs, but less work for the FLC, who will only have to check that the output foreseen has been achieved. This can be done by a site visit or even by checking photographic evidence. LAGs will have to learn how to use this new approach: training will be provided by the Managing Authority.

LAGs will have to set-up an internal methodology to implement the draft budget. This method can represent a risk for the beneficiary and the LAG since many projects need flexibility and might require modifications or could even be abandoned after the completion of a feasibility study. In this case, no payment would be made since the project would not have been completed.

A suggestion is to use milestones in the draft budget, with payments due when each milestone is achieved. This would allow for more flexibility (modifications

³³ Articles 53-57 of the CPR 2021-2027 allows the use of a series of cost options that are an alternative to the reimbursement of eligible costs.

would be possible after each milestone) but also avoids the risk that failure of a project would lead to no payment at all. This is especially important for innovative projects who should be allowed to fail without financial consequences.

3.6. Conclusions and recommendations on the delivery mechanisms

The administrative burden generated by the delivery mechanism is considered to be high by most stakeholders and should be reduced, whilst keeping a good accountability in the use of public funds. The LAGs in particular spend a lot of time on administrative procedures, whilst they should be on the ground looking for new ideas and actions at the local level and fostering the development of new projects: the different teams involved in the administrative procedures should have a closer relationship with the LAGs.

The **selection of projects** is devolved to the LAGs and each of them have a procedure in place for the selection procedure involving members from each partner and respecting the thresholds established in the CPR Regulation³⁴ for the composition of their decision-making body. To respect the cross-border dimension of CLLD in Interreg, it is necessary to include in each project a partner of both Member States, which could be problematic. These procedures involve substantial delays: up to seven months between the presentation of a project and the final approval of the grant.

Recommendations on the selection of projects

- *Organise an informal participation of the RCU in the projects selection committee to check the eligibility of projects.*
- *Provide an interpreter in meetings and foresee the need for translations by increasing the LAG's budgets.*
- *Define a minimum quota of women members in the project selection committee.*

The **management of the grant** is another source of administrative burden since each invoice needs to be checked by the team of the First Level Control (FLC). The team of the FLC is limited and these checks take on average 100 days: the FLC rejects on average 25% of the costs presented by the beneficiary. LAGs

³⁴ Articles 32-35 of the Common Provision Regulation 1303/2013 specifies that no interest group can have more than 49% of voting rights in the decision-making body of the LAGs.

stressed that this was a time-consuming process that was deterring some potential beneficiaries from applying for funding.

Recommendations on the management of the grants

- *Simplify financial management by the use of Simplified Cost Options (SCOs). The use of Draft Budget in the new period is a step in that direction, as well as the application of the Lead Fund option to the whole strategy instead of just to management costs. When the Lead Fund option is not accessible, other SCOs could be used, for example lump sums for management costs.*
- *Allow the use of milestones in the draft budget, with payments due when each milestone is achieved.*
- *The financial report can be done by only one beneficiary for all the partners: all invoices are then paid by the main partner, also for the other partners. In this case, there is only one payment claim and one final report, which substantially simplifies financial management.*

The **mid-term evaluations** undertaken by the LAGs in 2019 don't provide a clear view of the results since too many indicators are used. No synthesis of these evaluations has been undertaken and there is no overview of the results. The external evaluation of the programme undertaken in 2020 doesn't provide much information on the qualitative results either. According to one interviewee, the indicator used for monitoring and evaluation are too numerous and difficult to apply. They don't allow for a proper assessment of the added-value of CLLD in Interreg.

Recommendations on monitoring and evaluation

- *Reduce the number of monitoring indicators to the essential to allow better communication of the results.*
- *Choose indicators which can be used by politicians in their discourses and communication.*
- *A more limited set of indicators will also reduce for the LAGs the administrative burden related to the collection of monitoring information.*
- *Undertake a synthesis of mid-term evaluations to assess the progress made by the programme.*

4. The added-value of the approach

4.1. Quantitative analysis of results

The **total budget** allocated to CLLD is 19 589 247 Euros³⁵. The ERDF contribution is 13 660 087 Euros, national public contribution is budgeted at 1 827 641 Euros, whilst the own means of the beneficiaries are expected to reach 4 101 519 Euros. The analysis below is based on the total budget, including data on commitment and payments.

Commitments to projects reached 87% of the total budget at the level of the programme. 207 projects have been selected until August 2022, for a total committed cost of 17 136 115 Euros.

- 135 small projects represent 25% of the commitments, whilst 63 medium-size projects represent 62%. The remaining 13% are used for the management costs, including animation on the ground, a figure that seems below the maximum of 25% of costs incurred, set in the CPR Regulation³⁶.
- The level of commitments and the distribution of projects between small and medium size is variable from one LAG to the other (see below). The average cost is 31.690 Euros for a small project and 168 476 Euros for a medium-size project.

Costs approved by the First Level Control (FLC, see chapter 3) can be assimilated to payments³⁷. The FLC approves on average 75% of the cost claims presented by the beneficiaries. Cost approved by the FLC represents 55% of the budget, to be compared with the average of 60% reached by the ESI Funds in December 2020³⁸. NB: the N+3 rule gives more time to close the projects that were selected recently.

The relatively low level of payments is an issue which needs to be addressed to avoid decommitment at the end of the period. The use of Draft Budget in the future should accelerate substantially the payments since checks by the FLC will no longer be carried out. However, the fact that 25% of costs claims are rejected by the FLC means that the setting up of projects in the new period will have to be very rigorous on the eligibility of costs.

35 All data used in this analysis was extracted from the COHEMON database in August 2022.

36 Regulation EU (13030/2013), Article 35.2. "Support for running costs and animation (...) shall not exceed 25 % of the total public expenditure incurred within the community-led local development strategy".

37 An extra delay can take place between the approval of the project accounts by the FLC and the actual payment.

This delay cannot be identified in COHEMON.

38 Last data available on the Open Data Platform <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/overview>

The distribution of projects in each group is fairly different, reflecting both the orientation of the strategy and the experience of the LAGs. Small projects correspond more to the principles of CLLD than larger projects. They are also more time consuming for the LAG's management since they take typically the same time to be prepared, selected and supported as larger projects.

- **Terra Raetica** is a LAG which is based on experienced LEADER groups, including the Alta Val Venosta, which has been active since [LEADER 1](#). This can explain the importance given to small projects in their strategy: they have selected 78 small projects at a cost of 2 264 488 Euros (37% of their total commitments) and only 17 medium size projects at a cost of 3 090 098 (55% of their total commitments).
- **Dolomiti Live** is also based on experienced local groups but their strategy is more focused on larger projects: they have selected 29 small projects at a cost of 1 092 207 Euros (16% of their total commitments) but 32 medium size projects at a cost of 4 442 788 Euros (72% of their total commitments).
- **Wipptael** is a LAG with less experience, which has obtained a smaller budget than the other LAGs. They have therefore selected fewer projects, with a higher commitment to larger projects: they have selected 19 small projects for a cost of 858 797 Euros (26% of their total commitments) and 11 medium size projects for a cost of 1 754 898 Euros (61% of their total commitments).
- **HeurOpen** is a new LAG that started later than the others and has only selected 14 projects so far: nine small projects at a cost of 925 415 Euros (22% of their total commitments) and five medium size projects at a cost of 2 580 065 (47% of their total commitments). The cost of management is fairly high and represent 31% of their total commitments.

Analysis of CLLD projects Interreg IT-AT 2014-2020						
Data extracted from the COHEMON database in August 2022						
All financial values in Euros						
FLC = First Level Controls, last step preliminary to payment.						
		Dolomiti Live	Terra Raetica	Wipptael	HeurOpen	Total August 2022
Total budget		6 422 081	5 998 853	2 991 551	4 176 762	19 589 247
Total ERDF budget						13 660 087
Total number projects selected		61	96	31	16	204
Total commitment to projects		7 056 630	5 614 301	2 452 662	2 012 522	17 136 115
% budget committed		110%	94%	82%	48%	87%
Total ERDF committed to projects						11 913 564
% ERDF committed to projects						87%
Total approved by FLC		3 374 088	2 072 764	985 066	1 071 821	7 503 739
% ERDF budget approved by FLC		53%	35%	33%	26%	63%
% total commitment approved FLC		48%	37%	40%	53%	44%
Small projects	Budget small projects	1 092 207	2 264 488	858 797	925 415	5 140 907
	Number small projects selected	29	78	19	9	135
	Total commitment small projects	1 135 670	2 064 202	630 372	447 922	4 278 166
	% of total commitment small projects	16%	37%	26%	22%	25%
	Average commitment	39 161	26 464	33 177	49 769	31 690
	Cost FLC approved	460 605	736 584	119 606	96 925	1 413 720

	% of commitment FLC approved	41%	36%	19%	22%	33%
Medium projects	Budget medium projects	4 442 788	3 232 010	1 754 898	2 580 065	12 009 761
	Number medium projects selected	30	17	11	5	63
	Total commitment medium projects	5 089 237	3 090 098	1 485 958	948 682	10 613 974
	% of total commitment medium projects	72%	55%	61%	47%	62%
	Average commitment medium projects	169 641	181 770	135 087	189 736	168 476
	Costs FLC approved	2 206 909	1 336 179	664 939	631 492	4 839 518
	% of commitment FLC approved	43%	43%	45%	67%	46%
Management	Budget management	887 086	502 355	377 856	671 282	2 438 579
	Number management projects selected	2	1	1	2	6
	Total commitment	831 723	460 001	336 332	615 918	2 243 975
	% of total commitment	12%	8%	14%	31%	13%
	Costs FLC approved	706 574	0	200 522	343 405	1 250 501
	% of commitment FLC approved	85%	0%	60%	56%	56%

4.2. Conclusions and recommendations on the quantitative results

207 projects were selected by August 2022, for a total committed cost of 17 136 115 Euros. This represents 87% of the total budget of the IT-AT Interreg programme and the budget should be fully committed by the end of 2022. 135 small projects represent 25% of the commitments, whilst 63 medium-size projects represent 62%. The remaining 13% are used for the management costs. However, costs approved by the FLC represents 55% of the budget³⁹. This is a relatively low level of payment⁴⁰ and will need to be monitored to make sure they are cleared by the end of the N+3 period⁴¹.

The **number of projects is very variable**, from 96 in Terra Raetica to 16 in HeurOpen. This translates in a range of commitments from 110% of the budget⁴² for Dolomiti Live to 48% in HeurOpen. The **balance between small and medium-size projects** in the LAGs commitments reflects their strategy but also their experience with local development.

Recommendations:

- *Provide specific technical assistance to LAGs who are lagging behind with commitments to new projects and especially with the processing of their approved costs in COHEMON.*
- *Revise the budget allocation between LAGs to provide more financial means to those who perform better.*

4.3. Qualitative results of the application of the CLLD principles

This chapter is based on the seven features that are the added-value of the LEADER programme, as first defined in 1999 in the LEADER II document "[Assessing the added-value of the LEADER programme](#)". This approach to the identification of the added-value of CLLD is still relevant today as shown by the fact that the European Network for Rural Development is focusing its work on LEADER on [revisiting these seven features](#).

³⁹ Since the amount will not change after approval by the FLC, this figure can be considered as the level of payments despite an extra delay due to the body in charge of payments.

⁴⁰ The ESI Funds reached an average of 60% by December 2020.

⁴¹ Payment of the grants can take place up to 3 years after the commitment.

⁴² This overbooking is a classical way to take into account the risk of seeing some projects cancelled or having a reduced budget.

Each section will be introduced by a box containing a definition from the above document which explains the purpose of each feature and the expected outcome from its application. The application of each feature will be illustrated by projects examples coming from the different Interreg cross-border LAGs.

4.2.1. Area-based

*The area-based approach consists in defining a development policy starting from the current situation, strengths and weaknesses particular to an area. Under LEADER, this area is a **rural territorial unit** that has a certain homogeneity, is characterised by an internal social cohesion, shares a common history and tradition, and experiences a common feeling of identity. Its size can vary significantly according to context (for example, between low- and high-density areas) and the strategy adopted for development. The delineated area need not coincide with an existing administrative unit.*

*The rationale behind the area-based approach is linked to the new importance given to the role of endogenous resources (rather than exogenous resources) in the promotion of sustainable development. Rural areas are different from each other: every area has its own unique and typical mix of resources which may be more effectively utilised by local players and institutions. These are best placed to know the strengths and weaknesses of the area and to have an overview of its potential. Endogenous resources may be physical, environmental, cultural, human, economic and financial, institutional and administrative. The design of development policies at the local level may turn out to be more effective and manageable as it allows for the mobilisation of these resources.*⁴³

The Common Provision Regulation for the 2014-2020⁴⁴ period specifies that the area should cover between 10 000 and 150 000 inhabitants. The lower limit has been established to ensure that the area has a critical mass of inhabitant in order to be able to undertake projects. The higher limit aimed to ensure that the CLLD intervention remains “local”. These limits have been removed from the new 2021-2027 CPR.

⁴³ [“Assessing the added-value of the LEADER programme, a methodological guide by the LEADER Observatory, 1999.](#)

⁴⁴ Article 33.6 of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of 17 December 2013. The population of the area referred to in point(a)of paragraph 1 shall be not less than 10 000 and not more than 150 000 inhabitants. However, in duly justified cases and on the basis of a proposal by a Member State the Commission may adopt or amend those population limits in its decision under Article 15(2) or (3) to approve or amend respectively the Partnership Agreement in the case of that Member State, in order to take account of sparsely or densely populated areas or in order to ensure the territorial coherence of areas covered by the community-led local development strategies.

The four areas of the LAGs have cross-border historical roots, going back to the Iron Age. The current border between Italy and Austria only appeared after World War I. Several important trade routes linking the regions of the Roman Empire used to cross the Alps in this area. The cross-border work of the LAGs aims at leveraging this common past to address common issues. These four areas are remote and are seen as marginal in their respective countries. This has led them to face the same challenges together.

- **Terra Raetica** is the land of the Rhaetian people⁴⁵, early settler in the Iron Age. The Roman province of [Raetia](#) was named after these people, covering roughly the same area as the current LAG, bordering Austria, Italy and Switzerland.
- **The Wipptal** is geographically and historically considered to be one area, despite the border that divides it in the middle. It is strongly influenced by the transalpine connection through the Brenner Pass, which is one of the main European connections on the Munich – Verona axis. As the lowest pass in the Alps (1374 m) the Brenner has been an important connecting point throughout history. The name Wipptal derives from Vipitenum, a road used by the Romans. From the 15th century, the name Wipptal was used to describe what is the LAG's territory today. After World War I, the Brenner Pass became the border between Austria and Italy and the name Wipptal was forgotten. From the 70s, Wipptal has been used again to name both side of the border. Today, the LAG promotes the Wipptal region as a whole as "Wipptal without borders".
- **In Dolomiti Live**, cross-border CLLD is considered to be contributing to the building of a border-free Europe. The area is bordering Austria and Italy in the Dolomites range. This cross-border territory has always been a place of exchange and meeting between populations and cultures. Historically there was already an important trade road linking the territories of the Roman Empire. The cross-border region boasts an eventful history, in which the three participating areas were politically divided and reunited several times. Thanks to CLLD, the cross-border area will become a single economic area with a population of 195,930 inhabitants. The geographic and hydrographic

45 The Raeti (spelling variants: Rhaeti, Rheti or Rhaetii) were a confederation of Alpine tribes, whose language and culture was probably related to those of the Etruscans. Before the Roman conquest, they inhabited present-day Tyrol in Austria, eastern Switzerland and the Alpine regions of north-eastern Italy. (Wikipedia)

conditions of the three areas are very similar, and the fact that they are remote areas in their respective countries has led them to face the same challenges together.

- The **HEurOpen territory** lies at the intersection of three cultural and linguistic areas (German, Latin, Slovenian). The history that binds them is clearly identifiable in the evidence present in the area from the Roman age, to the Middle Ages, to the Venetian presence and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Until World War I, the borders of the Empire extended as far as Pontebba and even today, many families living on Italian soil have an Austrian surname and speak the German language: many Austrian traditions have been also preserved. The borders crossings are still places where many remains of World War I can be found. Many ancient traditions are very much alive and can be found in popular festivals, the gastronomy, the collections of museums, the legends. These elements are important for reinforcing the identity of local communities and for tourist attraction.

The four areas present common features therefore it is logical to include these in the same programme area. The natural environment is well preserved and offers impressive natural landscape. The local economy is composed mostly of SMEs addressing local needs and tourism which is very important for the local economy, although it is seasonal by nature. Farming consists mostly of dairy; holdings are small and farmers usually need a second job. However, the quality of life is very good.

Functional areas:

The current approach to the area-based feature encloses CLLD in rigid boundaries which can be irrelevant for some types of projects. Mobility projects, for examples might require an extension of the area of intervention to a city which is outside the defined CLLD area. Since the area-based approach aims also at ensuring a concentration of the financial means on a small area, there is a need to allow the extension of the area for specific purposes. This will be the case in the new period, where LAGs can add an extra budget to extend their action in an adjacent territory with which they form a “Functional Area”.

- For example, in **Terra Raetica**, the inclusion of a Swiss partner can be seen as an early attempt to cover a “Functional Area” since this extension was motivated by the need to cover a natural park adjacent to the Kaunertal. The governance is also innovative: the Swiss partners are

taking part in the meetings of the Project Selection Committee, but don't have voting rights.

- In HeurOpen, the enlargement to functional areas is seen as a further opportunity for the new strategy. Enlargement in functional areas will take place with the involvement of LEADER Groups bordering the HEurOpen area. Coordination will be ensured by the collaborative relationships that already exist between the various LAGs at the regional level.

