



**Rural COOP** fosters innovative and green participatory approaches to improve integrated territorial development policy instruments of rural areas.

## Newsletter #1

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## Rural COOP: Strengthening Green Communities in Rural and Mountain Areas

The **Rural COOP project** officially started on 1 May 2025 under the Interreg Europe Programme and will run until 31 July 2029. With a total budget of 1.6 million EUR, the project brings together partners from **Italy, Finland, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, Albania,** and **Bulgaria** to improve integrated territorial development (ITD) policies in rural and mountain areas.

Rural territories across Europe face persistent challenges such as fragmented governance, limited foresight capacity, environmental and socio-economic disparities, and low civic participation. **Rural COOP** addresses these gaps by **strengthening participatory approaches** and **supporting the development of community-driven green models**, enabling public authorities to design more inclusive, sustainable and forward-looking policies.

The project aims to:

- ◆ Strengthen competences of local and regional public authorities;
- ◆ Improve policy instruments through participatory and anticipatory approaches;
- ◆ Foster green community models;
- ◆ Contribute to territorial convergence and EU cohesion.



## The Rural COOP Partnership

The **Rural COOP** consortium consists of eight partners:

- ◆ Autonomous Province of Trento (IT) – Lead;
- ◆ Oulu Regional Council (FI);
- ◆ Opolskie Center for Regional Development / Opolskie Voivodeship (PL);
- ◆ Region Sörmland (SE);
- ◆ LINKS Foundation (IT);
- ◆ Conference for Adult Lifelong Learning in Southern Switzerland (CH);
- ◆ Municipality of Lushnje (ALB);
- ◆ Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vratsa (BG).



The partnership represents diverse rural and mountain territories across Europe, working collectively to strengthen governance and sustainability at local and regional level.



PROVINCIA AUTONOMA DI TRENTO



Conferenza della Svizzera italiana per la formazione continua degli adulti



Unit of Self-Government of the Opolskie Voivodeship

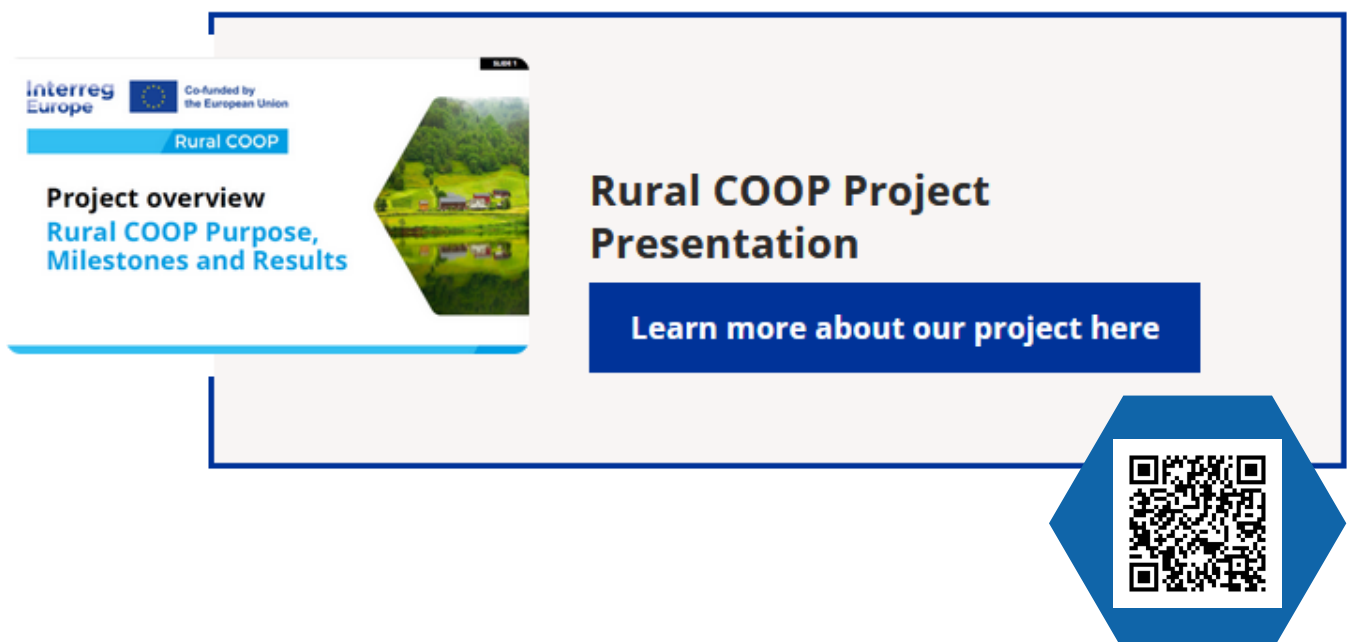
## Policy Instruments at the Core

Rural COOP focuses on improving **six** policy instruments:

- ◆ Plan for Integrated Development of the Municipality of Byala Slatina (BG);
- ◆ Provincial Law on the Mountain n.17/1998 (IT);
- ◆ Innovation and Skills in Finland 2021–2027 (FI);
- ◆ Territorial Strategy for Sustainable Development Sörmland 2030 (SE);
- ◆ Masterplan of Leventina (CH);
- ◆ European Funds for Opolskie 2021–2027 (PL).

