

Territoriality and ISO1

What territorial instruments and approaches are important in the next period?

Interreg Knowledge Fair session report | November 2025

Overview

Finding joint approaches to local and regional challenges is a key aim to all Interreg strands. This requires involving and addressing local and regional actors effectively in projects all over the cooperation area, whether in metropolitan, mountainous or rural areas.

This specific session aimed to explore how place-based approaches can be better supported in the post-2027 framework. Specific objectives are as follows:

- **Understanding** how Interreg post-2027 regulation stands regarding territorial and governance approaches.
- **Exploring** what future programme fiches, formerly known as orientation papers, may expect in terms of territoriality.
- **Identify practical needs** from programmes for ISO1 and territorial-related instruments such as currently used in PO5, e.g. CLLD, P2P for a better implementation and delivery in the future programming period;
- **Feed regulatory reflection & process** with insights from Interreg programme practitioners.

The session builds on the outcomes of the [Interreg wide consultation](#) undertaken in 2024 and intends to discuss with Interreg practitioners how to make territorial approaches work better in the next programming period (in both practical and regulatory terms).

Methodology

The scene was set by briefly introducing the key messages on territoriality coming from the Interreg wide consultation which were confirmed during the “Let’s put territoriality on the map” event in Vienna. Afterwards the European Commission presented the Post27 draft regulation. The main points were that:

- The Territorial instruments are in the future disconnected from the Policy Objectives.
- The European Commission is putting extra emphasis on programmes working with CLLD’s and ISO1 by proactively initiation two projects to prepare for the future being:
 - BridgeforEU
 - Impact

- BBSR provided an update on their study on how to involve regions better in Interreg programmes. The main update is that they also included rejected projects in their analysis.

Key discussion points derived from the world café

After the introduction 3 topics were discussed in world café style in 3 corners:

Corner 1: Governance actions (ISO1)

In the Post27 framework, ISO1 should serve as a driver of governance innovation within Interreg. Participants highlighted that its future role must go beyond administrative cooperation to actively **build trust, support long-term partnerships, and strengthen institutional capacity** across borders. ISO1 can provide the enabling space for cross-border public services, joint coordination platforms that connect multiple policy levels, participatory governance models that involve citizens and local actors, as well as lasting governance structures. Synergies and capitalisation could be explicitly mentioned in the description of ISO1 governance actions too. Participants also emphasised the potential to build on the **BRIDGEforEU regulation** and **B-Solutions** as solid foundations for future ISO1 interventions. ISO1 could also leverage the **successful Small Project Funds** model, which have proven highly effective in generating projects tackling cross-border obstacles and stimulating people-to-people cooperation.

To balance flexibility with effectiveness, the recommendations call for **clearer but non-prescriptive guidance** that preserves innovation, **simplified project formats** for piloting governance models, and **qualitative indicators** that capture cooperation quality rather than just quantitative outputs. Future frameworks should, however, remain flexible enough to adapt to local realities and experimentation.

Ultimately, ISO1 should bridge territorial cooperation with broader reform agendas, ensuring cross-border governance lessons feed both national and EU policy development. Through learning-oriented monitoring, good practice repositories and knowledge transfer mechanisms, successful governance models can be implemented and scaled effectively.

Corner 2: Citizen engagement and civil participation

The discussion on citizens' engagement in Interreg programmes brought forward a wide range of reflections on when and how citizens should be involved, the challenges that programmes face, and the opportunities for improving participation as we move toward future programming periods. Participants began by exploring the question of when in the programme cycle citizens can realistically be included. Several stages were identified as relevant touchpoints: during the design of the programme itself, throughout programme implementation, and during the development of individual projects. Yet it became clear that involvement is uneven across these phases. While citizens may be consulted or engaged in an advisory capacity during programme design, it is often at the project level where their participation is most tangible and effective.

A recurring theme was the importance of distinguishing between stakeholders and citizens. Stakeholders may include organised groups, institutions, or representatives with formal roles, whereas citizens constitute a much broader and often less organised group. The group highlighted major capacity disparities between territories. Urban areas usually have more resources, experience, and actors ready to take part in programmes, whereas rural areas may lack awareness, organisational structures, or familiarity with Interreg. Many of these areas have simply not been involved in previous programming rounds, which reinforces a cycle of low participation. Participants agreed that to achieve meaningful engagement, especially in these underrepresented regions, capacity-building efforts must be strengthened.

Another issue that emerged was the overload of public consultations. In some areas, citizens are confronted with multiple consultations from different programmes simultaneously, often using technical language unfamiliar to the general public. The inconsistency in terminology across programmes operating in the same region adds to the confusion. Participants stressed the need to simplify language, harmonise terminology, and reconsider how questions are formulated to make participation more accessible.

When examining the territorial dimension of Interreg, participants noted that cross-border programmes tend to have the most natural proximity to citizens and thus find citizen engagement somewhat easier to achieve. Transnational programmes, while broader in scope, still manage to identify opportunities, but pan-European programmes face significant challenges due to scale, distance, and the abstract nature of their themes. Maritime programmes were identified as another category struggling with citizen involvement.

The group also reflected on what Interact could contribute to improving citizen involvement across the Interreg community. Two main roles were identified: first, Interact could develop templates or standardised sets of questions for public consultations, helping programmes adopt clearer, more accessible language; second, Interact could collect and disseminate best practices, giving programmes concrete examples of successful citizen engagement models.

Looking ahead to the post-2027 programming period, participants suggested that programme documents should include a clear description of how citizens and stakeholders will be involved, represented, and selected throughout the programme. Choosing organisations that genuinely represent the diversity of specific areas was seen as crucial. Participants also recommended exploring synergies with other initiatives, such as Erasmus, to tap into broader networks and increase engagement beyond Interreg's usual reach. Finally, communication strategies should include direct, citizen-focused actions, ensuring that public engagement is not treated as an optional add-on but as an integral part of programme visibility and participation.

Corner 3: Cooperation for all regions

Programmes reflected on the study carried out by BBSR. The main outcome was that it is hard to measure what the impact is of Interreg projects. The location of partners is not sufficient. Partners are often located in urban areas and implement activities, outputs, investments in other areas than the location. The proposal is to add to the future HIT

template more location indicators for Investments, Deliverables, Activities, Outputs and results so that the impact on the ground can be better measured. Looking at best practices; Central Europe indicated that having a targeted call just for remote regions was a big success. Interreg Europe indicated that they have a programme rule that 90% of all nuts 2 regions must be involved in projects.

In regard to the draft regulation for Post27, the regulation does not provide any new challenges in terms of involving all regions in the area. In terms of opportunities, not having the need for a thematic concentration any longer clearly provides more freedom to programmes to target less developed regions through targeted calls.

Regulations and articles of particular significance

Territorial and local cooperation initiatives can be found under NRPP, Art. 74-77

Announcements, Conclusions, plans for followed up

The flipcharts were saved and photographed for record. The European Commission announced the following:

- Open call to support the setting up of cross-border coordination points under BRIDGEforEU (until 13 November 2025)
- Seminar on the implementation of the Partnership Principle in the candidate countries, 04 February 2026, organised by DG REGIO

Further follow up on Territorial instruments in 2026 will be considered as part of future events.

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