Recommendations:

- *The cross-border dimension can be challenging and obstacles such as languages or physical meetings across the border need to be recognised and addressed, by increasing financial resources.*
- *The size of the territory matters and should be adjusted in the light of experience as will be the case of HeurOpen in the new programming period. The extension of the area to Functional Areas should be used to create the critical mass required by some specific projects: funding should be available to cover this option.*
- *The issue of language is important and should be addressed:*
 - *Interpretation in meetings and translation of documents as is the case in Dolomiti Live, benefited a 5% increase of their budget allocated to running costs for that purpose.*
 - *By the organisation of language courses for local actors and migrant women as was done in Terra Raetica.*

4.2.2. The Bottom-up approach

*The bottom-up approach aims to encourage **participatory decision-making** at the local level for all those concerned with development policies. The involvement of local players is sought and includes the population at large, economic and social interest groups, and representatives of public and private institutions. **Capacity building** is a strategic component of the bottom-up approach (...). The bottom-up approach is an alternative to the traditional forms of policy making, which is often top-down. It is a method for identifying desirable policy measures through the consultation of relevant interest groups at the local level.*

If it is assumed that rural areas have a different set of resources and have different problems to resolve; measures adapted to each case are required. Centralised decision-making becomes inappropriate or insufficient as it cannot

*take into account the particularities of each area. Local participatory decision-making becomes therefore a strategic tool for acknowledging the different policy needs of rural areas. (...) A second assumption is that participatory decision-making can ensure (...) a wide and fair representation of all groups of interest, thus creating an occasion for building up a consensus, dealing with conflicts and fostering interrelationships between sectors and groups.*⁴⁶

The bottom-up approach is applied by the LAGs who have set-up working groups to assess the needs for the preparation of the strategy. These working groups have usually become a more permanent feature during the implementation of the strategy since they proved to be a very useful tool to involve a larger part of the local population and relevant stakeholders in the decisions that will affect them.

In Terra Raetica, there are 6 transnational Working Groups, which are open for all local actors and meet 6 times/year. About 200 local actors are part of the different working groups who also include experts from the regional administration. These working groups have met 69 times since 2016, involving 1.532 participants. The group has set a target of 70% participation in order to keep the Working Groups active. The groups are:

- Natura Raetica: nature projects
- Cultura Raetica: cultural projects
- Tourismus Terra Raetica: touristic projects
- Mobilita Raetica: mobility projects
- Humana Raetica: Social projects
- Energie initiative Terra Raetica: energy related projects

The **Interreg Council Wipptal** meets at regular intervals (at least twice a year) and consists of representatives from North and South part of the valley. Its role is to steer the implementation of the strategy. In addition, working group meetings on various topics are held to encourage and support further cross-border projects. In total, there are over 25 thematic working groups which held more than 50 meetings since 2015, involving around 500 participants.

In **Dolomiti Live**, the LAGs used the analysis of the socio-economic data of the territory to identify the needs, as well as the experience acquired over many

⁴⁶ ["Assessing the added-value of the LEADER programme, a methodological guide by the LEADER Observatory, 1999.](#)

years of cross-border joint activity. Thematic working groups were organised with the stakeholders during the drafting of the strategy. These involved local authorities, trade associations, representatives of civil society, natural parks, cultural and tourist operators. These working groups remained active during the implementation of the strategy, to develop projects around the main themes of the strategy.

During the implementation of the **HeurOpen** strategy, thematic working tables were organised with the aim of bringing together potential project partners and foster partnerships and project ideas (topics included electric mobility, schools, emergency management, music, pilgrimage, etc.). The governance of CLLD in HeurOpen will be reinforced in the new period by the use of working groups to define the new strategy and oversee its implantation in specific sectors. In April and May 2022, the three partners LAGs have organised different Thematic Working Groups on the following:

- Climate Change and energy
- Sustainable Value Chain (agri-food, craft, wood)
- Nature, Biodiversity and nature tourism
- School and Education
- Youth and projects for the future
- Emergencies and risk prevention

The bottom-up approach has also been applied by the Managing Authority since decision-making has been devolved to the LAGs. Small projects are selected directly by the LAGs as part of a dedicated fund allocated when the strategy is approved. A budget is also ring-fenced for medium-size projects which are also selected by the LAGs through a separate procedure.

Recommendations:

- *The four LAGs state that the administrative burden related to the management of the programme limits their capacity to apply the bottom-up principle. It is essential to limit the administrative burden to allow the LAGs to realise their basic task, which consists of carrying out local animation activities. An alternative would be to increase substantially the budget allocated to management, which is currently well below the limit of 25% set in Article 35.2 of the CPR Regulation 2014-2020.*
- *Thematic working groups are a central tool for the implementation of the bottom-up approach and should be given a key role in preparing and implementing the strategy.*
- *Thematic working groups should become permanent for the entire duration of the next programming period in order to support co-planning, assess the progress of the strategy and check whether updates are necessary.*

4.2.3. The Partnership

The “local action group” (LAG) is a combination of public and private partners who devise a common strategy and innovative actions for the development of a rural area. These partners should represent leading figures in the economic and social life of the area, and the various sectors and associations concerned with the environment, culture and social integration. (...) These local groups may have been set up ad-hoc or may have existed already. They generally decide the direction and content of the rural innovation programme; they make decisions on the different actions to be financed; (...) The LAG, which is neither a public nor private sector body, is one of the most original and strategic specific features introduced by the LEADER Initiative. Endowed with decision-making power and a relatively important budget, the LAG usually represents a new form of organisation which can significantly influence the institutional and political balance of the area. The main reason for delegating the management of LEADER to the local groups is based on the expectation that they would be more effective in stimulating local initiative than existing administrations and agencies. In many

*cases, a long history of sectoral and top-down policies has led to a lack of organisation and dynamism in rural areas.*⁴⁷

All partners in the cross-border Interreg LAGs are LEADER groups (ten in total) and have some experience of applying the method. This experience ranges from groups long-established such as Alta Val Venosta (the Italian partner of Terra Raetica who was already a LAG under LEADER 1 in 1991) to newly formed groups such as Hermagor which was part of the Villach LEADER group and had to become a separate entity since the Villach LAG was not eligible as it was mostly outside the area covered by the IT-AT Interreg programme.

The LAGs had to develop a new partnership to take decisions in the cross-border area they cover.

- For example, the Dolomiti Live LAG was established on the basis of former informal cooperation between the LAGs, going back to Interreg II and III projects. The experience gained in the period 1997-2006 was fundamental to the constitution in 2008 of the Interreg project [Rat Dolomiti Live](#) (Interreg IV Italy-Austria), which worked for many years for the integration of the territories of the cross-border regions of Belluno, Val Pusteria of South Tyrol and Osttirol. The small project fund has been particularly used since 2010, creating intense cross-border activity between schools and local associations of East Tyrol and Val Pusteria in South Tyrol.

Each LAG has set-up a decision-making body respecting the specifications laid out in the CPR⁴⁸. They also include representatives of the local authority since you need people who are decision-makers.

- **In Terra Raetica**, the Interreg Council is the decision-making body composed of 49% public participants and 51% private. It meets twice a year at least and decides on the selection of projects. The LAG has set a target of 70% participation to these meetings, in order to remain

⁴⁷ [“Assessing the added-value of the LEADER programme, a methodological guide by the LEADER Observatory, 1999.](#)

⁴⁸ Article 34.2 (b) of Regulation 103/2013 of the 17 December 2013. “The tasks of local action groups shall include the following (...) drawing up a non-discriminatory and transparent selection procedure and objective criteria for the selection of operations, which avoid conflicts of interest, ensure that at least 50 % of the votes in selection decisions are cast by partners which are not public authorities, and allow selection by written procedure”

representative of the area. Regional managing directors have an advisory function and the EGTC South Tyrol-Trentino has an observer status.

- The Interreg Council **Wipptal** meets at least twice a year and consists of representatives from North and South part of the valley. In addition, working group meetings on various topics are held to encourage and support further cross-border projects.
- In **Dolomiti Live**, the Management Committee is composed of presidents and directors of the three partners and meets at least once per year. Their role is to direct and oversee the implementation of the strategy. The Project Selection Committee is composed of members appointed by the three partners and meets at least four times per year.
- In **HEurOpen**, the Project Selection Committee is made up of 15 members. Each area has designated five members, but in a coordinated way in order to represent the socio-economic fabric of the HEurOpen area and comply with the European Regulation that specifies that no interest group can control the decision-making. At least 33% of members must be women. The Project Selection Committee meets every three months, project promoters are invited to present their project.

Local development takes time, often more than 20 years before communities can be considered to be sustainable. Cross-border CLLD needs continuity: between programming period, the LAG team must stay in place as well as most of the Board. They learn to work together, which reduces misunderstandings and builds trust.

Recommendations:

- *Local decision-making implies responsibility since local partners are endowed with public funds: some capacity-building measures are needed to help them in this regard.*
- *Sufficient time and finances need to be allocated to the building of cross-border partnerships since this is made more challenging by distance, languages and a different legal environment.*

4.2.4. The Strategy

In LEADER II no reference was to a “Strategy” as such, however, the same aim was achieved by insisting on the need to ensure good linkages between the actions supported in the “business plan”: “The linkage between actions (...) explicitly states that actions and projects within the business plan should not be individual

*and separated measures (...) but should be coordinated and well-integrated in a coherent whole. (...) The main objective for emphasising different forms of integration between actions and their multi-sectoral character is to reorganise and co-ordinate the different sectoral approaches, (...) into a coherent set of policy measures to ensure they are neither implemented independently nor in opposition to one another. The holistic, integrated approach to planning creates or exploits existing synergies among different sectors; increases the overall effectiveness of the programme and the sustainability of individual actions; encourages the diversification of the rural economy, creating an alternative to the declining agricultural sector and strengthening its capacity to respond to sectoral crises”.*⁴⁹

The four LAG's strategies are structured along the three axes of the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#): Smart Growth, Sustainable Growth and Inclusive Growth. This connects them to the main European Agenda for the 2010-2020 period and ensure that they adopt a holistic approach to the development of their area. For the next period, the strategies will refer to the [Green Deal](#) as a reference framework.

Strategies were developed in a participatory way, using working groups, and address the needs identified at the local level. The main aim of the strategies is to maintain a good quality of life, whilst improving the competitiveness of the local economy. Strategies are in general well rooted in the local context, using local assets to leverage development in the area.

- In **Dolomiti Live**, the challenge for cross-border CLLD is to support an alternative form of tourism based on the existence of **numerous protected areas** and natural parks, and of the Dolomites which are an UNESCO world heritage site. This can be achieved through better integration between sectors such as craft, tourism and sustainable agriculture.
- In **Wipptal**, the current CLLD strategy promotes and consolidates the network of public and private partnerships, provides links between local actors and public bodies, private associations, interest groups, etc. throughout the area Wipptal. The **Brenner Pass** is a central element that provides coherence to the strategy.
- In Terra Raetica, the Marmor project is based on a local marble factory, which is known world-wide. It is a **unique asset** that can be used to

⁴⁹ [“Assessing the added-value of the LEADER programme, a methodological guide by the LEADER Observatory, 1999.](#)

leverage development in the area, in this case, by serving as a basis for new touristic products.

The development of the strategy starts with an assessment of the needs. This is achieved by undertaking a detailed description of the area, sometimes complemented by a SWOT analysis. This provides a good understanding of the specific needs that could be addressed by cross-border CLLD. The strategy is then prepared by establishing the political priorities between those needs, which is a process of negotiation which should be undertaken in a “bottom-up” fashion. This will enhance the quality of the strategy but also facilitate its implementation.

An innovative element in Interreg is the need to think constantly on cross-border issues: every project needs a cross border partner. There are many examples of genuine cross-border projects but many projects are above all local and have only a networking dimension with a partner across the border.

- The “Community Gardens” project in Terra Raetica is an example of a local project with a networking dimension. The gardens are by nature local, but the project’s partners liaised with other areas across the border to find innovative ideas and to exchange good practices.
- The “Geopark” project in HeurOpen is by nature cross-border since the park extends over two countries.

Recommendations:

- *Strategies need to be tailored to local needs but should also contribute to the objectives of the IT-AT Interreg programme and to European priorities.*
- *Strategies need to be developed in a bottom-up way, using cross-border working groups where possible.*
- *Projects should have partners on each side of the border, although there are examples of projects which are mainly local with a simple cross-border networking dimension.*

4.2.5. The innovative character of the actions

Several meanings have been attributed to the innovative character of LEADER actions:

*a) actions seeking to **add value to local resources** (typical of the specific rural context, including cultural and environmental aspects, tourism and local identity, raising the capacity of the local population to take initiatives);*

*b) actions which have **not been considered in other development policy measures** (distinct from measures supported by other EU programmes or national measures);*

*c) actions which have offered **new responses to the weaknesses and constraints of rural areas** (...);*

*d) actions which fall under the **usual definition of innovation**, especially technology and know-how: a new product, a new process, a new form of organisation or a new market; this includes the application of new information and communication technologies in rural areas.⁵⁰*

In CLLD, LAGs are looking at **innovation in the local context**. Actions need to be innovative since they are seeking answers to local issues which have not yet been addressed, that is, there is a need to do something new or differently to solve a problem or add value to a local asset. An action can be innovative in a project even if has already been implemented elsewhere.

In a cross-border environment, innovation can be observed in each of the partners area, as they have their own specific needs and assets, but it also takes place at the cross-border level. The networking taking place between the partners is a great way of supporting the transfer of innovative ideas between their territories.

Innovation can also be observed at the level of the LAGs themselves in the way they manage the preparation and the implementation of their strategies, but also in the projects they decide to finance.

Partners in a project will provide their own experience and enrich the work undertaken in cooperation, since an action which is not innovative in an area can be very new in the partner's areas.

⁵⁰ [Assessing the added-value of the LEADER programme, a methodological guide by the LEADER Observatory, 1999.](#)

- For example, in **Dolomiti Live**, the “Coworking, Smart Working & Laboratorio Urbano” project aims at improving the possibilities of digital technology in the workplace. The three areas involved have different approaches to promote innovation using digital technologies and are very interested in learning from each other. The different experiences of the partners enables a useful exchange of knowledge on the use of digital technologies but also on participatory approaches for the development of the regions.

The examples given below have been distributed amongst categories of innovation. A more detailed description of these projects can be found in the LAGs profiles that are in annex.

Technological innovation:

- The “Smarter Village and Portal Wipptal” project. New Information Technology allows a better communication on the Wipptal area using the Internet: the project target is the local population.
- The two projects “Technological development in support of the mountain rescue organisations” in Dolomiti Live are looking at technology to help the mountain rescue organisations, for example finding people buried under an avalanche.

Product innovation:

- The “Goat yoghurt in Vilipeno’s dairy” project allowed the development of a new lactose-free product by an existing local enterprise in Wipptal. 40 farms have decided to join and adapt their small farms to adjust to this new opportunity opened by the growing demand for lactose-free products.
- The “Places of energy and strength” project in Wipptal is a pilot project for the region, since there is currently no other comparable concept in the whole of South and North Tyrol. The concept is based on identifying places which are conducive to mediation and reflection.

Innovation based in the community:

- The “Community Garden project” in Wipptal created a new space where the local community can meet and garden together.

- The “From Pass to Pass” project in HeurOpen was developed at the demand of a specific section of the community, in this case the Alpine Clubs which wanted to support hiking between two important passes through the Alps.

Innovation to add value to a specific local asset

This is the more common type of innovation and there are many examples in the projects.

- The “Waterfall and water mills village” in Wipptal aims at using the existing spectacular waterfall to attract tourists interested in discovering the historical importance of windmills.
- “Networked archaeology: the former inhabitants of the Eastern Alps” and “First prehistoric population in the Dolomites” projects in Dolomiti Live aim at building a cross-border identity on the basis of ancient sites.
- In HeurOpen, the “VIDEM - Via Julia Augusta” project is promoting cultural innovation by looking at the musical culture that unites the area.
- The special rock formations that can be observed in the Geopark area has led the HeurOpen LAG to support an innovative project based on this specific feature.
- In Terra Raetica, innovation consisted in adding value to a historical asset such as a Roman road in the project Via Claudia Augusta or a specific economic asset such as a marble quarry in the “Marmor – Visiting the global marble factory in Laas” project.

Innovation in addressing local issues

- Climate change is a global issue which requires local actions, including awareness raising. The “Water adventure trail” project in Wipptal addresses the expected shortage of water in the future by raising awareness of the younger generation.
- The lack of diversity in the forest is a major local risk since one disease could destroy a whole area of forest. The “*Oh Tannenbaum – Forest management and improvement*” project in Wipptal addresses this risk by collecting seeds of the fir tree and replanting them in areas safe from animals. This is a very long-term project, since it takes 160 years before a fir tree is fully mature.

Innovation addressing a new trend in society

- The “Coworking, Smart Working & Laboratorio Urbano project” in Dolomiti Live addresses the evolution of work patterns, since remote working has become mainstream since the COVID crisis.
- The project “What does democracy mean to me?” supported by Dolomiti Live aims at fostering a conversation in the local community on an issue of relevance for all.
- The “Crosstrail” project in HeurOpen aims at tapping into the global development of Trail Running by supporting a product addressing this new trend in tourism.
- Terra Raetica supported projects focusing on those at risk of exclusion such as young people in the “Mobility Youth Service”, people with disabilities in the project “Inklusion – Terra Raetica”, and language courses for migrant women.

Evolution of innovation in a LAG.

A seven years programme is enough to start local development on the ground. However, local development takes at least 20 years before its full effect can be assessed: thus, LAGs are bodies set-up for long-term. As they work through different programming period and increase their experience of working locally, their approach to innovation evolves.

The Alta Val Venosta partner in Terra Raetica has been a LEADER group since LEADER 1, and some members of the team have been involved from the beginning more than 30 years ago. Unlike the other LAGs, Terra Raetica devotes a large part of its resources to small projects, which are very much in the spirit of CLLD. They take more time from the coordinator (the administration involved in selecting and managing a small project is as heavy as for a larger one) but they allow more ordinary people to get involved in delivering the local strategy, whilst medium projects tend to be implemented by more established actors. The animation by the LAG is essential to involve the local population into projects.

Humana Raetica is the working group established to identify and support social projects which are one of the most important dimensions of the action in Alta Val Venosta. This type of project is often more difficult to undertake for local action groups and is carried out by more experience groups. Newcomers will start with simpler projects in areas such as tourism or agri-food.

