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Newsletter



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What happened in TOURBO?

This combined newsletter #5 and #6 marks the end of the core phase of TOURBO Project. We started in 2023, we visited each other to learn from each region, we involved stakeholders at home and at visits, we carried out pilot actions, identified good practices, held webinars, and improved policies.

Interreg Europe projects have a reputation for being quite abstract, because the goal of the programme is to improve regional policies. So, here is a short recap of what happened in TOURBO project, and what happens now as the core phase of TOURBO ends.

Firstly, Interreg Europe **project partners are organisations**, that either oversee the **regional policies** they aim to improve, or work closely with such organisations. The projects start from a need shared with other regions: to improve a regional policy so that it addresses specific priorities, such as developing sustainable tourism.

Secondly, Interreg Europe projects have two parts. We have been in **the core phase**, the active phase, where the exchange of knowledge and experiences between regions takes place. During the **three-year** core phase, we have visited each other's regions to learn and support each other in the policy change process. We worked also with our local stakeholders and reflected the insights from other regions with them. As usual with any rather abstract process, knowledge accumulated and ideas about improvement were refined as we learned more. At the end of the core phase, regions can ideally apply the lessons learned in the project to improving their selected policy instruments.



TOURBO project timeline

2023

- 03/2023 Project start + Core phase starts
- 06/2023 Kick off meeting: Sevilla, Spain
- 11/2023 Interregional Meeting: Pora, Croatia

2024

- 02/2024 Pilot Action: Call for Knowledge Providers
- 04/2024 Interregional Meeting: Rovaniemi, Finland
- 09/2024 Interregional Meeting: Marche, Italy
- 10/2024 Pilot Action: Call for Innovation Projects

2025

- 02/2025 Interregional Meeting: Mytilene, Greece
- 03/2025 Pilot Action: Implementation of projects start
- 05/2025 Pilot Action: Implementation of projects end
- 06/2025 Interregional Meeting: Vratsa, Bulgaria
- 10/2025 Interregional Meeting: Donegal, Ireland
- 11/2025 TOURBO Webinar on Digitalisation
- 12/2025 TOURBO Webinar on Sustainability

2026

- 02/2026 Action Plans ready + Core Phase ends
- 03/2026 Start of the Follow-up Phase
- 03/2026-02/2027 Monitoring the effects of policy changes regionally
- 10/2026 Final Conference: Bremerhaven, Germany

2027

- 02/2027 End of the Follow-up Phase
- 03-05/2027 Project closure phase
- 05/2027 Project end

We met again!

How sustainability and digitalisation transform tourism industry in Europe? TOURBO interregional meetings in Bulgaria and Ireland showcased practical regional examples of digitalisation meeting local and cultural heritage, and provided information and policy examples as food for thought on developing sustainable tourism.

Vratsa, Bulgaria, June 2025

The visit to Vratsa on 11–12 June 2025 highlighted tourism policies and partnerships already delivering social, economic, and environmental benefits. Two TOURBO Pilot Actions from Italy's Marche Region were presented following their completion. The meeting also offered a chance to experience in practice how Vratsa's unique heritage is utilised in tourism through sustainable practices and digital solutions.



Donegal, Ireland, October 2025

Donegal hosted the last TOURBO interregional meeting of the core phase on 14-15 October 2025. Ireland presented examples and valuable experiences about different aspects of digitalisation in rural tourism and heritage preservation. Ireland has experiences about sustainability improving digital tools in tourism businesses, as well as for opening up the local heritage and Irish language to the customers.



Good Practices

TOURBO identified altogether 18 Good Practices from project regions during the core phase, and 11 of them received the *expert approved* stamp. The latest addition is Creating an innovative and integrated cross-border tourist product from Vratsa region in Bulgaria. The good practice presents how the rich cultural and natural heritage of the region is highlighted using 3D technologies.

Characteristics of a Good Practice?

A Good Practice goes through peer and expert review processes, and has certain features:

- is already in action in it's home region
- can show tangible, measurable results in achieving its goal.
- has the potential to be implemented in other regions
- is usually related to public intervention, for example has been developed in a publicly funded project

→ [Take a look at all of the Good Practices identified in TOURBO!](#)

Hungry for more (than) good practices?

Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform might be for you! It offers information for the policy making community on a variety of topics via thematic publications, online and onsite events, and direct communication with a team of experts.



Pilot actions results & experiences

Pilot actions in Interreg Europe projects allow testing a more practical approach to improve local policies. In TOURBO, Marche region in Italy, and the North Aegean region in Greece approached policy improvement with pilot actions.

The Idea

The Pilot Actions tested a voucher scheme in which tourism MSMEs received €8,000 to carry out innovation and development projects with external knowledge providers. The aim was to improve sustainability through digital solutions.

The Timeline

- **February 2024 Kick-off: Interregional call for Knowledge Providers**
 - Open for individuals and public/private companies/entities.
 - Resulted in 53 knowledge providers from 10 countries
- **Autumn 2024: Call for MSMEs and their innovation projects**
 - Resulted in 19 submitted project proposals, 12 from Italy, 7 from Greece
- **January 2025: Calls closed.**
 - Five innovation projects per region were selected and matched with suitable knowledge providers
 - Innovation projects started
- **May 2025: Innovation projects ended**

Marche: sustainability and competitiveness through digital transition

In Marche, the goal was to help MSMEs become more competitive and sustainable by strengthening their digital capabilities. With support from Knowledge Providers, participating businesses improved existing services, developed new activities, and explored new digital solutions to enhance their operations.