Each instrument provides opportunities to integrate green community approaches — from clean energy transition and sustainable tourism to rural revitalisation and participatory governance.

Learn more about the policy instruments here:



The graphic features a slide on the left with the Interreg Europe logo, the Rural COOP banner, and the text 'Project overview Rural COOP Purpose, Milestones and Results' next to a landscape image. To the right, the text 'Rural COOP Project Presentation' is displayed above a blue button that says 'Learn more about our project here'. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner of the graphic area.

## Pre-kick off meeting

Prior to the official launch, the Rural COOP partners held an online pre-kick-off meeting on 9 April 2025 to ensure coordinated project start-up.

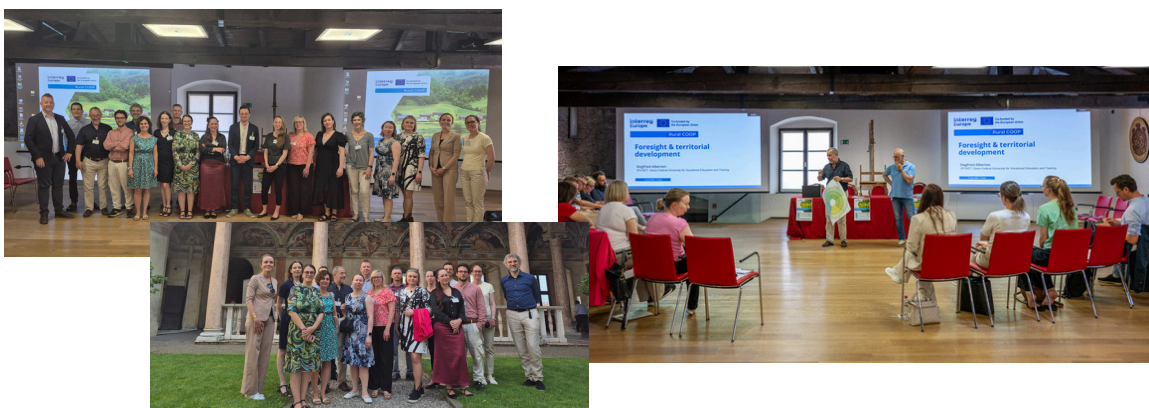
During the meeting, the Lead Partner presented key updates from the approved Application Form and clarified partners' roles, while LINKS Foundation introduced the best practices analysis and CFC provided a short overview of the foresight methodology. The draft agenda for the Kick-Off Meeting and the Partnership Agreement were also discussed, ensuring alignment and readiness for the formal launch in Trento.

## Project Kick-off meeting 10-11 June 2025, Trento, Italy

The Rural COOP project was officially launched in Trento. During the kick-off meeting, partners:

- ◆ Aligned on the project vision, objectives and governance structure;
- ◆ Clarified work packages and responsibilities;
- ◆ Presented the participatory and foresight-based methodology;
- ◆ Presented the participatory and foresight-based methodology.

This meeting marked the beginning of structured cooperation and policy learning across regions.



## Stakeholder Engagement

During the reporting period, Rural COOP partners initiated stakeholder engagement activities across their regions to introduce the project's objectives and prepare the ground for the **establishment of Regional Stakeholder Groups (RSGs)**. Meetings with local authorities, community representatives, businesses, civil society organisations and policy actors helped present the green communities approach and open dialogue on rural challenges and opportunities. These early engagement activities laid the **foundation for structured participatory processes** that will support the improvement of the selected policy instruments throughout the project lifecycle.



Trento,  
Italy



Sörmland,  
Sweden



Byala Slatina,  
Bulgaria



Opolskie,  
Poland



Oulu,  
Finland

## Green Communities Policy Landscape Report

In the first months of implementation, advisory partner LINKS Foundation prepared a Policy Landscape Report on Green Communities.

The report analyses national and regional frameworks in Italy, Finland, Sweden, Bulgaria, Poland, Switzerland and Albania, examining how green economy, sustainability and citizen participation are embedded in policy frameworks. It also reviews 23 case studies, identifying emerging practices and policy gaps.

This analytical groundwork supports future policy exchange and structured improvement processes.



## Laying the Foundations for Green Community Transformation

The period May–October 2025 focused on establishing a strong analytical, organisational and collaborative foundation for the **Rural COOP** project.

Through policy analysis, partner alignment and early stakeholder engagement, the project has successfully positioned itself to move into the next stage: structured policy improvement and deeper community involvement.



[Watch our first video](#)

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**Disclaimer:** This newsletter was supported as part of the Rural COOP project, an Interreg Europe Programme project, co-funded by the European Union. This document reflects only the author's view. The Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.