Recommendations:

- *Innovation should be compulsory but there should be no rigid definition of innovation, especially in a cross-border context.*
- *To support small innovative projects, the administrative burden needs to be kept proportionate to the size of the projects.*
- *Networking is a tool to disseminate innovation, but it is missing in CLLD under Interreg (see below).*
- *Innovation is often found in smaller projects where testing new approaches can be easier. To support small projects, the administrative burden needs to be kept proportionate to the size of the projects.*

4.2.6. Networking and cooperation

« LEADER » is a French acronym standing for “Liaison entre Action de Développement de l’Économie Rurale ». The idea of liaison has always been a fundamental element of the CLLD approach. Networking and cooperation are some of the tools used to achieve this.

Networking has been established as a requirement for all direct LEADER beneficiaries. They have a series of obligations, in particular to provide information on the actions carried out.

By facilitating the exchange and circulation of information about rural development policies and the dissemination and transfer of innovation, networking aims to:

> reduce isolation and increase the information and references used by LAGs, thereby improving their decision-making capacity and the effectiveness of rural development actions;

> compile a database of information and analyses on innovative actions and practices in order to promote the transfer of know-how and best practices between rural areas.

In the case of (...) cooperation, the motivation is more ambitious. This may be to achieve a “critical mass” of products or services (for example through joint

*production or marketing agreements) and to bring partners together in order to achieve a stronger bargaining power on the markets or in sectors.*⁵¹

Networking

Networking is the missing link in this period since there were only two meetings of the four LAGs in 2019 and 2022, although other exchanges took place on line. The COVID crisis had reduced the possibility of meeting face-to-face, and networking was also not seen as a priority. The distance and travel difficulties in the mountain area were also perceived as an obstacle.

Since all partners are LEADER groups, networking takes place in the framework of LEADER networks in both countries, but there is a lack of specific networking events targeting cross-border CLLD. For example, the LAGs could address together issues such as the administrative burden. Solutions developed in one area are not shared and each LAG has to find their own solutions. Further, the lack of networking arrangements prevents also the transfer and dissemination of experiences, which would be very useful in these early days of cross-border CLLD.

Cooperation

Cooperation is at the core of the cross-border CLLD approach since the aim is to foster cooperation across the border. Projects always require at least one partner on each side of the border and their exchanges are intensive during the implementation of the strategy.

Cooperation between the LAG partners has often been ongoing for a long time.

- Cross-border cooperation between the north and south Wipptal already developed during Interreg IV (2007-2013). An Interreg Council was set-up in 2008, that has institutionalised and strengthened this cooperation.
- In Terra Raetica, the Austrian and Italian LEADER groups have cooperated since 1997 and were involved in Interreg 2000-2006 and 2007-2013. There are also some vintage cooperation projects undertaken using the LEADER specific cooperation budget, an example is the [Via Claudia Augusta](#).
- In Dolomiti Live, the partnership is based on former cooperation experience between the LEADER groups since Interreg II and III. That cooperation led to the constitution in 2008 of the cooperation structure [Rat Dolomiti Live](#) between Val Pusteria and Osttirol, financed by the

⁵¹ [“Assessing the added-value of the LEADER programme, a methodological guide by the LEADER Observatory, 1999.](#)

Interreg IV Italy-Austria programme 2007-2013. This cooperation led to the constitution of the LAG Dolomiti Live in 2015.

- In [HeurOpen](#), the LAGs did not have much cross-border activity before the launch of the CLLD strategy. The proper cross-border work only started in 2015-16 when there was an Interreg call for “[Smart Borders](#)” to which Hermagor replied jointly with the Comunita Montana that became their partners for Interreg CLLD.

Working Groups

Working Groups have been established by the LAGs to foster thematic cooperation between stakeholders across the border. These have been described in section 4 of this chapter covering the preparation of the strategies. Working Groups were set-up for the preparation of the strategy but proved very useful and usually remained active during the implementation phase.

Other forms of cooperation include:

Cooperation takes place between local enterprises within the area and beyond:

- 40 farms have decided to join their forces and adapt their small farms for the production of goat milk. The production and distribution of goat yoghurt will start in autumn 2022. Despite its growth, the dairy has kept its cooperative principles, showing how these can still be of value in a global world.
- Dolomiti Live supported a cooperation between enterprises to develop safety-related products. Certotica-Dolomicert is a private company employing 35 people in an industrial zone in Longarone. They see the need to cooperate with partners companies rather than compete with them, since they can learn from each other. They developed two safety devices at the demand of the mountain rescue organisations. Interreg created a link between the mountain rescue organisation and the enterprises.

Cooperation takes place with universities outside the programming area

- The project “What does democracy mean to me? Reflections in the transborder Dolomiti Live Region” was undertaken in partnership with a professor from the

[University of Donau](#) and one from the University of Veneto, who provided the specific expertise needed by the organization of a citizen's panel.

Functional areas will provide another level of cooperation

- HeurOpen: The enlargement to functional areas is a further opportunity for the new strategy. Enlargement in functional areas will take place with the involvement of LEADER LAGs bordering the HEurOpen area.

Cooperation with other institutions

- There was a hut in the mountain, cross-border, that had to be rebuilt and needed a new form of management. The budget was too high for CLLD since the hut had to be bought. The project became a joint investment between the Wipptal CLLD and the EGTC Tyrol- South Tyrol – Trento.

Recommendation

- *Set-up a specific multi-lingual networking support team targeting cross-border CLLD. Tasks could include organisation of cross-border meeting of the four LAGs; help to find partners for projects; identification of innovative practices; provision of an interface with the administrations at all levels. These tasks could be part of Interact programme of activities.*

4.2.7. The “seventh feature”: Methods of management and financing

Whatever the method of financial management, financing may be considered as a LEADER specific feature because in many cases, it is the groups which:

- *define their budget on the basis of the actions planned in their rural innovation programme;*
- *allocate their resources to different measures;*
- *approve actions as they are submitted by the project leaders;*
- *modify and adjust these allocations during implementation if necessary;*
- *are accountable for their decisions.*

Such financial decision-making by a group (...) empowers the group and remains a specific and unique aspect of LEADER. This is one of the conditions of the

*bottom- up and area-based approach principles and is required to respect the objectives sought by creating the LAG.*⁵²

This last specific feature of LEADER has been integrated in Article 34.4 of the CLLD section of the CPR 2014-2020, where the tasks of the LAG are defined in details. The role of the Managing Authority is limited to verifying the eligibility of the actions to be financed, a role fulfilled by the Regional Coordination Units who are consulted before the formal selection of a small project by the LAG.

The management of project selection, budget allocations and cost claims have been described in detail in Chapter 3 on delivery mechanisms. It showed how the respect of the principle of decentralisation of decision-making has to be balanced with the need for accountability of the use of the public funds. This description also showed the weight of the administrative burden which takes often precedence over the animation function which should be at the core of the LAG's team work.

Recommendations:

Reduce the administrative burden:

- *Limit the need to ask for three estimates for large items.*
- *Apply Simplified Cost Options without adding more administrative burden to the LAGs.*
- *Harmonise procedures between regions and member states to create a stable environment for beneficiaries. Create a clearing house system for interpretation of eligibility questions.*
- *Allow the application of Draft Budget to be done by milestones, to allow for potential modifications to the original plan.*
- *Take into account the need to work in different languages, and increase the budget for LAGs.*
- *Improve the monitoring system, making it more user-friendly for LAGs and final beneficiaries.*

⁵² [“Assessing the added-value of the LEADER programme, a methodological guide by the LEADER Observatory, 1999.](#)

5. Conclusions

The IT-AT programme was developed in a cross-border area that had a common history for centuries until a border was created after World War I: local people still have a special relationship with their cross-border neighbours. Furthermore, they share a similar geography, with the Alps which are crossed by several passes connecting the two sides of the LAGs areas.

The regions on both sides of the border enjoy significant political autonomy from the capitals, this form of political devolution inspires further devolution towards the local, a core feature of CLLD. The two EGTCs which are active at the cross-border level provide the LAGs with a positive political support across the border.

The programme can be considered to be a success, which can be assessed through the quality of the 207 projects that were selected and implemented by August 2022⁵³. The short descriptions included in the LAG's profiles to showcase some of these successful projects. There were difficulties linked to the cross-border dimension of the programme, but these were solved one by one and the level of implementation is now satisfactory with commitments reaching 87% of the budget. There are notable differences between LAGs according to their previous experience with CLLD. Their strategies are reflected in the balance between small and medium projects.

The Interreg programme 2021-2027 builds on that success recipe and the four LAGs strategies will probably be selected again with a larger budget. This is important since local development takes time and the LAGs need to carry on their development work beyond the limits established by programming periods.

The LAGs benefit also from a supportive political environment, an essential element for the sustainability of local development and a condition for accessing the public co-financing required for the implementation of projects. Politicians support CLLD because they can see the projects on the ground as positive examples of the benefit of EU funding.

The cross-border dimension is a specific challenge for CLLD, as it creates a new set of issues and difficulties. However, it is also an asset since cross-border cooperation could foster an environment to encourage local innovation.

⁵³ The deadline for the selection of projects is 31/12/2022.

The governance of the programme is complex and use procedures that are not tailored to CLLD. The LAGs should have a facilitated access to different strands of national and European funding, helping them to become fully-fledged cross-border local development agencies, following the “one-stop-shop” approach applied in Austria. This is a natural evolution for LAGs as they gain experience on the ground. Links with agencies in charge of sectoral policies such as tourism should also be established. Local development takes time, often more than 20 years before local communities can be considered to be sustainable. Cross-border CLLD needs continuity: between programming period, the LAG team should stay in place as well as the partnership. The team and the Board have learned to work together, which reduces misunderstandings and helps to build trust.

The cross-border areas covered by the current LAGs can prove too small for certain types of projects that require more critical mass, for example projects on mobility should be able to extend towards the town centres even if these are not in the core area. More flexibility will be provided on the area-based approach through the use of Functional Areas.

The IT-AT Interreg Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat are based in Bolzano. The office is understaffed because of the requirement for team members to be bilingual in Italian and German. It should be reinforced in the new period, possibly via a delegation of staff working for the Austrian authorities in charge of the programme.

The current delivery mechanism is considered to be an important source of administrative burden by most stakeholders. Both the selection of projects and the management of the grants are time consuming and distract the LAGs from their core task which is to support new projects. Simplification through the use of Draft Budget is very welcome by both the MA and the LAGs, although the conditions under which this will be applied are not yet very clear.

All LAGs have used cross-border thematic working groups to develop their strategy, but also to develop thematic projects and follow their implementation. This is a powerful tool for fostering the bottom-up approach as it involves many people in local development.

Each project has partners on both sides of the border, sometimes to achieve the critical mass needed for a project like it is the case with the Geopark project in HeurOpen, sometimes because there is a similarity between the

areas on which a common project can be built, like the network of Roman sites in Dolomiti Live. Yet, in many cases, the cross-border dimension is limited to networking and exchanges, without common action.

Projects are innovative in many different ways, ranging from technological innovation to adding value together to a common asset. Innovation transfer should be supported by networking, but very little networking took place for different reasons: lack of time, lack of support, distances, travel difficulties, etc. Yet, networking is a key feature of CLLD and should be supported in the future since it also helps solving together some common difficulties such as the administrative burden.

Annex 1: Description of the four Local Action Groups.

- Terra Raetica
- Wipptael
- Dolomiti Live
- HeurOpen

Terra Raetica



1. The Area

Surface area: 5.956,81 km²

Population: 150.699 (2021) 146.143

(2013)

Terra Raetica is the land of the Rhaetian people⁵⁴, early settlers in the Iron Age. The Roman province of [Raetia](#) was named after these people, covering roughly the same area as the current LAG, bordering Austria, Italy and Switzerland. There were also early settlers of Celtic origin who left interesting archaeological remains.

The area has only small towns with less than 10.000 people. The population is slowly increasing, but emigration continues from side valleys (Spiss, Val Müstair, Stelvio) towards urban centres. The population is young (22% are under 20 years of age), excepted in the Swiss Terra Raetica (National Park Region). Less than 10% of the population is of migrant origin. From the Vinschgau Valley, more than 1.000 people commute daily to Switzerland for work. The level of education is low with 6% of the active population having achieved higher education. There are many school leavers. The lack of qualified jobs leads to the outmigration of educated people.

⁵⁴ The Raeti (spelling variants: Rhaeti, Rheti or Rhaetii) were a confederation of Alpine tribes, whose language and culture was probably related to those of the Etruscans. Before the Roman conquest, they inhabited present-day Tyrol in Austria, eastern Switzerland and the Alpine regions of north-eastern Italy. (Wikipedia)



The natural environment is well preserved and presents an impressive natural landscape, providing a very good quality of life. There are problems related to the high cost of land, leading sometimes to building on farm land. Some areas have already been protected here for over 100 years, and the area counts two national parks, several natural parks and protected areas (Natura 2000, Biosphere reserves, etc.).

The local economy is composed mostly of SMEs with less than 6 employees, addressing local needs. Productive activities include mainly construction and tourism.

Unemployment is kept low, but a lack of childcare facilities limits the access of women to work.

Farming consists mostly of dairy; holdings are small and farmers usually need a second job. It is extensive which is essential for preserving the natural and cultural landscape; mountain pasture covers a very large portion of land. On the Italian side, Val Venosta is well-known for its orchards. Cooperation between farming and tourism could be better developed in projects that associate on the farm accommodation and local quality products.

There is little industry, excepted in Val Venosta and the tertiary sector lacks future-oriented companies. Broadband access is not yet completed including in Val Venosta (Vinschgau Valley).

Tourism is very important, with 17 million overnight stays in 2014, this being one of the regions with the greater number of tourists in the Alps. It suffers of seasonality, which can be addressed via better quality, authenticity, high quality natural offer.

Energy is widely available, mostly from renewable sources, especially hydroelectric. There is a high potential from solar and geothermal. The population must understand the need to improve energy savings.

Transportation is good in Val Venosta, but needs improvement elsewhere, especially in cross-border in order to support the increased mobility of the workforce.

The cultural heritage is very rich and needs to be preserved for tourism and residents. The Via Claudia Augusta crosses the area and is used by cyclists and hikers.

The health and social services infrastructure is good but there are access difficulties for isolated communities. There is a need for new models of innovative care adapted to local needs.

2. The Partnership

The Austrian and Italian LEADER groups have cooperated since 1997 and were involved in Interreg 2000-2006 and 2007-2013, where they supported 41 large projects and 63 smaller projects. They became an Interreg LAG in 2014-2021.

The Lead Partner is the “Regionalmanagement für den Bezirk Landeck”, which also a LEADER group. They benefit from multi-funding and use the Lead Fund to finance running cost for management and animation.

There is a second Austrian partner, “Regionalmanagement Bezirk Imst”, which is also a LEADER group covering an adjacent area.

The Italian partner is “Community Val Venosta Valley”, which has been a LEADER group since LEADER 1.

There is also an associated Partner from Switzerland, “[Pro Engiadina Bassa – Wirtschaftsforum Nationalparkregion](#)”.

Bottom-up: the management of the LAG

Three decision-making structures are established. This was already the management model in the former period.

- The Interreg Council is the decision-making body composed of a maximum of 49% public participants and 51% private. It meets twice a year at least and decides on the selection of projects. The LAG has set a target of 70%

participation to these meetings, in order to remain representative of the area. Regional managing directors have an advisory function and the EGTC South Tyrol-Trentino has an observer status.

- There is a central Working Group of Interreg managers which prepares the decisions of the Council.
- There are six transnational Working Groups, which are open for all local actors and meet six times/year. Today about 200 local actors are part of the different working groups who also include experts from the regional administration. These working groups have met 69 times since 2016, involving 1.532 participants. The groups are:
 - Natura Raetica: nature projects
 - Cultura Raetica: cultural projects
 - Tourismus Terra Raetica: touristic projects
 - Mobilita Raetica: mobility projects
 - Humana Raetica: Social and agriculture projects
 - Energie initiative Terra Raetica: energy related projects

Those working groups meet regularly cross-border in order to:

- Exchange experiences
- Develop projects
- Get to know each other and build trust.

Every project is submitted to the respective local group who carries out an initial evaluation and advises the potential beneficiaries. The feasibility of the project and the eligibility of the actions foreseen are assessed by the regional managers and through contacts with the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) in Innsbruck or Bolzano, depending on the country of the project holder. The management can also help project holders to find the partners they need. The decision to support the project is taken by the Interreg Council, where a majority is needed, although unanimity is always sought. Project promoter are invited to present their project to the Council.

The follow-up of the projects is undertaken by the relevant thematic group (for small projects), the relevant local group (for medium-size project) or by Terra Raetica management.

For small projects i.e. those that are below 50.000 EUR, EU funding is up to 80% in Val Venosta, but only 70% for the other partners. The Swiss partner must self-finance its share of the projects in which they are involved.

For medium-size projects, i.e. those that are between 50 to 200.000 EUR, an application must be submitted via COHEMON after selection by the Interreg Council.

The need to ask for three estimates when using public money is very heavy, and small projects would not exist if this task was not done by the LAG.

3. The Strategy

The strategy was developed bottom-up in working groups opened to all interested actors. These include the six Working Groups that remain operational during the implementation of the strategy (Natura Raetica; Cultura Raetica; Tourism terra Raetica; Public transport terra Raetica; Humana Raetica; Energie initiative Terra Raetica) and three specific regional working groups (labour market, economy and innovation; renewable energy and regional resources; renovation of centres of historic villages).

The main aims of the strategy are to maintain the high quality of life, whilst improving the competitiveness of the local economy. This is specified in 7 objectives, as follows:

Smart growth:

- Economy, innovation and training
 - Improving competitiveness; developing cooperation; joint developments or commercialisation; Decentralised research network on energy, food and Alpine technology.
- Tourism and leisure infrastructure
 - Improve competitiveness, joint product development and marketing; cooperation tourism-agriculture; cross-border common qualification course; tourism development involving local population as users of infrastructure (not just for tourists); cross-border hiking and cycling trails.