North Aegean Region: Specific Challenge of Energy Efficiency

The geography of the North Aegean Islands creates significant energy challenges. The islands rely mainly on autonomous fuel-based power stations, while the use of wind and solar energy remains limited. Due to their distance from the mainland, they are not connected to the national energy grid. As a result, energy costs are high, and recent energy crises have driven them even higher, increasing operating costs for tourism MSMEs. The Pilot Actions aimed to support these businesses in developing short-term strategies to improve energy efficiency through innovative and digital solutions.

Innovation Projects

Five projects were selected in each region. In the North Aegean Region, the projects focused on improving energy efficiency and sustainability in tourism services with digital solutions. In Marche, the projects explored digital tools as part of the tourism experience, promoted sustainable travel and eco-friendly practices, and developed experiences that strengthen visitors' connection to the region.

→ [Read more: Marche & North Aegean pilot actions](#)

Policy improvements

In TOURBO, the policies selected for improvement by the eight partner regions are all linked to tourism in different ways. Some regions are working directly on their tourism strategies, while others are focusing on broader regional policies that also impact tourism sector, and some work on their European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) operational programmes. A common goal across all regions is to strengthen tourism MSMEs' sustainability and competitiveness by enhancing their ability to harness the opportunities offered by digitalisation.

Here are some examples!



Koprivnica-Križevci County, Croatia

Regional Tourist Board of Koprivnica Križevci County, founded by the Koprivnica Križevci County (KKC), revised the Public Call For Financial Support For The Improvement Of Accommodation Capacities In The Koprivnica Križevci County For 2024, which was financed from the budget of Tourist Board of KKC.

Tourist Board of KKC were inspired by good practice "[Green for Business](#)" of Irish partners Donegal County Council and decided to put new element in the Call: financial support for green and digital transition. The purpose of the Call was to encourage tourism activities with the aim of increasing the accommodation capacity, improving the accommodation offer and increasing tourist traffic to create preconditions for the continuous development of tourism in KKC.

Support was given to hotels, camps, other catering facilities for accommodation, facilities where household services are provided and family farms. Maximum amount of support per beneficiary was 2,500.00 EUR, up to a maximum of 50% of the total eligible costs under the call. Total budget for the call was 30 000 €. Of the total amount awarded, €6,050 specifically went to projects related to digital and green transition.

The supported projects included the construction of a wooden house, eco-production and processing of fruit and vegetables, the purchase of a solar shower, utilising Google Maps, the creation of virtual tours, the purchase of electric bicycles, and similar initiatives.



Marche, Italy

The Marche Region is participating as a Pilot Action region to improve policies in support of the regional tourism ecosystem.

Although the region's tourism sector is recovering well from COVID-19, many tourism MSMEs need support to become more sustainable and to strengthen their digital capabilities.

To address this, Marche tested a voucher scheme in Pilot Actions, which provided funding to five tourism SMEs to implement innovative actions supporting the twin transition. The initiative was very welcomed and resulted in high-quality projects.

Encouraged by these results, the region has allocated an additional EUR 40,000 from the regional budget to support five more tourism SME projects. By continuing the voucher scheme, the region aims to strengthen digitalisation and sustainability in the tourism sector, which are key strategic priorities for regional development.





Lapland, Finland

In Lapland, the Sustainable Smart Specialisation Strategy (S4+) is one of the main regional strategies. It focuses on identifying regional strengths and as tourism is a key industry in the region, the strategy plays an important role in supporting its sustainable development.

During the application phase of TOURBO, the goal was to influence the strategy itself. However, the revised strategy was adopted before the policy improvement work in TOURBO began. As strategy periods last several years, specific implementation plans are prepared through several working groups every two years to review and adjust the strategy. Lapland therefore shifted its focus to influencing the implementation plan of the strategy instead.

As a result of the TOURBO project, several additions were made to the implementation plan. Examples of local community participation in Vratsa, North Aegean Region and Ancona study

visits and examples of financial instruments in good practices of Green for Business and Digital that Delivers inspired the policy improvement process. The implementation plan now emphasises ecological, cultural and social sustainability, digitalisation, inclusiveness and diversity in Lapland's businesses, as well as community participation in developing products and services. These themes can be developed further also in new projects, and one such project has already been launched. Lapland Vision project aims to create a shared vision and policy guidelines for the future of tourism in Lapland. During the follow-up phase, the strategy is being monitored, new activities based on the revised plan will be planned, and the Lapland vision project itself will be implemented and monitored.

End of core phase – Now what?

So, the core phase with the active policy improvement work is coming to an end. Project aims for impact, so just stopping here would leave everyone wondering what changed? Therefore, after the core phase, Interreg Europe project steps into **the follow-up phase**. The duration of this phase is **one year**, and in this phase, we monitor what effects of the policy changes can we see in our regions. If we don't complete the policy change during the core phase, we will create an action plan for the follow-up phase. In the plan we outline how we will improve the selected policies and how lessons learned from interregional exchanges will be applied. During the follow-up phase, we monitor how the plan is implemented. We can still stay in touch with each other,

share experiences, and even support with the implementation of an approach that was learned from a partner region. The exchange can spark also other policy improvements in the region, and these are also interesting results of the project.

As of this writing, us at TOURBO regions are finalising our policy improvement processes and reporting them. The active stage for the project ends here, and the partners will now work mainly in our own regions observing the policies in action. We will get together once more at the **final conference in Bremerhaven on 6-7 October 2026** to share observations and explore how policy improvements are taking shape across the regions.

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