Green growth:

- Natural heritage
 - Strengthening natural parks; cross-border working group; common map of natural resources; exchange of staff; etc.
- Cultural heritage

- Rehabilitation of cultural sites and buildings; intensification of cross-border cooperation.
- Mobility and energy
 - Introduction of sustainable solutions for public transport in peripheral mountain municipalities; improvement of cross-border cycle paths and transport of bicycles along Via Claudia Augusta;
 - Ensure a sustainable energy supply, improve energy efficiency and energy saving; exploitation of renewable energy sources.

Inclusive growth:

- Health, social and accessibility
 - Improving accessibility to health services (women, families, youth, migrants, people with disabilities, etc.)
 - Reduction of discrimination against women, especially of migrant origin, and people with disabilities; cross-border exchange of information; innovative childcare offers
- Labour market
 - Facilitate cross-border collaboration between local actors and enterprises.

Budget allocated to the strategy⁵⁵

Terra Raetica					
	Partner	ERDF	Nat. cofinan	Own resources	Total
Small projects	LP (Regio Landeck)	563.500,00 €	81.794,12 €	276.554,00 €	921 848 €
Small projects	PP1 (Regio Imst)	409.250,00 €	72.221,00 €	206.345,00 €	687 816 €
Small projects	PP2 (BZG Vinschgau)	484.000,00 €	62.707,76 €	108.116,00 €	654 824 €
Total small projects					2 264 488 €
Medium projects	LP (Regio Landeck)	809.718,00 €	142.891,00 €	635.073,00 €	1 587 682 €
Medium projects	PP1 (Regio Imst)	179.745,00 €	31.720,00 €	140.977,00 €	352 442 €
Medium projects	PP2 (BZG Vinschgau)	954.872,00 €	141.076,00 €	195.938,00 €	1 291 886 €
Total medium projects					3 232 010 €
Management	LP (Regio Landeck)	0	0,00 €	0,00 €	0 €
Management	PP1 (Regio Imst)	0	0,00 €	0,00 €	0 €
Management	PP2 (BZG Vinschgau)	355.834,00 €	62.795,00 €	83.726,00 €	502 355 €
Total management					502 355 €
	Total	3 756 919 €	595 205 €	1 646 729 €	5 998 853 €

Implementation of the strategy

⁵⁵ Data for budget and implantation were extracted from the COHEMON database in August 2022

Small projects	Budget small projects	2 264 488 €
	Number small projects selected	78
	Total commitment small projects	2 064 202 €
	% of total commitment small projects	37%
	Average commitment	26 464 €
	Cost FLC approved	736 584 €
	% of commitment FLC approved	36%
Medium projects	Budget medium projects	3 232 010 €
	Number medium projects selected	17
	Total commitment medium projects	3 090 098 €
	% of total commitment medium projects	55%
	Average commitment medium projects	181 770 €
	Costs FLC approved	1 336 179 €
	% of commitment FLC approved	43%
Management	Budget management	502 355 €
	Number management projects selected	1
	Total commitment	460 001 €
	% of total commitment	8%
	Costs FLC approved	0
	% of commitment FLC approved	0%

4. Innovation in governance and projects

Projects are innovative in different ways, all related to the territory:

- Looking at a contemporary issue such as climate change in the project “KLAR Kaunergrat” or at the consequences of climate change in the “Water experience in Terra Raetica” project.
- Adding value to a historical asset such as a Roman road in the project Via Claudia Augusta or a specific economic asset such as marble in the “Marmor – Visiting the global marble factory in Laas” project.
- Focusing on those in risk of exclusion such as young people in the “Mobility Youth Service”, people with disabilities in the project “Inklusion – Terra Raetica” or people of migrant origin.
- Addressing a long-term issue by a new way of promoting the renewal of small-town centres in the “Revitalisation of Schluderns town centre”.

The inclusion of a Swiss partner can be seen as an early attempt to cover a “Functional Area”⁵⁶, which will be streamlined in the next programming period.

⁵⁶ The current approach to the definition of the area encloses CLLD in rigid boundaries which can be irrelevant for some types of projects. Working on mobility for examples might require

The governance is also innovative: the Swiss partners are taking part to the meetings of the selection committee and have voting rights.

5. Networking and cooperation

Cooperation is the underlining principle of cross-border work, but this was already started well before, see the section 2 on partnership. Some early LEADER cooperation projects involved some of the LAGs, such as the Via Claudia Augusta. This was born under LEADER 2 and has become a major touristic product used by over 100.000 cyclists use it every year.

The six transnational Working Groups are composed of specific stakeholders and members of the core team. They focus on networking, exchange, initiation of cross-border cooperation and improvement of cross-border project delivery. On the basis of periodic reunions common topics are faced, experiences are shared and confidence is established.

Each cross-border project presented below is a result of networking and cooperation. It is also a promoter for further development of networking and cooperation in different sectors.

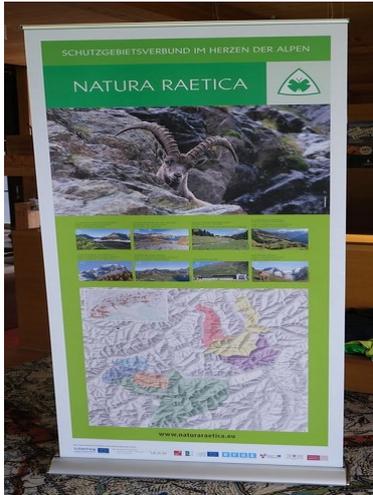
6. Results: a selection of projects supported by the LAG

“We don’t only do CLLD, we live CLLD”

Ernst Partl, Managing Director Kaunertal Park

an extension of the area of intervention to a city which is outside the defined CLLD area. Since the area-based approach aims also at ensuring a concentration of the financial means on a small area, there is a need to allow the extension of the area for specific purposes. This will be the case in the new period, where LAGs can add an extra budget to extend their action in an adjacent territory with which they form a “Functional Area”.

Studying the Ibex and its migration patterns



The Kaunertal Park has been in existence for 24 years and aims at protecting the environment whilst allowing the development of economic activity, including tourism. It covers 600 km².

The House of the Park was created in 2007 at the crossing of three valleys, to give a place where visitors can “see” the Park physically. It has 100.000 visitors of all age every year, including many schools and kindergarten.

Interreg CLLD supported since 2018 a project aiming at studying the Ibex and its patterns of migration. With the support of their Swiss partners, the Park was instrumental in the reintroduction in 1995 of the chamois (Ibex) which had disappeared. Biodiversity is still very high and can be appreciated via the exhibition in the House of the Park. Some other species are coming back, including wolves.

Cost of project: 49.494 €

ERDF: 39.595,2 € including national co-financing

Assessing the presence of the Forest Dormouse in the Kaunertal Park

The working group Natura Raetica collaborated with the Natural Park to **assess the presence of the “Forest Dormouse”** (*Dryomys Nitedula*) in the area covered by the LAG. Three areas were studied in 2021 in natural parks in Austria, Italy and Switzerland. They used wildlife cameras and also launched a call to the general public, and demonstrated that this small mammal was still present in the three countries.

Cost of project: 49.280 €

ERDF: 34.496 € including national co-financing

Other projects involving the Park include:



- The Kaunertal region received a [price for sustainable tourism given by the UNWTO](#) and is listed amongst the 51 “Best Tourist Villages” in the world. The focus of development in the Kaunertal is on inclusive

tourism, offering special products and services for people with disabilities. The LAG can rely on the experience of Sandra Careccia, who

is an architect suffering from a walking disability. They have developed special walking path adapted to the needs of this type of tourists.



- Interreg supported under Natura Raetica the networking of 2 national parks and 5 natural parks located in the three countries. They published a map showing the locations of the parks, their contact details and some specific feature of each park (24.138,72 €).

- The Natura Raetica Akademie is a small project (9.000 Euros) which allows the networking of the employees of the parks and the tourist boards, the organization of “Park days” for the same public as well as school trips in the nature facilities. 575 people participate in these activities.

The other Working Groups were also involved in projects:

- **Cultura Raetica:** Produced a leaflet outlining 40 culture facilities presented on one map.
- **Mobilita Raetica:** Developed a [timetable](#) for all public transports in the LAG area, as well as tips for excursions. This required the coordination of different cross-border busses. Cost: 15.200 Euros, of which 9.044 comes from the ERDF.
- **Fiber optic Terra Raetica :** The LAG worked on the development of a fiber optic network connecting the area to the Swiss network (cost: 9.000 Euros). This reduced the cost of the infrastructure but reduced also the dependency on the national provider. They would like to do the same on electricity and water but these are very regulated and it is more complicated.

KLAR Kaunergrat



The Pilot Programme „ Climate Change Adaptation Model Regions for Austria - [KLAR!](#)“ is funded by the Austrian Climate and Energy Fund and offers support for municipalities to raise awareness for climate change adaptation and implement concrete actions on regional level.

The awareness was born in the winter 2015-16, where there was no snow, which meant skying and hiking became more difficult. It is applied in the area covered by the Park, with several actions: raise awareness of young people who work with farmers on adaptation actions; reduce emissions of CO2 in hotels; e-mobility grants for electric taxis. A pilot car-sharing initiative was started with LEADER but could not be extended because of the cost.

Via Claudia Augusta



The [Via Claudia Augusta](#) is a cycling trail developed along the old Roman Way linking Venice with Swaben in Bavaria. It was originally a LEADER cooperation project but has now become an important touristic product since over 100.000 cyclists use it every year. There is a last gap remaining in the Via, which is called the “Evil Way”, a dangerous pass that would require over 6 million Euros to secure.

Mobility Youth Service

The **Mobility Youth Service** is a partnership with Landeck for the exchange of young people between 13 and 25 years old young people, including those who don't have a job or those without a legal status. The project is based on the understanding that it was important to give young workers a perspective as they lack contacts with adults outside the family, this could be done through networking. The objective is the professionalisation and further development of existing Youth services. The innovative dimension is its proximity and added value through the creation of a professional offer for young people at the interface between young people and social work.

It proved very relevant despite the limitations linked to COVID and 8 exchanges took place instead of the 4 that were planned. 1.118 young workers were involved. Landeck already had a youth workers network, but it was not the case in Italy. The Alta Val Venosta Valley doesn't have a real town centre, and 52 villages had to be included in the project. This required a lot of outreach work, the team visited many villages, looking for young people meeting places such a skateboard parks: a mobile van was also used.

The project is now closed but an evaluation concluded that it should be continued in the next period.

The project is worth 199.848 Euros, of which 60% are in Landeck and 40% in Val Venosta. The ERDF contributed 115.520 Euros.

Inklusion – Terra Raetica Für Alle



⁵⁷The social inclusion of people with disabilities requires the removal of structural, informational and organisational obstacles. The lack of recreational opportunities, sports, services and physical accessibility to places limits the independence of people with disabilities and

therefore their self-determination to fight exclusion.

Creating and improving the basic conditions for inclusion in the various areas of life (leisure, culture, nature, tourism and work) are the cornerstones of the project. "Without barriers" requires both the adaptation of structural problems and the overcoming of psychological and social barriers.

The **"Inklusion – Terra Raetica Für Alle"** project is targeting people with disabilities, aiming at reinforcing their inclusion through sport. This is a growing area as shown by the success of the Paralympics games. The project assessed the suitability of existing sport facilities in the valley, with the support of Sandra Careccia, an architect suffering from a walking disability who does work related to inclusion in Landeck. Sport teachers were trained for working with people with disabilities and participants recruited. Around 1.400 hours of training were delivered between March 2021 and July 2022. Several exchanges were organised with Landeck, which brought new approaches and ideas. The budget in Val Venosta was 50.000 Euros for 2 years and will be continued. The total cost of the project is 200.000 Euros, of which 110.500 comes from the ERDF.

Basic competences in Terra Raetica

In Terra Raetica the number of people considered disadvantaged and at risk of exclusion is increasing. These are mainly elderly people, women, people of

⁵⁷ Observation platform accessible to people with disabilities

migrant origin and people with disabilities. This inclusion promotion project aims above all to address people with a migratory background, in particular women and children, as well as people with disabilities. In a cross-border context, the project created services adapted to the needs, such as the provision of language courses for migrant women, including the provision of childcare.

The goal is to give these people equal opportunities in their personal, social and professional development by promoting their core competencies. Within the project, it is planned to exchange information, experiences and knowledge of previous projects in the regions in a cross-border context, to involve volunteers in the activities and to raise awareness of the meaning and need for inclusion, thus creating an added value to various levels. These activities take into account the important role of social inclusion in local and interregional development policies, reduce the risk of discrimination in border areas and promote equality between men and women.

The budget is 192.290 Euros (72.306 Austria, 119.984 Italy), of which 118.465 came from the ERDF.

Water experience in Terra Raetica:

The Alps are the main reservoir of soft water in Europe, but the Val Venosta is a very dry region, where there is very little rain. The Valley has relied on irrigation for centuries: water comes from the glaciers and is carried by the river in the whole valley. This situation is threatened by the melting of glaciers due to climate change: it is estimated that these will have disappeared by 2050. In the municipalities of the partners (Ladis and Prato allo Stelvio) there are already some projects relating to the theme of "Water".

- In Ladis, there is the well-known "Tiroler Sauerbrunn" sulphur spring, a water hiking trail and the centrally located Lader Weiher pond.
- The Community of Prato allo Stelvio has designated water as a central theme for its development: it has an aquarium, a national park house centred on water, angling lakes, etc.

The project aimed at developing a "Water theme trail" in each area, connecting individual water related attractions. In Prato allo Stelvio, it is a 4,4 Km long trail, the theme of water is illustrated on panels along the trail which follows an old irrigation canal. In Ladis, a similar path will illustrate the different stages of the water cycle.

The cross-border dimension includes the transfer of knowledge, the joint development of all water highlights of both municipalities, the exchange in the form of excursions on the theme of water.

Cost of the project: 189.580 Euros, ERDF contribution: 108.586 Euros.

Revitalisation of Schluderns town centre:

The inhabited centres of towns in Terra Raetica are characterized by a relatively high number of buildings that need to be restored. Due to the historical subdivision of assets, the property situation is very fragmented and complicated because properties were usually divided between siblings several times throughout history. This makes the renovation of such buildings difficult and many families moved away or settled in modern houses in the outskirts of the towns. Old houses are abandoned and become derelict, which gradually destroys the urban landscape and weakens the social and economic fabric.

In Schulderns in the Val Venosta, the project studied the feasibility of renovating an ancient building and turning into apartments for young families and came up with plans for its renovation which is now well under way. This is seen as a pilot for the renovation of other similar buildings in the centre, maybe setting up an architecture office shared between several municipalities. The project also organised a series of awareness-raising events on both sides of the border in order to mobilise the local population around this process.

Cost of project: 198.000 Euros, of which the ERDF contributed 108.630.

Historical, cultural and touristic promotion of mining areas in the Terra Raetica

Marmor Plus, visiting the global marble factory in Laas



The mining industry in Terra Raetica has a long tradition. Marble has been extracted from the mountain near Laas for hundreds of years. Lasa marble was already used in Roman antiquity for the construction of milestones on the Via Claudia

Augusta in the Vinschgau Valley. It is famous worldwide, some of the deliveries are very prestigious: the factory delivered special orders for 65.000 white crosses for the military graves of WW1; a special quality of marble was also delivered to New York for the rebuilding of the transport hub under Ground Zero. The association Marmor Plus organises guided tours of the quarry and the factory and Interreg supported a CLLD medium-sized project "Cultural-historical and touristic upgrading of mining areas in the Terra Raetica". This included a series of public lectures by leading academics in geology and historian, the publication

of a common leaflet, the implementation of common school program for training as a guide. The focus is on the preservation of cultural heritage whilst increasing the touristic attractiveness in the region.

In Laas, a factory hall is being reconstructed according to historical specifications, with historical marble processing equipment that is still in working order. Lighting is being installed on the historic gantry crane located by the new hall.

In St. Anton, an abandoned mine is to be reconstructed and made accessible to visitors.

Project cost in 200.000 of which 132.800 came from the ERDF.

Wipptal Interreg LAG

1. The Area

Surface area: Wipptal (northern und southern)

Population: 36.170 inhabitants

The Wipptal is considered geographically and historically as one area, despite the border that divides it in the middle. The landscape is stunning, offering all sorts of alpine views. It is strongly influenced by the transalpine connection through the Brenner, which is one of the main European connections on the Munich - Verona axis. As the lowest pass in the Alps (1374 m) the Brenner has been an important connecting point throughout history.

The Wipptal territory includes 12 municipalities in the northern part and 6 in the southern part.

The name Wipptal derives from Vipitenum, a road used by ancient Roman. From the 15th century, the name Wipptal was used to describe what is the Interreg LAG's territory today. After World War I, the Brenner pass became the border between Austria and Italy and the name Wipptal was no longer used. From the 70s, Wipptal has been used again to name both side of the border. The Wipptal has been exposed to profound changes after the accession of Austria to the EU and the opening of the EU borders. This brought large changes to the local economy, which is characterized by the small scale of its enterprises.

The Wipptal has a strong rural character, and agriculture contributes considerably to the maintenance of the landscape. This is an important asset for tourism but is also important for the inhabitants who identify themselves with their Wipptal region. A significant weakness of the area is the impact of the very heavy traffic load through the Brenner pass which is used by around 2.5 million lorries every year.

Young people are of very diverse origin but they lack opportunities to exchange with friends across the border. The educational opportunities are better in the south Wipptal where a range of options exists: from kindergarten to high school there is a wide range of offers, while in the north of Wipptal higher education is only available in Innsbruck, a 40 minutes train drive away.

2. The Partnership

Cross-border cooperation between the north and south Wipptal already developed during Interreg IV (2007-2013). An Interreg Council was set-up in 2008, to institutionalise and strengthen this cooperation. The Interreg Council, in addition to having developed key themes for cross-border cooperation, set up cross-border working groups and carried out numerous small cross-border projects. Small projects are a factor essential for the success of cross-border cooperation and have been perceived positively by the actors concerned. This created an important foundation for future regional development. In the past few years several small and medium projects have been carried out without the financial contribution of the Interreg Council Wipptal.

The Austrian and Italian partners are both LEADER groups. For the implementation of the joint CLLD strategy under Interreg IT-AT, the cooperation was consolidated in the form of an institutional partnership between the following organisations:

- The Lead Partner is the Verein Regionalmanagement Wipptal, Matriei am Brenner, based in Steinach. It benefits from multi-funding and uses the Lead Fund⁵⁸ to finance running cost for management and animation with the EAFRD.
- The Italian partner is Bezirksgemeinschaft Wipptal, Sterzing, which is the LEADER group GAL Wipptal 2020.

3. Bottom-up: the development of the strategy

The involvement of different institutions and interest groups was fundamental in the development of the strategy.

Local development has been developed in both the northern and southern Wipptal, involving the local population, the associations, the District Communities, Municipalities, representatives of the social sector, schools, forestry, enterprises, culture, young people, tourism, etc.

The global strategy CLLD Wipptal Region has been elaborated taking into account the topics and strategies developed by local working groups and was then integrated with new content developed by cross-border working groups.

⁵⁸ Regulation 1303/2013, CPR Article 32. 2 and 32.3.

The current CLLD strategy promotes and consolidates the network of public and private partnership, provides links between local actors and public bodies, private associations, interest groups, etc., throughout the Wipptal area.

The added value of the strategy is as follows:

- Development of a joint cross-border strategy including concrete measures and objectives, which strengthen cross-border cooperation.
- Promotion of "Wipptal without borders", considering the Wipptal region as a whole.
- Involvement of the population, systematic exchange of information with all interested parties.
- Local decision-making on the distribution of funds for local projects, and the associated responsibility.
- Accompaniment of project holders through professional assistance.
- Co-financing from the region.
- Partnership with the EGTC Tyrol-Alto Adige-Trentino.

The implementation of small initiatives is particularly important to bring down the barrier represented by the border in people's minds, through the multiplication of cross-border exchanges between people.

4. The management of the LAG

Decision-making:

The Interreg Council Wipptal is a body composed of representatives from the north and south parts of the valley, coming from the public and private sectors. At least 50+1 must be from the private sector and at least 1/3 must be women. The members are, for example, mayor, forest inspector, district president, youth representatives, representatives of the Italian language group and representatives of other institutions. It meets at regular intervals but at least twice a year.

The CLLD management carries out an initial assessment of new ideas or projects. In particular, the consistency with the development strategy and the eligibility of the project are checked. The CLLD management will help the project promoters to fulfil these criteria.

Once the project promoter has submitted the complete documentation, the project is presented to the Interreg Council Wipptal by the project promoter himself or by a representative.

In addition, working group meetings on various topics are held to encourage and support further cross-border projects. In total there are over 25 thematically different thematic working groups which organised more than 50 meetings involving around 500 participants.

Management of projects

Small projects:

For projects relating to the **Northern Wipptal**, all receipts and invoices are issued to the Regionalmanagement Wipptal and paid for by the Interreg LAG, who also seeks the necessary estimates for public procurement and orders the goods and services required.

The projects related to the **Southern Wipptal** can be implemented following to two variants according to the agreements of the CLLD management with the beneficiaries of the project:

- Variant 1: all invoices and receipts are addressed to the Wipptal District Community, who also manages offers and orders. Co-funding is paid by the beneficiary or partners involved in the project. The beneficiary also pays expenses that are ineligible.
- Variant 2: All invoices and receipts are addressed and paid by the beneficiary of the project. Estimates are also collected by the beneficiaries of the project. After the completion of the project the beneficiary issues an invoice with the total expenses to the Wipptal District Community. The Community then settles this amount to the implementing body minus the co-financing and expenses that are ineligible.

Medium projects

For medium size projects the management procedure is as follows:

- After the approval of the project, the realisation of the project is the responsibility of the beneficiary. All invoices and receipts are issued to the promoter and paid by him.
- After the completion of the project, the CLLD management supports the beneficiary of the project in compiling the report (list of invoices paid, invoice payments, estimates, assignments, evaluation of offers). The beneficiary of the project transmits all documents to the First Line Control who issues the validation report. The contribution is paid directly by Bolzano to the beneficiary.

5. The Strategy

The strategy was developed through a broad consultation with stakeholders from various sectors. Several meetings were organised with different working groups at local and cross-border levels. This allowed for a participative exchange and the development of a bottom-up strategy.

A goal defined by the Interreg Council Wipptal 2020 is the strengthening of integration cross-border and the promotion of local responsibility. It extends to areas adjacent to the border and aims at promoting innovative, sustainable and inclusive growth in the Wipptal region on both sides of the Brenner Pass. The strategy focuses on strengthening the attractiveness of the two regions and increasing their competitiveness.

Smart development

Agricultural and forestry:

- Conservation of small farms and mountain huts
- Support for cross-border cooperation in the agricultural, forestry and tourism sectors
- Cross-border quality improvement measures for "Agriturismo"
- Support of working groups in agriculture, cross-border treatment of issues / problems

Tourism:

- Innovative tourism including joint cross-border development of tourism offers (joint promotions, development of attraction points)
- Strengthening and expansion of the "Antica Strada del Brennero" (paths, cycle paths, development of railway stations)

Economy

- Strengthening of the entire economic area
- Organization of cross-border business exhibitions, innovation
- Support for cooperation between businesses and young people
- Promote exchanges and cooperation between businesses across borders

Sustainable Development

Natural space including landscape protection and care

- Strengthening the nature and forest sectors

- Sustainable protection against natural hazards
- Respectful use of natural environments

Transport and public mobility

- Raising awareness on the need for sustainable mobility
- Cross-border construction of two-wheeled mobility and marketing

Art and culture

- Promote art and culture initiatives in the area
- Promotion of culture along the "Antica Strada del Brennero"
- Strengthen the exchange of artistic and cultural associations in the entire Wipptal area
- Promotion of customs and traditions

Inclusive development

Young people

- Strengthening of cross-border networks
- Sensitization of the population towards the needs of youth
- Establishment of a long-term cross-border collaboration in the youth field
- Exchange of young people of different ages and backgrounds across borders
- Support for cooperation between businesses and young people

Social and health

- Establishment of a liaison network between health and social sector operators
- Construction of a cross-border exchange of employees in the social sector
- Establishment of a liaison network between care facilities throughout the Wipptal
- Awareness and awareness of the population on health issues

Training

- Creation of a network between promoters and training offers
- Cross-border network between schools
- Preservation and extension of existing contacts

Municipalities and Public Administration

- Strengthening of cross-border cooperation between municipalities
- Strengthening of public administration networks
- Establishment of public structures in the periphery

Budget allocated to the strategy⁵⁹

Wipptal

	Partner	ERDF	Nat. cofinan	Own resources	Total
Small sized Projects	LP (nördliches Wipptal)	311.223,00 €	47.863,00 €	89.771,00 €	448 857 €
Small sized Projects	PP1 (südliches Wipptal)	302.000,00 €	25.971,18 €	81.968,82 €	409 940 €
Total small projects					858 797 €
3 (Mittelprojekte)	LP (nördliches Wipptal)	538.777,00 €	95.078,00 €	158.464,00 €	792 319 €
3 (Mittelprojekte)	PP1 (südliches Wipptal)	710.000,00 €	60.083,00 €	192.496,00 €	962 579 €
Total medium projects					1 754 898 €
ITAT4023 - MGMT-WPT	LP (nördliches Wipptal)			0,00 €	0 €
ITAT4023 - MGMT-WPT	PP1 (südliches Wipptal)	273.000,00 €	48.177,35 €	56.678,36 €	377 856 €
Total management					377 856 €
Total		2 135 000 €	277 173 €	579 378 €	2 991 551 €

Implementation of Wipptal budget August 2022

Small projects	Budget small projects	858 797 €
	Number small projects selected	19
	Total commitment small projects	630 372 €
	% of total commitment small projects	26%
	Average commitment	33 177 €
	Cost FLC approved	119 606 €
	% of commitment FLC approved	19%
Medium projects	Budget medium projects	1 754 898 €
	Number medium projects selected	11
	Total commitment medium projects	1 485 958 €
	% of total commitment medium projects	61%
	Average commitment medium projects	135 087 €
	Costs FLC approved	664 939 €
	% of commitment FLC approved	45%
Management	Budget management	377 856 €
	Number management projects selected	1

⁵⁹ Data for budget and implantation were extracted from the COHEMON database in August 2022.

Total commitment	336 332€
% of total commitment	14%
Costs FLC approved	200 522€
% of commitment FLC approved	60%

6. Innovation in governance and projects

Projects are innovative in different ways, all related to the territory:

- Technology-based innovation in the case of the “Smarter Village and Portal Wipptal” project.
- Very centred on the community in the “Community Garden project”.
- Adding-value to a specific local asset such as the “Waterfall and water mills village”.
- Looking at a very long timeline, 160 years before a tree is fully mature like the “Oh Tannenbaum – Forest management and improvement” project.
- Launch of a new product by an existing local enterprise, like the “Goat yoghurt in Vilipeno’s dairy” project.
- Addressing a local issue such as the expected shortage of water in the “Water adventure trail” project.

7. Networking and cooperation

Cooperation between both sides of the border started under Interreg IV (see section 2) and is at the core of the work done by the Wipptal Interreg LAG. Projects always require a partner on each side of the border and their exchanges are intensive during the preparation and the implementation of the projects. Yet, the Interreg LAG is still at the beginning of its cross-border work and many lessons have been learned that will be used in the next programming period.

Networking takes place in the framework of LEADER networks in both countries, but there is a lack of specific networking support targeted at cross-border CLLD. Therefore, the Interreg LAGs are alone to deal with many issues that could be addressed together such as the administrative burden. The solutions developed in one area are not shared with the other Interreg LAGs and each of them has to reinvent its own solution.

8. Results: a selection of projects supported by the WIPPTAL LAG

Community Garden: Ecological and social highlights in the Wipptal: Shared gardens and edible municipalities



A local association is renting a piece of land situated centrally in the district of Statz. For a small annual contribution, local people can join the association and obtain a small plot of land where they can cultivate fruit and vegetables of their choice following principles of organic cultivation. More than 300 people have joined the association and meet in the allotment. This project goes well beyond the traditional allotments that can be found in many European countries, since the aim is very much to create a meeting place for the local community, to reinforce personal links and to open a cross-border dimension by organising study-visits to similar places. It also aims at raising awareness of the local population, especially young people, on the importance of a proper nutrition by carrying out lectures under the name “Incredible Edible Wipptal”. The association is part of a larger network of similar popular education outlets led by the Tyrolean Education Forum⁶⁰. The cost of the project was 48.968,21 Euros, of which the ERDF paid 35.379,50 Euros.

Smarter Village and Portal Wipptal

This project aims at creating an online portal where the ten municipalities of the area can be presented in a systematic way. Many of them already have web sites, but these are very unequal and tends not to be updated regularly. This common portal targets the 30.000 people living in the valley, rather than tourists and presents sections on administration, events, small adds, etc. Its common interface will also create a sense of belonging to a larger community at the cross-border level. It will be updated directly by community members, with a central moderator employed 15h/week. It is expected to go live at the end of 2022. Project cost is 50.000 Euros of which ERDF covered 38.250.

⁶⁰ The Tyrolean Education Forum designs affordable educational and cultural work in the Tyrolean communities, which supports people in making their lives fit for the future. Every year, 500 educational volunteers organize 1,800 events with around 35,000 participants in 220 Tyrolean communities.

The waterfall and water mills village – Muhlendorf



This project is centred around a beautiful waterfall located in the Gschnitz Valley. Here a very active association has renovated the watermills that were used traditionally for grinding grain. The “Water Mill Village” offers a walk around different types of historic mills and buildings to show how this activity was undertaken in the past. There is also a platform overlooking the waterfall, where people can stand to feel the effect of the “climatotherapy” associated with the spray of the waterfall. This project also aims at promoting local and regional cooperation between clubs and local companies and to benefit tourism in the region. Two LEADER grants were allocated to this project⁶¹ in the current programming period: renovation of a bridge that had been brought down by a sudden flood (19.924,40 Euros of which 15.560,60 from LEADER), and several actions for the extension of the “village” (22.976,17 Euros, of which 15.500,60 from LEADER). This also resulted in joint projects with the southern Wipptal, where, for example, a cookbook can be mentioned as a result.

Oh Tannenbaum – Forest management and improvement



The pine tree “fir” is a deep-rooted plant offering great advantages over the spruce due to its higher drought resistance and lower susceptibility to wind storms. It used to be widespread in the Wipptal but the areas where it is found today are very limited since biodiversity in local forest has been reduced and often a single species is cultivated. This is a serious risk for forests since a disease or an attack by parasites can devastate a large area.

The “Oh Tannenbaum” project aims at expanding the use of this ancient fir tree, by collecting seeds and growing them in areas protected by fences to keep deers and bears away. These trees are very tall and the collection of seeds must be undertaken manually by specialized climbers or with the help of a lifting platform. This campaign for the

⁶¹ This is a LEADER project, the Interreg contribution is not clear.

diversification of trees in local forests is a very long-term project since those trees take up to 160 years to grow to full maturity.

It is carried out in both sides of the border, with support from Interreg CLLD. ERDF contribution is as follows: South Wipptal: 16.300 €; North Wipptal: 17.300€.

Places of energy and strength



The Wipptal area is a traditional holiday place for tourists coming mostly from German-speaking areas. In 2019, 162.000 people visited the area, spending 500.000 nights: this represented a serious drop (-40%) due to the COVID. The area has not yet recovered and they hope that the next season will be better and are preparing new touristic activities. The “Places of energy and strength” is a new cross-border circular mountain trail designed to make nine points of natural energy and strength along the routes accessible to the public (locals and guests). These are places designated by medical experts, where you feel connected to nature. Information signs are posted, describing the particular characteristics of the place, including an explanation on the methods of Feng Shui that empower the forces that promote life. There is currently no comparable strength path in the whole of South and North Tyrol, so this is not an imitation but a pilot project for the entire region.

Project cost: 99.400 Euros. Interreg contribution: 77.720 Euros.

The old Brenner Pass Road



The aim of this Interreg project is to encourage people passing through the Brenner Pass motorway to stop along the "old Brenner pass " road, to learn about the culture and history of the surrounding towns and valleys, and to experiment some of its culinary delights.

The project is supported by the local HGV Sterzing (association of caterers and lodgers), in collaboration with the tourist office of Vipiteno and the tourist consortium Wipptal. The project undertook a targeted promotion of the theme

route by improving its offline and online presence, notably by using the theme of “smuggling”, an old tradition in the area of the Brenner Pass. A promotional video was also produced in German and Italian, which attracted over 5 million viewers online.

Project cost: 49.500 Euros, of which 37.503 came from Interreg.

Goat yoghurt in Vilipeno’s dairy

“The goat is the cow of the poor people”

Goat conservation and milk raw material processing Cooperation between the Cooperative Dairy Vipiteno and Milchgenossenschaft Wipptal Stubai.



For centuries, the harsh climate and the high altitudes in Wipptal only allowed dairy farming. Agriculture and the production of milk and dairy products were often the only way to ensure the economic survival of the families. In 1884, a cooperative was formed to collect the farmers' milk. This was the start of the professionalisation of milk collection, processing and distribution in the whole Wipptal⁶².

Today, 400 farmers in South Wipptal and 200 in North Wipptal supply up to 170,000 l of milk daily. The dairy has a staff of 170 FTE and sells its products in Italy, Austria and Germany.

⁶² The area was unified until the end of World War 1.

The dairy started the production of yoghurt in 1976, which now represent 86% of the milk used. They started a line of biological yoghurt in 2000 and have a series of quality certifications.



The rising demand for lactose-free yoghurt led the dairy to look for alternatives and identified goat's milk as an alternative for those who have lactose problems. Goats are also less harmful for the environment than cows. With the support of their members on both side of the territory, they started promoting the breeding of goats. Lectures and farm visits were organised for interested farmers so that they could assess how to develop this new line of activity. Advice was also available for the building of specific sheds to keep goats.

40 small farms have decided to join and adapt their infrastructure. The production and distribution of goat yoghurt will start at the autumn of 2022. Despite its growth, the dairy has kept very much a cooperative spirit, showing how this can still be a value in a global world, at the condition to keep innovating.

The cost of the project is 39.100 Euros (30.360 € in southern Wipptal and 8.740 € in northern Wipptal), of which Interreg pays 27.224,64 Euros (80%).

Water adventure trail



With climate change, the protection of water is becoming a growing issue in the Alps. The joint project of the Tourismusverein Gossensass (southern Wipptal and the Tourismusverband (North Wipptal) aims to build an experience around the theme of water. The “water trail” project aims at raising the awareness of children by organizing a trail along a river, with educational activities to be carried out by children at some stations. The hiking trail in the valley will also be suitable for wheelchairs and

widened at the existing bottlenecks. The route will feature a variety of stations with games, climbing, slides and benches to relax and rest. The same project was developed on both sides of the mountain range. In the South Wipptal the valley

hiking trail includes various stations with water games and information on alpine herbs.

Project's cost: 199.800 Euros, of which 153.840 came from ERDF.

Dolomiti Live LAG

“We are not working on Interreg, we are working on the development of our territories through projects, Interreg is just a mean.”

Ms Gina Streit, Dolomiti Live

Population: 195.930 inhabitants

Area: 6,405 km²

Population density: 30.6 inhabitants/km²

1. The area

The area is bordering Austria and Italy in the Dolomites range. This cross-border territory has always been a place of exchange and meeting between populations and cultures. Historically there was already an important trade road linking the territories of the Roman Empire. The cross-border region boasts an eventful history, in which the three participating areas were divided and reunited several times politically. Thanks to the CLLD, the cross-border area will become a single economic area with a population of 195,930 inhabitants. The geographic and hydrologic conditions of the three areas are very similar, and the fact that they are marginal areas in their respective countries has led them to face the same challenges together.

The population is stable but there is some emigration from peripheral and marginal areas. There are differences between the three areas: between 2013 and 2021, the population decreased in Alto Bellunese as well as in East Tyrol and increased in Pustertal.

The population is aging since young people are moving away, looking for better jobs. This aging population requires good welfare services, but there are accessibility issues due to lack of local public mobility offer in marginal areas such as valleys. There are 6 hospitals in the area and a good network of social services.

The difficult geography makes it difficult to operate profitable activities and small shops are gradually closing in small villages. Good broadband facilities are lacking in low-density areas.

There is a good primary and secondary school network, but only a few university courses are available locally: young people study in larger towns and don't come back since it is difficult to find suitable work locally.

There are several active economic clusters in food, metal processing, plastic, wood and new material. The industrial sector is still well developed and the tertiary sector is growing. Enterprises are small (4,6 workers average) but remain competitive in their area. The unemployment rate is low, but is high for young people. There is a lack of early childhood facilities such as kindergarten, which can prevent women to work. The challenge for cross-border CLLD is to create the conditions for innovation and foster a better integration between sectors such as craft, tourism and farming.

Farming is composed of small holdings since the arable land is very limited and composed mostly of meadows and pastures. Traditional dairy products are dominant. The areas covered with forest are growing due to the progressive abandonment of mountain areas. The challenge for cross-border CLLD is to support productions that aimed at recovery and enhancement of biodiversity such as vegetables, small fruits, honey, etc.

Tourism is a strong sector but is too dependent on mass hotels and ski resorts: there are 150.000 beds in the area, providing many seasonal jobs. The challenge for cross-border CLLD is to support an alternative form of tourism based on the existence of numerous protected areas and natural parks, and of the Dolomites which are an UNESCO world heritage site. This can be achieved through better integration between sectors such as craft, tourism and sustainable agriculture.

Energy is still based mostly on fossil fuels but there is a large hydro-electric potential and there are more than 50 hydroelectric plants in the area. Wood biomass is also exploited since the area is rich in forest resources.

The road network and public transport are good, but remote areas remain less connected. The challenge for cross-border CLLD is to increase and improve public transport, especially its coordination and interconnections in the three parts of the LAG's area.

There are three different languages spoken in the area, each with their associated cultures. This is weakness but it is also an opportunity to position Dolomiti Live as the interface between the three territories. There is a rich

historical and architectural heritage witnessing the cross-border exchanges that took place in the past, especially Roman roads.



The natural environment is exceptionally beautiful and its biodiversity is protected in the many Parks and Natura 2000 areas. However, traditional agricultural and pastoral activities are slowly decreasing, together with the traditional forms of landscape management, leading to an increased vulnerability of the soils. The challenge for cross-border CLLD is to develop that environmental potential for tourism.

2. The partnership

The Lead Partner is the “Regionsmanagement Osttirol”, a LEADER group based in Lienz. It benefits from multi-funding and uses the Lead Fund to finance its share of the running cost for management and animation. There are two Italian partner: the “Bezirksgemeinschaft Pustertal”, based in Brunico BZ, Italy and the “Gal Alto Bellunese” based in Lozzo di Cadore.

Two partners are Leader groups (Regionsmanagement Osttirol and GAL Alto Bellunese). The Italian Partner "Bezirksgemeinschaft Pustertal" is a county community, which have delegated the tasks to the Regional Management LAG Pustertal.

Former cooperation between the LAG includes the following:

- An informal structure was created for the development of the Interreg II and III projects, promoted by Community Montania Comelico-Sappada, Alta Pusteria Tourist Consortium and Osttirol Consortium Werbung of Lienz. During the same programming period, a project for the establishment of a “Small projects” fund was developed in partnership a partnership between Regionsmanagement Osttirol and the Val Pusteria District Community.
- The experience gained in the period 1997-2006 was fundamental in the constitution of the Interreg [Rat Dolomiti Live](#) in 2008 (Interreg IV Italy-Austria). The Interreg-Rat Dolomiti Live has been working for years together with its partners for the integration of the territories of the cross-border regions of Belluno, Val Pusteria of South Tyrol and Osttirol.

The small project fund has been particularly used since 2010, creating intense cross-border activity between schools and local associations of East Tyrol and Val Pusteria in South Tyrol.

The LAG Alto Bellunese has been in operation since LEADER 1, and many project ideas still come from that area. The local community is very interested in what happens in the other areas and in the rest of the world. However, the Alto Bellunese is part of the Veneto Region, which doesn't enjoy the same autonomy as South Tyrol. The Veneto Region is very large and doesn't pay much attention to a remote mountain area such as the Alto Bellunese. Interreg has helped open the mentality of the three regions, and has really brought people together.

3. Bottom-up: the preparation of the strategy

To identify the needs, the partners used the analysis of the socio-economic data of the territory and the experience acquired over many years of cross-border joint activity. Thematic working groups were organised with the stakeholders during the drafting of the strategy. These involved local authorities (municipalities, provinces, Community Montana, etc.), trade associations, representatives of civil society, parks, cultural and tourist operators. Numerous face-to-face interviews with local stakeholders were conducted per region.

Working groups remained active during the implementation of the strategy, to develop projects around the main themes of the strategy.

4. The management of the LAG:

There are three cross-border bodies involved in the management of the LAG:

- The Management Committee is composed of the presidents and directors of three partners. Their role is to direct and oversee the implementation of the strategy and the activities carried out by the core working group and the selection committee. It meets at least once a year.
- The Project Selection Committee is composed of members appointed by the three partners, respecting the requirement of Article 32.2 of the CPR. It meets at least four times per year.

- The Core Working Group is composed of employees of the three partners. It is the operational branch of the Interreg LAG, undertaking the following tasks:
 - Animation of the local community
 - Finding partners and bringing them into contact with each other so that projects can be developed.
 - Drafting calls and forms for submitting project proposals.
 - Technical assistance in preparing applications and billing.
 - Monitoring during program implementation.
 - Drafting of the annual documentation submitted to the Management Committee.

The evaluation report published in 2019 establishes some implementation challenges and the remedial actions taken:

- The BZG Pustertal started its activities with some delay, which led to a certain imbalance in the commitments compared to the other two partners.
- The waiting time for the First Level Control and the consequent transfer of the funds is too long. The administrative burden discourages many potential beneficiaries from submitting project applications.
- The **bilingualism in the Dolomiti Live** area is a hurdle since most of the meetings, minutes and documents have to be bilingual, which is not the case in Terra Raetica nor Wipptal. This was addressed by the Managing Authority which accepted a higher level of administrative costs (maximum 25% of the cost incurred instead of 20% for the others) The LAG provided more interesting details on the cost of bilingualism and the way it is managed:
 - The LAG organised language training courses.
 - At the beginning of the period, there were no templates for the administrative internal processes such as calls for projects, decision-making board meetings, documentation, etc. They had to create and translate these themselves.
 - They provided Heuopen with all the multi-lingual documents, saving them a lot of groundwork.
 - The challenge is that only South Tyrolean partners and project promoters are bilingual, which is not the case in East Tyrol and Alto Bellunese.
 - All translation services are covered by LAG staff and resources, without resorting to external service providers. This accelerates processes and develop competences within their organisation.

- On average, around 10 meetings take place for each small project, from initiation to completion. All related documents are bilingual (invitations, agendas, minutes, project information, amendments, conflict management, meeting moderation, emails, partner visits, etc.).
- The Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) in Veneto has no knowledge of German, so they are required to produce all funding-relevant documents in two languages.

Small projects (maximum 50.000 Euros):

- The beneficiary of the ERDF grant is the Small Project Fund set-up by the LAGs.
- They have published a call for proposals together with application form and instruction. Small projects can be presented continuously.
- Applications are filled by the body leading the project, with a letter of commitment from the others partners, including at least one from the other Member State⁶³.
- CLLD management transmits the application to the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) which checks the compliance with formal provisions and state aid.
- The Project Selection Committee approves the projects after checking if these comply with the strategy.
- There is one “implementing body” for the project. The corresponding LAG’s partner will insert the invoices in COHEMON and liaise with the FLC.
 - In Italy, the programme authorities pay directly the LAG, which then pays the final beneficiary.
 - In Austria, the LAG asks for offers, pays all the bills directly and claim the money back from the programme authorities.
 - This difference complicates the management of projects since partners are treated differently, which can lead to mistakes and confusion. In the future, there will be only one beneficiary, which will make it easier, although it will require the translation of invoices.

63 Only in exceptional cases a project had just one partner in small projects. In these cases, one of the LAGs was the beneficiary.

- The use of draft budget⁶⁴ in the future is seen as cautiously positive, although it brings new issues.
 - Modifications will not be possible, although projects always need changes and adjustments. A solution would be to cut up the project in “slices”, separated by milestones which trigger an interim payment. However, this can lead to an additional workload for the LAG’s team, which is difficult to estimate.
 - They are not sure on how this will be implemented and know they need to keep a very good relationship with the MA.

Medium-size projects (maximum 200.000 Euros):

These follow the same procedure, but applications are introduced directly by the project beneficiaries in COHEMON and follow the normal Interreg procedure, although the funding decision is not taken by the Monitoring Committee but by the Interreg LAG’s Project Selection Committee.

5. The strategy

The very similar geographical and hydrographic conditions of the three areas and the fact that they are peripheral in their own countries have led them to face the same challenges. The central aim identified for the development of the cross-border CLLD region is that of **improving the quality of life**, which can be broken down according to the three growth objectives of the European Union.

Smart growth

- Create, through close collaboration, a unique cross-border tourist offer that makes the area more attractive.
- Support networking through supply chain processes for industry, crafts and research.
- Increase the capacity for innovation through training and cooperation, so that companies can compete in a knowledge-based economy.
- Support the development of cross-border production chain processes, to achieve critical mass and economies of scale.

64 Simplified Cost Option in which a budget is approved for a project and payment takes place if the results are delivered. There is no verification of individual invoices any longer. See Chapter 3 for more details.

Sustainable growth

- Increase awareness of the population on the value of their resources and the need to use them sustainability for the development of the tourism sector, a better mobility and sustainable energy.
- Protect and enhance the cultural and natural heritage that characterize the image of the region.
- Improve the skills of economic actors in combining environmental protection and economic exploitation, making the region a recognized « quality mark ».

Inclusive growth

- Foster the development of a common identity, in addition to local identities.
- Undertake joint administrative and organizational projects and in the social field in its broadest sense.
- Support cross-border collaboration between public institutions and authorities in order to be able to rely on the skills already present in the three regions: the knowledge acquired in one area will be extended to the others to harmonize and improve the quality of life in all three regions.

The strategy includes expected a table presenting the expected results and a breakdown of the budget between the three objectives. There is also a detailed action plan.

Budget 2014-2021⁶⁵

Dolomiti Live					
	Partner	ERDF	Nat. cofinan	Own resources	Total
Small sized Projects	LP (RMO)	298 500 €	48 000 €	61 147 €	407 647 €
Small sized Projects	PP1 (BZG Pustertal)	265.000,00 €	30.397,06 €	52.129,14 €	347 526 €
Small sized Projects	PP2 (GAL Alto B)	257.000,00 €	29.479,67 €	50.554,78 €	337 034 €
Total small size					1 092 207 €
3 (Mittelprojekte)	LP (RMO)	1.089.084,00 €	182.824,00 €	397.730,00 €	1 669 638 €
3 (Mittelprojekte)	PP1 (BZG Pustertal)	856.664,00 €	95.933,00 €	234.000,00 €	1 186 597 €
3 (Mittelprojekte)	PP2 (GAL Alto B)	1.136.000,00 €	130.305,00 €	320.248,00 €	1 586 553 €
Total Medium projects					4 442 788 €
ITAT4025 - MGMT DL	LP (RMO)				0 €

⁶⁵ Data for budget and implantation were extracted from the COHEMON database in August 2022.

ITAT4025 - MGMT DL	PP1 (BZG Pustertal)	300.920,46 €	53.103,61 €	62.474,00 €	416 498 €
ITAT4025 - MGMT DL	PP2 (GAL Alto B)	340.000,00 €	60.000,00 €	70.588,00 €	470 588 €
Total management					887 086 €
	Total	4 543 168 €	630 042 €	1 248 871 €	6 422 081 €

Implementation of Dolomiti Live budget August 2022

		Dolomiti Live
Total budget		6 422 081
Total ERDF budget		
Total number projects selected		61
Total commitment to projects		7 056 630
% budget committed		110%
Total approved by FLC		3 374 088
% ERDF budget approved by FLC		53%
Small projects	Budget small projects	1 092 207
	Number small projects selected	29
	Total commitment small projects	1 135 670
	% of total commitment small projects	16%
	Average commitment	39 161
	Cost FLC approved	460 605
	% of commitment FLC approved	41%
Medium projects	Budget medium projects	4 442 788
	Number medium projects selected	30
	Total commitment medium projects	5 089 237
	% of total commitment medium projects	72%
	Average commitment medium projects	169 641
	Costs FLC approved	2 206 909
	% of commitment FLC approved	43%
Management	Budget management	887 086
	Number management projects selected	2
	Total commitment	831 723
	% of total commitment	12%
	Costs FLC approved	706 574
	% of commitment FLC approved	85%

6. Innovation in governance and projects

Dolomiti Live's governance is presented in chapter 3.2. Its main innovation is the use of working groups: the Dolomiti Live core Working Group composed of the three coordinators and Project Working Groups composed of project partners with the participation of members of the core working group.

Projects are innovative in different ways, all related to the territory:

- Technology-based innovation in the case of the two projects "Technological development in support of the mountain rescue organisations". These are also addressing directly a local issue, looking at technology to help the mountain rescue organisations.
- Using a new trend in working patterns to support co-working in a small town, like in the "Coworking, Smart Working & Laboratorio Urbano project". The forms of intervention were adapted to the local circumstances of the partners, this could only be done with CLLD.
- Building a cross-border identity on the basis of ancient sites, like in the "Networked archaeology: the former inhabitants of the Eastern Alps" project, or the "First prehistoric population in the Dolomites" project.
- Very centred on the community in the project "Green spaces in communities".
- Foster a broad and deep conversation in the local community on an issue of relevance for all. The project "What does democracy mean to me?" provided some orientations for the strategy in preparation for the next programming period.
- Address locally an important issue in the project "Dolo DEFI: Red Cross: added value of defibrillators in a tourist region".

7. Networking and cooperation

The partnership is based on former cooperation experience between the LEADER groups since Interreg II and III projects. The RMO and the Gal Alto Bellunese have also implemented transnational Leader projects together. That experience was fundamental in the constitution in 2008 of the cooperation structure [Rat Dolomiti Live](#) between Val Pusteria and Osttirol, already financed by the Interreg IV Italy-Austria programme 2007-2013.

The Interreg-Rat Dolomiti Live has been working for years together with its partners for the integration of the territories of the cross-border regions of Belluno, Val Pusteria of South Tyrol and Osttirol before the constitution of the Dolomiti Live in 2015.

The Alto Bellunese LAG has been involved in cooperation projects under LEADER since LEADER II (1994-1999).

Yet, there is no networking facility between the Interreg LAGs in this programming period and they rely on existing LEADER networks to exchange and access good practices ideas. This has reduced the opportunities for the four CLLD regions to meet and discuss the issues they were facing, in particular with regards to administrative burden.

8. Results: a selection of projects supported by the LAG:

Networked archaeology: the former inhabitants of the Eastern Alps

Project partners: Magnifica Comunità di Cadore (Alto Bellunese), Brunico Kronplatz Tourism (South Tyrol), Curatorium pro Agunto association (Osttirol)



Three archaeological museums Pieve di Cadore, St. Lorenzen Sebatum and Aguntum near Dölsach are working together to create an informal network between the institutions and the individual regions, in order to unite three important Roman sites on the territory. The project's partners feel that it is important that

the local population and tourists associate the area with more than snow and mountains/ outdoor activities. The museums attract a growing number of school groups, which is good since young people need to discover their area and develop their understanding of the local history.



Interreg allowed these sites to be promoted jointly through targeted campaigns and the development of cross-border communication and marketing products such as a joint film and promotional material to link the three museums.

Each site also benefited from some investments, including:

- The Magnifica Comunità di Cadore, owner of the Archaeological Museum in Cadore, Alto Bellunese, enabled the restoration and display of the

mosaic floor found in a Roman villa not far from the museum. It is now preserved in the museum on the first floor of the Palazzo della Magnifica.

- Brunico Kronplatz Tourism in Pustertal, supported work on two archaeological sites related to the Mansio Sebatum Museum: the "Public Baths" and the "Craftsmen's Quarter".



- The Museum of Aguntum in Austria, created a 3D model of the Roman settlement "Municipium Claudium Aguntum". The entire Roman city is analyzed and reconstructed using digital techniques that allow visitors to understand the complexity of its construction, structure and expansion.

Cost of project: 200.000 Euros, of which Interreg contributed 143.200 Euros.

Coworking, Smart Working & Laboratorio Urbano

Project partners: Department of City Marketing City of Lienz (Osttirol), City Marketing Municipality of Brunico (South Tyrol), Reviviscar Srl di Belluno (Alto Bellunese).



The project aims at improving the possibilities of digital technology in the workplace. The different experiences of the three partners in this field enable a useful exchange of knowledge on questions and approaches to the use of digital and participatory approaches to the development of the regions.

The activities planned by each partner are:

- The Pustertal partner concentrates primarily on improving the communication of the "Startbase" project of the city of Brunico, a co-working space set-up in 2018, which is more and more successful, also amongst tourists visiting the area. This communication strengthens the city's co-working space, which serves as a start-up for development projects and is also an exhibition space promoting the city and the district amongst the users of Startbase. They organized a series of workshop in schools to make the idea of co-working better known.

- In Alto Bellunese, Reviviscar is the local branch of Cofindustria, a business association. It promotes new forms of location-independent work in the region through the [Smart Working Moving Lab](#), raising awareness of local population and entrepreneurs on these new opportunities.
- The municipality of Lienz used this project to promote co-working, using the existing city lab for citizen participation processes

It was advertised on the city's web site and a multi-lingual video has been produced.

The three areas involved have different approaches to promote innovation and are very interested in learning from each other.

Cost of project: 49.100 Euros, of which Interreg contributed 40.039,25 Euros.

Technological development in support of the mountain rescue organisations

Certotica-Dolomicert is a private company employing 35 people in an industrial zoning in Longarone. It is a certification body but the company has diversified in the development of safety-related products, using EU funds when possible. They see the need to cooperate with partners companies rather than compete with them, since they can learn from each other. It is also a way for the company to remain located in a remote valley and employ young people from the area.

They developed two safety devices at the demand of the mountain rescue organisations. These projects are undertaken with the Austrian engineering company Micado, specialized in product development and automation technology company and the Mountain Rescue Service in the Alpine Association South Tyrol.

- The project supported the development of a "Fall Factor Reduction" accessory that can be placed on a climbing rope in order to reduce the risk of long falls of people climbing in Via Ferrata. This should reduce the casualties if people fall, and the need for intervention of the mountain rescue organisation. Cost of project: 196.221,41 Euros, of which Interreg contributed 123.241,20 Euros.
- The "Rescue System for Winter Activity" is a heated probe with a camera, that can be used to locate people that are buried under an avalanche. This need was identified after an avalanche in 2017 that

buried a whole hotel with 29 people. Cost of project: 199.139,18 Euros, of which Interreg contributed 126.401,55 Euros.

First prehistoric population in the Dolomites.

Partners: Municipality of Obertilliach (Osttirol), Municipality of San Vito di Cadore (Alto Bellunese), Istitut Ladin Micurà de Rù (South Tyrol).

A prehistoric site near San Vito di Cadore has been explored, which demonstrated that the area was populated 11.000 years ago by hunters. The project has organised visits on the site with scientists, locals and tourists. The area where the remains were discovered is one of the most beautiful areas of the Dolomites and has been contested between San Vito di Cadore and the neighbouring town of Cortina d'Ampezo for many years. This project allows these towns to cooperate instead of compete with each other. The Ladin Institute in Val Badia South Tyrol is the third partner since Ladin was also spoken in this area. The project has supported more excavation work and communication of the findings: a video has been produced, meetings with universities were organised (although these were limited by COVID) and a didactic programme was developed and implemented in four schools in East Tyrol. The project's partners would like to become a Geological Park supported by the UNESCO.

Cost of project: 49.100 Euros, of which Interreg contributed 35.474,75 Euros.

Green spaces in communities

Biodiversity-friendly green space design in the area of the Virgen education center.

Partners: Municipality of Virgen (Osttirol), Municipality of Perarolo di Cadore (Alto Bellunese), Municipality of Wengen (South Tyrol)

The school in the village of Virgen needed a new playground for the local school. They had the opportunity to buy a piece of land adjacent to the school and decided to turn it into a garden where biodiversity will be displayed. The municipality of Virgen has been involved in biodiversity protection for many years, working with the national park nearby, renovating meadows and protecting special biotopes.

The idea was to develop the garden with a focus on biodiversity as a role model, involving pupils, teachers, staff from the children garden, council

workers and also young artists. It had to become an education area for the pupils but also for the whole community.

The project started by studying the local biodiversity with the children, visiting farmers, nurseries, etc. After this awareness-raising phase, they started planning the garden, defining different areas for different uses, including a playground, small fruit garden, etc. The implementation of the plan was delayed by COVID but is now ongoing.

Cross-border exchanges took place with the municipality of Wengen in South Tyrol, where a similar project was taking place.

The partners knew each other from two former projects: Green spaces - which involved small municipalities and Blooming cities – in which the two bigger cities collaborated.

Cost of project: 49,500 Euros, of which Interreg contributed 35.763,75 Euros.

[What does democracy mean to me?](#)

Reflections in the transborder Dolomiti Live Region

The partners were Regionsmanagement Osttirol/RMO (Osttirol), Fondazione Comelico Dolomiti Centro Studi Transfrontaliero (Alto Bellunese), Eurac research (South Tyrol).

This project was undertaken in partnership with a professor from the University for Continuing Education Krems and one from the University of Turin. It was made more difficult by the COVID since meetings were difficult and this type of project can't really be done on line.

20 people in each region were meeting to explore the meaning of democracy with the help of a professional facilitator. The facilitator had a brief and 5-6 subthemes to explore. Participants were hand-picked by the LAGs amongst people they knew, but also identified through word-of-mouth, discussions in bars, or simply using the telephone directory and through advertising via the media and with the municipalities. Each group had a balanced constitution, representative of their area (gender, ethnic origin, education level, etc.).

2-3 tables were organised in each CLLD partner's areas. The discussion lasted for 90 minutes but participants wanted to keep on exchanging. The outcome is a better understanding of what people think in the three regions involved, a

contribution to the preparation of the next programming period. Key messages include:

- We need more education to democracy
- Women rights were raised at each table
- Who has the right to vote? What about migrants?
- Freedom of speech / freedom of the press
- Lack of trust in politicians
- Climate is a key subject
- Democracy should be more like this project

Cost of project: 49.936,75 Euros, of which Interreg contributed 36.079,30 Euros.

[Dolo DEFI: Red Cross: added value of defibrillators in a tourist region](#)

Partners: Landesrettungsverein Weißes Kreuz EO (South Tyrol), Azienda ULSS n. 1 Dolomiti (Alto Bellunese), Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz (Landesverband Tirol, Bezirksstelle Osttirol)

The border area between South Tyrol, Belluno and Osttirol has always been a popular excursion and recreational destination for local people and tourists. This project aimed at installing defibrillators in key places in the three areas, to help people with sudden cardiac arrest. The use of early defibrillators has been the benchmark in the struggle for survival for many years now when the heart suddenly stops beating. However, this requires a widespread network of AEDs in addition to trained personnel and make them accessible around the clock by mounting them in outdoor areas. The idea is to make a significant amount of equipment available in all three areas and to train the staff concerned. Location data is provided to all rescue centres in the border area, so that in the event of an emergency call it can be assigned directly to a device.

Cost of project: 199.744,65 Euros, of which Interreg contributed 147.325,80 Euros.

HeurOpen LAG

1. The Area

Surface area: 3 268 km²

Population: 92.000 inhabitants

The area has deep historical roots for both cultural and historical reasons. Until World War I, the borders of the former Austrian Empire extended as far as Pontebba and even today many Families living on Italian soil still carry an Austrian surname and speak German language; many Austrian traditions have been also preserved.

The concept of a “No Borders” area was developed a few decades ago: the aim was to get together the neighbouring districts of Italy-Austria-Slovenia on occasion of the 1999 Italian candidacy for the Winter Olympic Games together with Slovenia.

There are three borders in the area (Italy, Austria, Slovenia) and three languages. The Interreg CLLD doesn't extend to Slovenia, but there are many existing connections. The LAG Open-LEADER has 2 Slovenian municipalities on its Board.

The **population is slowly decreasing** (-5% in 10 years) but growing in the towns. It is aging and people over 65 represent 25% of the population. Young people leave because of the lack of work and housing. The cross-border CLLD challenge is to create employment opportunities and better services.

There is a full schools' network, but secondary **education** is only available in major town centres. Mobility solutions are good, so reaching schools is not a problem. Higher education is only available in larger cities such as Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, Villach, Udine and young people don't always come back after achieving higher education. This brain drain is a problem for the future of the area. Adult education is available but sometimes poor internet connection limits its availability. Three languages are spoken in the area but lack of language skills is a challenge for cross-border work.

There are 5.900 **enterprises** in the area, providing 25.000 jobs: with an average of around 4 jobs per unit companies are small and often lack competitiveness. Unemployment is low at 6%, but there is a shortage of jobs for young people

aged between 18 and 25 and for women after the age of 50. Enterprises can be found mainly in the tertiary sector, although there is some industry in wood and metal processing, paper production and mechanical industry. Research and innovation is concentrated in Amaro with three specialised labs (optics, electromagnetic, calorimetry). The cross-border CLLD challenge is to stimulate local innovation and to increase the cooperation especially cross-border between enterprises.

Tourism is the sector that can contribute most to the sustainability of the entire production system in the area. There is a good availability of hotels and other beds and a good touristic offer based on nature in the summer and snow in the winter. The cross-border CLLD challenge will be to support the creation of products associating tourism and farming, as well as common products across the border.

Agriculture and forestry are sectors that have reduced activity in recent decades but these sectors remain essential for the management of the land. Agriculture is mainly based on the use of meadows and pastures, breeding of cattle from milk. There is already some cross-border activity with the management of the alpine huts that are located in the direct border area. Farms are small (between 2 and 10 hectares) and farming is mostly a part-time activity. Traditional local foods, such as meat, speck, cheeses, vegetables, fruit, etc. are of very good quality. Direct sales undertaken in synergy with agritourism accommodation represent an important source of income for farms and has experienced strong growth in the last few years. The cross-border CLLD challenge is to establish cooperation especially as regards transfer of know-how, intensification of existing cooperation and elaboration of common products and offers.

Most of the energy is from fossil fuels, whilst renewables represent only 6,5% of the production (data from 2012)⁶⁶. There is still an important potential for the development of hydro-power but forest biomass could be more used through a better management of the forest and an increased use of wood. The cross-border CLLD challenge is to increase the level of energy self-sufficiency and reduce the release of greenhouse gases. This can be achieved by raising awareness and implementing common projects for the exchange of know-how and experience, as well as developing cooperation in the use of renewable sources.

⁶⁶ It is very difficult to get data for the HEurOpen area as a whole. Data is very flawed and has many gaps. Getting good data will be a big goal in the next period. In 2020 in the Hermagor region, 57% of the energy used came from renewable sources.

Public transport in the cross-border area (rail and road) does not respond sufficiently to the current needs of the population and tourists. The cross-border CLLD challenge is to make it more efficient and reduce its environmental impact.

There are numerous **protected areas**: Natura 2000, parks and nature reserves. The growing area which is no longer cultivated leads to the development of forests and soil erosion. This development has negative effects on biodiversity and the landscape. The cross-border CLLD challenge is to recognize the environmental heritage as a great value in this cross-border area and place it at the centre of integrated policies and territorial marketing. The exchange of knowledge and experiences between organizations operating in the three areas and cooperation in the cross-border area will expand the environmental potential of the area.

The HEurOpen territory is influenced by **three cultural and linguistic environments** (German, Latin, Slovenian). Their common history can be identified in the remains dating the Roman, the Middle Ages, the Venetian presence, and the First World War. Many ancient traditions still influence popular festivals and the gastronomy. These elements are important for reinforcing the identity of local communities but they are also attractive for tourists.

Some sections of the local population are **at risk of poverty**: single-parent families, migrants, young people, individuals with disabilities. Women are more at risk than men since they have often given their up jobs to care for child or elderly relatives.

The CLLD area enjoys an extensive **public health and social system**, but demographic change and the scarcity of public resources pose a major threat and require rethinking the provision of services. The cross-border CLLD challenge consists in the coordination and exchange of knowledge and experience and the identification of common solutions for the protection and development of the social infrastructure.

2. The Partnership

The Lead Partner is the “LAG Region Hermagor”, which is also a LEADER group. It benefits from multi-funding and use the Lead Fund option to finance running cost for management and animation with the EAFRD. Hermagor used to be part of the Villach LEADER Group, which was mostly outside the Interreg IT-AT area. It became an independent LEADER group in 2015 which made it eligible to Interreg cross-border CLLD.

The two Italian partners are both LEADER groups:

- GAL Open LEADER based in Pontebba
- GAL Euroleader based in Tolmezzo

The LAGs did not have much cross-border activity before the launch of the CLLD strategy. The proper cross-border work only started in 2015-16. There was a separate project called “Smart Borders” that Hermagor implemented jointly with the Comunita Montana, which became their partners for Interreg CLLD.

A technical working group of CLLD management was set up between the LAGs of the CLLD project area HEurOpen, to create the basis for cooperation in the HEurOpen project area. The language barrier was an issue at the beginning, but now all meetings are bilingual and interpreted simultaneously by a member of staff from the LAG Hermagor.

The first three years were essentially about getting to know the individual LAGs and the respective project areas (regional situation, organizational structures, administration, etc.), but also about improving and strengthening relationships with the other actors involved (presidents/chairmen/ mayors, etc.).

Almost 3 years after the start of the implementation of the strategy, the goal of building, strengthening and intensifying cross-border cooperation between the project areas and the respective stakeholders were partially reached.

Continuous collaboration has been established between the three LAGs, who now work together as if they were a single body. All beneficiaries of the projects funded under the HEurOpen strategy emphasize the importance of implementing these first collaborative projects, as this is the first step in the development of future collaboration.

The three LAGs meet regularly to implement the strategy and communicate daily by email. In addition, numerous meetings took place in the three offices of the LAGs (Pontebba, Tolmezzo and Hermagor) and in other locations of the project areas to get to know the areas and to present the work of CLLD to the public. Wherever possible, video conferences have been organized to save time and to reduce CO2 emissions.

The implementation has been working well since 2019 after the initial difficulties. They expect to be able to commit their full budget by the end of 2022.

The HEurOpen project area does not have a good balance in terms of distribution:

- LAG Hermagor: 9 municipalities with a total population of 20,142 inhabitants (22%)
- LAG Open Leader: 15 municipalities with a total population of 32,883 inhabitants (36%)
- LAG Euroleader: 28 municipalities with a total population of 38,554 inhabitants (42%)

The Austrian area, which must be represented in all projects, represents only 22% of the entire HEurOpen project area. This means that it is sometimes difficult to find a partner for a cross-border partnership on the Austrian side.

This situation will be addressed in the new period by adding some new local authorities to the area covered by the LAG. The new Hermagor territory will have 35.000 inhabitants, which will also create a critical mass since Hermagor alone was very small and lacked potential project's promoters or partners.

In the next period, the partners intend to develop cooperation with the EGTC "Sensa Confine" which brings together since 2012 the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, the Veneto Region and the Land Carinthia. The cross-border CLLD HEurOpen could be the pilot for new actions undertaken by the EGTC. The EGTC already provides statistics at the level of the LAG, which are often very difficult to obtain. This is being updated every year, allowing an adjustment in the implementation of the strategy.

Currently there are 52 Municipalities belonging to the HEurOpen area. In the next period, the area on the Carinthian side will be expanded by six municipalities and on the Italian side by one municipality. One of the most difficult elements in the current period is the limited size of the Austrian area compared to the Italian one and, above all, the fact that the Austrian GAL area stops several kilometers from the Tarvisio border and does not include, for example, the neighboring municipalities of Arnoldstein, Hohenthurn and Noetsch. These municipalities, located on the border area, will be included in the new strategy. This will move the center of the area, which is good since

people are already very active across the border: for example, children go to school on the other side of the border.

3. Bottom-up: the management of the LAG:

The development of the strategy:

The development strategy of the HEurOpen area is the result of the joint planning work of the three LAGs on the basis of the context analyses and the indications that emerged from the cross-border Tables promoted by the Smartborders 2020 project. This was a project financed by the Interreg IV Italy-Austria programme which ended in 2015 and whose beneficiaries were the *Mountain Community of Gemona, Canal del Ferro and Val Canale*, the *Mountain Community of Carnia* and the *Region of Hermagor*.

The strategy drafted in 2014 was the very first step of cooperation. But many things were not known at the beginning, and objectives, themes and measures proved to be inadequate and have been adapted or changed in the new strategy on the basis of the experience gained.

During the implementation of the strategy, thematic working groups were organised with the aim of bringing together potential project partners and supporting the emergence of partnerships and project ideas (topics included electric mobility, schools, emergency management, music, pilgrimage, etc.). Covid discontinued this activity.

For the new period 2021-27, in order to facilitate large participation and to increase the involvement of stakeholders and civil society, the three LAGs have organized different Thematic Working Groups on the following topics:

- Climate Change and energy, 23/3/22
- Sustainable Value Chain (agri-food, craft, wood), 12/4/22
- Nature, Biodiversity and nature tourism, 12/4/22
- School and Education, 28/4/22
- Youth and projects for the future, 13/5/22
- Emergencies and risk prevention, 19/5/22

It is intended to make these thematic focus groups permanent for the entire duration of the next programming period in order to support co-planning, assess the progress of the strategy and check whether adjustments are necessary.

The enlargement in functional areas is a further opportunity for the new strategy. Enlargement in functional areas will take place with the involvement of LAGs bordering the HEurOpen area. Coordination will be ensured by the collaborative relationships that already exist between the various LAGs at the regional level.

Decision-making

Selection procedure

1. The call for small projects was open in January 2017, and for medium-projects in March 2017. The calls are open permanently.
2. The three LAGs undertake local animation to promote the call for project and help project holders develop projects and application forms.
3. Project proposals are presented to one of the three LAGs. The first step for project presentation is to fill out an Expression of Interest describing the project's objectives, actions and cross-border added value. You can also use the expression of interest to search for a partner with the help of the LAG in your area.
4. Small projects must involve at least two partners from different GAL areas, one of which must be Austrian. For medium projects, it is necessary to involve three partners each belonging to the 3 different LAG areas.
5. Once the partnership defined, a meeting is organised in the presence of all the LAGs where the project partners present their ideas and can ask for clarification on technical aspects. The orientation meeting for medium-sized projects is required. With one LAG project, named SUPPLING, it was possible to provide each project the support of an interpreter, with the aim of overcoming the language barrier.
6. Once submitted, formal criteria are verified by the LAG, including completeness and correctness of the project, contribution in achieving the outputs of the HEurOpen strategy and the presence of cross-border added value.
7. The Project application is loaded in COHEMON to ask the opinion of the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) on the eligibility of the actions foreseen. If OK, the project is submitted to the Project Selection Committee.
8. The Project Selection Committee is made up of 15 members. Each area has designated 5 members, but in a coordinated way in order to represent the socio-economic fabric of the HEurOpen area and comply with the European

Regulation that specifies that no interest group can control the decision-making. At least 33% of members must be women.

9. The Project Selection Committee meets four times per year and project holders are invited to present their project. This can be done face-to-face or by written procedure. Meetings took place virtually in the time of the COVID.
10. Their evaluation is based on qualitative criteria such as synergies with other projects/programmes, multi-sectoral aspect, innovation, economic, ecological and social sustainability.

Procedure for the management of the grant

1. Once approved by the PSC, the grant letter is issued directly by the LAG. For medium projects, these follow the normal Interreg procedure, although they will not be approved by the Monitoring Committee in order to comply with the CLLD methodology which is based on the devolution of decision-making to the LAGs.
2. In Carinthia, a start-up meeting is held with the project promoter, the CLLD management, the Regional Coordination Unit and the FLC.
3. The management of each LAG will provide ongoing support during the life of the project.
4. Once funded, small projects remain with the LAGs.
5. Project partners have to advance all expenses and this can sometimes be a problem. Interim invoices are possible and follow the same procedure as final reporting.
6. For small projects, each partner forward its spending to its own LAG, who will upload them in the monitoring system. This was too complicated and from 2019, small projects can be billed by only one partner.
7. The accounts of small projects are checked first by the LAGs and then by the FLC. Once the First Level Control has finalised its assessment, the payment claim is sent to the MA in Bolzano. The grant is paid to the CLLD management and forwarded to the beneficiary within 5 days.
8. Medium-sized projects interface directly with the Managing Authority in Bolzano.

Administrative burden

- It is essential to reduce the administrative burden since the LAG's team should concentrate on the animation, not on the administration.

- It was hard to learn how to use COHEMON⁶⁷, especially since there were some problems with the system.
 - Normally, Interreg programmes use a specific platform called JEMS⁶⁸, which was developed by Interact. It is described as user-friendly and can be customised to your specific needs. There is regular maintenance and training is available.
 - It has been developed by Bolzano for all Cohesion programmes and doesn't have the same support.
 - It is a big hurdle for the project partners. A lot of support is needed from the CLLD management who themselves rely a lot on friendly support from the Joint Secretariat.
- The First Level Control (FLC) is established in each Region (Trieste and Klagenfurt) and has to give its OK before transmitting the files to Bolzano for payment. This can be difficult since they don't always interpret the rules in the same way.
- The assessment of the plausibility of costs incurred is a major hurdle, especially in times of uncertainty: the crisis has brought prices up and costs have been rising in the course of the project. In the next period, the lump sums with regard to personnel costs will certainly bring relief.
- Rules are not the same in Italy and Austrian for public procurement.
- In the next period, draft budget will be good since it makes the LAG responsible for the way they use the CLLD method.

Finances and timetable:

In Italy, there are financial difficulties for co-financing since small municipalities have limited financial resources. Co-financing share is guaranteed with the transfers of the partners: each member pays an amount that has been determined for municipalities on the basis of population and number of enterprises, and for individuals on the basis of their income. The highest share is paid by the Comunità Montana del Gemonese and is € 8.700 and the lowest is € 100,00 paid by small local associations. Prefinancing would be useful for some small projects.

Cross-border CLLD is quite new and small projects work well in Italy since there are many municipalities with limited budgets; medium projects are more for

⁶⁷ COHEMON is the monitoring system developed and managed by the MA in Bolzano for all the Cohesion programmes (ERDF, ESF and Interreg).

⁶⁸ JEMS is the Joint Evaluation and Monitoring System developed and managed by Interact. It is specifically adapted to the needs of Interreg. Interact provides regular updates and training sessions.

Austria. Language is a real issue since LAG members are not bilingual and meetings can be quite long and formal.

The average time needed for a medium project to pass from the presentation to the approval by the LAG is 91 days; it takes another 149 days before getting the grant letter: more than 7 months in total.

This is much faster for small projects since the LAG takes directly the decision: 51 days on average.

The implementation of a small project will take around 2,5 years on average; the approval of the FLC about four months and the payment another two to three months.

4. The Strategy

Between the Austrian and Italian partners, the distribution of the budget was defined at programme level. Between the two Italian partners, the distribution was made on the basis of objective data: population and surface of the two areas. Open Leader has about 47%.

The HEurOpen strategy supports a **regional development approach**, which:

- Transforms the limitation brought by the mountain environment and the remoteness into valuable elements and factors of distinction of the area and what it has to offer.
- Transforms linguistic, cultural and institutional diversity into an important opportunity for the exchange of experiences and skills.
- Mobilizes the resources that are not well used inside the area: natural and cultural assets, culture and tradition, derelict buildings, etc.
- Increases the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the proposed actions, through the involvement of actors in participatory planning.
- Does not consider the creation of added value, the increase of social cohesion and sustainability as alternative objectives, but integrates them into every initiative.

The strategy has four specific objectives:

Cross-border cooperation and skills development for economic innovation

- Sharing of new products and innovative approaches through the implementation of pilot projects.

- Establishment of networks and other forms of cooperation between companies in the same sector (for example: agri-food, gastronomy and slow tourism).
- Development of technical and entrepreneurial skills for specific needs and target groups of operators.
- Development of young people's skills, including language, through cross-border activities.

Safeguard and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage

The environment and cultural resources constitute a heritage to be protected for the next generations, but they can also be a sustainable source of income and employment.

- Management of natural areas and protection and enhancement interventions through shared projects that build on the many experiences gained in the territories of the three LAGs.
- Development of actions for the recovery of artistic and historical-cultural assets and development of their use for tourism.
- Sharing of action plans and pilot projects appropriate to the alpine context aimed at reduction of CO₂.

Strengthening of responses to new social needs

- Supporting youth with actions that favour school and social inclusion
- Enhancing the role of the elderly within local communities.
- Job placement and creation of innovative responses to social needs.

Institutional cooperation and integrated and shared strategies.

The strategy aims to be an area in which to concretely start overcoming obstacles political, administrative, legal and organizational that hinder cross-border cooperation, including by networking with other CLLD areas within the Interreg IT-AUT Programme.

Budget 2014-2021⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Data for budget and implantation were extracted from the COHEMON database in August 2022.

	Partner	ERDF	Nat. cofinan	Own resources	Total
				Gesamt	
Small sized Projects	LP (Hermagor)	238.160,00 €	23.160,00 €	46.100,00 €	307 420 €
Small sized Projects	PP1 (Open Leader)	221.600,00 €	26.071,00 €	43.707,00 €	291 378 €
Small sized Projects	PP2 (Euroleader)	248.400,00 €	29.224,00 €	48.993,00 €	326 617 €
Total small projects					925 415 €
3 (Mittelprojekte)	LP (Hermagor)	661.840,00 €		116.840,00 €	778 680 €
3 (Mittelprojekte)	PP1 (Open Leader)	630.850,00 €	74.218,00 €	124.424,00 €	829 492 €
3 (Mittelprojekte)	PP2 (Euroleader)	739.150,00 €	86.959,00 €	145.784,00 €	971 893 €
Total medium projects					2 580 065 €
ITAT4040 MGMT -	LP (Hermagor)				0 €
ITAT4040 MGMT -	PP1 (Open Leader)	243.750,00 €	43.014,91 €	50.606,00 €	337 371 €
ITAT4040 MGMT -	PP2 (Euroleader)	241.250,00 €	42.573,95 €	50.087,00 €	333 911 €
Total management					671 282 €
	Total	3 225 000 €	325 221 €	626 541 €	4 176 762 €

Implementation of the strategy

	HeurOpen
Total budget	4 176 762
Total ERDF budget	
Total number projects selected	16
Total commitment to projects	2 012 522
% budget committed	48%
Total ERDF committed to projects	
% ERDF committed to projects	
Total approved by FLC	1 071 821
% ERDF budget approved by FLC	26%
% total commitment paid	53%
Small projects	
Budget small projects	925 415
Number small projects selected	9
Total commitment small projects	447 922
% of total commitment small projects	22%
Average commitment	49 769
Cost FLC approved	96 925
% of commitment FLC approved	22%
Medium projects	
Budget medium projects	2 580 065
Number medium projects selected	5
Total commitment medium projects	948 682
% of total commitment medium projects	47%
Average commitment medium projects	189 736

	Costs FLC approved	631 492
	% of commitment FLC approved	67%
Management	Budget management	671 282
	Number management projects selected	2
	Total commitment	615 918
	% of total commitment	31%
	Costs FLC approved	343 405
	% of commitment FLC approved	56%

5. Innovation in governance and projects

The governance of CLLD in HeurOpen was presented above. Its innovative dimension lies in the selection procedure and will be reinforced by the use of working groups to define the new strategy and oversee its implantation in specific sectors.

Innovation in projects stems from the cross-border partnership approach and will be highlighted in the project descriptions in section 7.

Projects are innovative in different ways, all related to the territory:

- Cultural Innovation by looking at the musical culture that unites the area.
- Innovation based on a specific feature of the area, such as the special rocks formations that can be observed in the Geopark area.
- Taping into a global trend and developing a product addressing new tendencies in tourism such as Trail Running.
- Projects supporting a specific section of the community like the Alpine Clubs in the “From Pass to Pass” project. In this case, it is also aiming at proposing a new product to stimulate tourism.

6. Networking and cooperation

Cooperation is at the core of cross-border CLLD, both locally and across the border. Partnership with one LAG from the other side of the border for small projects or from all three areas for medium projects is a key requirement to enforce cooperation.

Networking is the missing link in this period since there were only two meetings of the four LAGs in 2019 and 2022. Other exchanges took place on line. COVID has a role to play here, but this was also not seen as a priority. The distance and travel difficulties in the mountain were also an obstacle.

There is a need for more contacts outside the programme as well, but this requires a specific budget to organise exchange-visits.

7. Results: a selection of projects supported by the LAG

The cooperation in projects has brought closer individual partners and organisations, who have built personal relationships which forms the basis for future cooperation. Exchange of information, mutual invitations and visits, development of new projects still takes place after the completion of projects. However, this is very difficult to measure quantitatively.

VIDEM - Via Julia Augusta

Here cooperation took place in the cultural, artistic field.



The promotion of musical culture in the HEurOpen area is at the heart of the project.

- Increase the offer of high-level musical events through the establishment of the "Alpine Youth Orchestra HEurOpen", which will hold a concert in each of the CLLD regions.
- The organization of a series of ensemble concerts is also planned, whose performances will be held in places of particular cultural and naturalistic value.
- In organizing these events, particular attention will be paid to the involvement of schools, through the participation of students in concerts and the performance of educational activities by the musicians involved in the project.
- Historical research will be carried out in each area and published, promoting the knowledge of the specific features of the three regions in the musicological field.

Cost: 179.300

ERDF: 140.782

Geopark Karnische Alpen

The Geopark of the Carnic Alps covers a cross-border area and has two offices in Dellach (Austria) and Tolmezzo (Italy). The Park organises many activities to promote the geological richness of the area amongst schools and tourists, for example school visits and hiking tours displaying specific geological features. Hikes are organised to discover specific geological formations. It has several museums and visitors' centres where specific exhibitions are organised as well as lectures. It has already benefited from mainstream Interreg support.



The aim of this cross-border CLLD project is to develop an aspect of the geological heritage of the area which is still little known but has a great potential also for tourism: the ancient mines that were extracting ferrous minerals and have been abandoned for centuries and often

forgotten. These geological sites are also historical sites, witnessing the relationship between man and territory in antiquity.

The project includes scientific research, which will translate into tourist and educational activities in the area. The project intends to create new products to attract a wider public, including mining-themed excursions, educational activities for schools, summer entertainment proposals for families, exhibitions and workshops aimed at deepening their knowledge of the territory.

A new original geo-referenced information layer on the historic and ancient mines in the area of interest is also planned, which will further enrich the information in the existing Geopark webgis.

The project started in February 2020 and is not yet finalised.

Cost of project: 200.000

ERDF: 153.000

CROSSTRAIL: Discover Friuli and Hermagor through Trail Running

In recent years, trail running has developed exponentially and the number of people practicing this discipline is constantly growing. This sport can be practiced throughout the year in areas below 1,000 m and for 6-9 months a year in areas above these altitudes. One of the objectives is to exploit this opportunity during the intermediate seasons, from March to November.

To attract trail runners, the project aims to develop and map a network of existing trails to offer a complete offer that combines logistical, technical, naturalistic and cultural aspects. A paper and digital version of guide including GPS tracks will be created containing trail running routes. The web site will also propose technical advice for correct training, information on places of historical and naturalistic interest and on accommodation facilities in the area. Workshops and high-level events related to trail running will be organised to promote the new routes.

The project started in June 2019 and is not yet finalised.

Cost: 195.410

ERDF: 149.773

PASSOPASS: From Passo di Monte Croce Carnico (Plöckenpass) to Passo di Pramollo (Nassfeldpass)

The cross-border area between the Plöckenpass and the Nassfeldpass is an area with numerous natural, historical and alpine values: there are nature reserves, paleontological and archaeological sites, historical memorials, including from World War I. There is also a dense network of hiking trails that include the "red path" of Via Alpina and the peace path of the Traversata Carnica, several via ferratas and high mountain paths.

The project was submitted and presented by the Italian Alpine Club of Moggio Udinese (lead partner) together with the CAI of Pontebba and Ravascletto and the Österreichische Alpenverein (ÖAV) Hermagor, the ÖAV Obergailtal-Lesachtal and the University of Udine.

The aim of the project is the valorization of the entire area for cultural, educational and tourist purposes by rehabilitating the routes and the local

cultural assets for sustainable tourism in order to contribute to enhancing the attractiveness of these places and to make the local population aware of the richness of their own territory.

Activities included identification of cross-border hiking routes, maintenance and signposting of the paths, design and production of signs and brochures, renovation of the Lomasti bivouac and development of multimedia products;

The involvement of the local communities, in particular the Alpine Clubs, but also young people through the local schools and the youth groups of the Alpine Clubs, plays a key role in this project since they are the future 'guardians' of sustainable development in the project area.

The project started in August 2017 and is finalised. Project partners are still meeting regularly despite the formal end of the project.

Cost: 195.410,33

ERDF: 148.720

Annex 2: List of persons met during the visits

Innsbruck

- Christian Stampfer, Juliane Weickert and Sigrid Hilger, LEADER and CLLD
- Andreas Eisendle - EGTC Tyrol- South Tyrol – Trento
- Harald Oblasser forest department
- Christian Dobler - regarding climate change, SDGs and sustainability
- Martin Traxl – multifund approach
- Marcus Hofer - innovation agency of Tyrol
- Ursula Weingartner – ESF in Tyrol

Bolzano

- Martha Gaerber - Managing Authority
- Arno Kompatscher – President of the Trentino Alto-Adige/Südtirol Region and of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen
- Christoph von Ach, General Secretary of the Tirolo – Alto Adige – Trentino EGTC and Stefan Graziadei.
- Kathrin Nagler and Evelyn Wieser - First level control Bolzano
- Jessica Strappazon- Audit authority
- Helmt Schwarzand - Environmental Authority
- Josef Tetter - Joint Secretary
- Petra Tamanini - Joint Secretary
- Maren Meyer - Policy officer – Italian EUSALP Presidency 2022

Terra Raetica

- **Ernst Partl, Managing Director Kaunertal Park**
- Sandra Careccia, Architect
- Gabriele Juen, LAG manager
- Franz Geiger, Landeck TV
- Friedl Salpeza, LAG Manager Alto Val Venosta
- Anna Morrigl, coordination of social services
- Gustav Tschenett, Mayor
- Susanne Seifer, Coordinator Mamor Plus
- Tobias Stecher, Mobile Youth network
- Michael Traut, Terra Raetica for all
- Waltraud Wielander, MP Basic skills
- Andreas Tappeiner, President of and Mayor of Laas

- Hugo Trenkwalder, Head of technical services in Leeg Enterprises

Wipptal

- Carmen Turing, Manager Interreg CLLD Wipptal North
- Helmut Gassebner, project holder Oh Tannenbaum
- Sabine Richter, Manager Interreg CLLD Wipptal South
- Lukas Peer
- Christian Ploder, University Innsbruck
- Petra Obojes, Community Gardens
- Margarete Ringler, Tiroler Bildungsforum
- Alfons Rastner
- Felder Christian, Mulendorf
- Peter Linter and Thomas Gschlieber, Tourist office in Sterzing and Ratschings
- Manuela Stuefer and Luis Wild, Representatives from the Sterzin-Vitipeno dairy
- Philip Oberegger, Forstinspektorat Sterzing

Dolomiti Live

- Gina Streit, LAG Manager
- Ingemar Gräber and Peter Aussedorfer, Museum Mansio Sebatum in Sankt Lorezen
- Lukas Neumair and Anna Hofer, Youth Project in Bruneck
- Bernhard Mair, member of the project selection group
- Marion Niederkofler, manager of StartBase in Bruneck
- Iolanda De Deppo, Manager LAG Alto Bellunese
- Armana De Martin, Museum Pieve di Cadore
- Leano Viel and Marco Calvi, Certottica-Dolomiticert in Longarone
- Alfonso Sidro, city's council building in San Vito di Cadore
- Leano Viel, Research and Development manager Dolomicert
- Marco Calvi, R&D in Certotica
- Corrado Facco, Managing Director Certotica-Dolomicert Group
- Michael Hohenwarter, LAG manager in Lienz
- Dietmar Ruggenthaler, Mayor of Virgen and Chair of the LAG
- Irmgard Hitthaler, Regional Management LAG Pustertal
- Daniela Ingruber, Research Lab Democracy and Society in Transition, Donau Universität
- Jasmina Steiner and Oskar Januschke, project on inner cities in Lienz

- Fadi Donhal, University Professor in Lienz
- Manuel Jesacher, Red Cross in Lienz

HeurOpen

- Friedrich Veider, LAG management Hermagor
- Gerlinde Ortner, Geopark Project
- Michele Mizzaro, President of the LAG Euroleader
- Stefano Santi, Director LAG Euroleader
- Luca Scignaro, Vice-Mayor, Municipality of Paluzza
- Paola Scarsini, Employee assigned to the CLLD Strategy in Euroleader
- Manuela D'Orlando, secretary Caseificio Alto But (Dairy)
- Markus Brandstätter, President CLLD Hermagor
- Birgit Zankt-Petautschnig, Member of Hermagor team
- Thomas Schicho, Regional Coordination Unit Klagenfurt
- Mauro Moroldo, President OpenLeader
- Barbara Matellon, CLLD management OpenLeader
- Alessandro Benzoni, Park Prealpi Giulie