



Northern & Western  
Regional Assembly



**#EU IN MY REGION**



Ireland's European Structural and  
Investment Funds Programmes  
2014-2020

Co-funded by the Irish Government  
and the European Union



**European Union**  
European Regional  
Development Fund

30 years of Partnership: Stories of  
Countries & Regions Sharing  
Knowledge, Ideas & Innovation





# Building a Brighter European Future

*I am pleased to have been asked to contribute to this brochure. More than four decades have now elapsed since Ireland joined what was then the Common Market in 1973.*

In the intervening years, membership of the European Union has played an important part in our economic, social and political development.

Throughout that period, Ireland has been a major beneficiary of EU Cohesion funding. The Union's Cohesion policy lies at the heart of European integration and solidarity and proves that these words have real meaning for every part of the Union. It has been one of Europe's success stories.

Everywhere you travel in Ireland you can see the distinctive Structural Funds logo on plaques and signs, which highlights the many ways we have benefitted from Cohesion funding – from major infrastructure road and rail projects to smaller community projects, to projects aimed at helping people acquire new skills and find better jobs. All serve to underline the very real ways Ireland has benefitted from its membership of the European Union.

But Cohesion funding has done more than that. It has enabled Ireland to take part in European Territorial Cooperation – or INTERREG – programmes with other Member States and neighbouring countries.

The aim of INTERREG programmes is to allow regions like the Northern & Western Region to work together to achieve sustainable development, resulting in regions across Europe that are geared to the needs of competing in a global economy.

For me, INTERREG is not so much about working across borders as building links between regions. It lies at the heart of what the European Union is all about. Over the period 2014–2020, some €10 billion will be invested by the EU across more than 100 cooperation programmes throughout the 28 member states, as well as in external cooperation with our European neighbours.

Each of these projects has a story to tell. The stories that follow are stories of cooperation and partnership across the regions of Europe and the benefits that such cooperation can bring.

**Paschal Donohoe TD**  
Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform



# Learning Together, Sharing Success

*For more than four decades now, partnerships with our EU colleagues have helped improve almost every aspect of life for the people who live in our region.*

From how we work, travel and shop to the quality of our environment, our opportunities for learning and the way our businesses buy and sell their goods and services have consistently become better and more effective.

The challenges faced by our region are mirrored quite often by other places in Europe. Other regions share our lack of urban infrastructure and peripheral constraints. They share our geographical and demographical challenges.

That's why it makes sense to work with them. By cooperating and learning with those 'places' we can develop innovative solutions to current and future problems. Transnational cooperation financed by Interreg programmes brings benefits to our regions, cities, and ultimately citizens all across Ireland.

Much of the leadership in these programmes has come from stakeholders in the Northern & Western Region, focusing on Research & Innovation, Low Carbon projects, combating Climate Change and many more.

Drivers of this work include individuals, businesses, third-level institutions, local authorities, state agencies and communities.

It is impossible to capture the full extent and impact of Interreg programmes but in these pages you can enjoy a snapshot of projects supported by the Atlantic Area Programme, Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme and Interreg Europe.

Now more than ever it is important to inform ourselves of #EUIINMYREGION

**David Minton**  
Director Northern & Western Regional Assembly



# Building The Blue Economy

**Irish scientists and engineers are making waves investigating the impact of renewable marine energy on the environment, thanks to EU funding.**

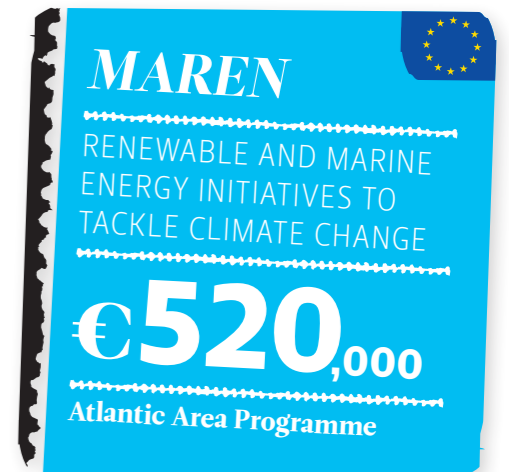
The MAREN project, launched in 2009, focused on the energy extraction potential of the Atlantic Ocean and its spin-off effects on aquatic species which today are stark sufferers of centuries of man-made pollution.

Marine energy, which is the power carried by waves, tides and ocean temperature is an environmentally friendly alternative to fossil fuels, releasing zero harmful gases, wastes or pollutants into our air and waters.

MAREN was a collaborative project between NUI Galway and four Atlantic area universities - Cardiff University (Wales), University of Cantabria (Spain), Centec, Instituto Superior Técnico (Portugal) and Iferner (France).

It received funding of €520,000 through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and garnered international attention and widespread publication due to its findings.

Professor Michael Hartnett, Deputy Director of the Ryan Institute at NUI Galway said the project was a precursor for further research and initiatives, one being the development of the MaREI Centre for Marine and Renewable Energy of which he too is Deputy Director.



MaREI, which is supported by Science Foundation Ireland, is home to more than 200 researchers investigating marine and renewable energy applications and developing marine technologies.

Professor Hartnett says: “That’s all because of Interreg funding. It opened up a lot of doors for us in our area of tidal energy. Working with our European partners allowed us to bring our expertise to the table and compare our findings which have since been published and presented at conferences at NUI Galway and in Lisbon.”

MAREN also looked at the impact of climate change on the CO2 reduction figures including how storms and floods effect CO2 release.

The development of the renewable marine energy industry in Ireland could lead to 70,000 jobs with the Atlantic Ocean representing huge potential for research and future European collaborations.

# Powering Up For an EV Future

**The appeal of electric vehicles (EVs) is gaining momentum as the world's auto manufacturers release more sophisticated models onto the market.**

A three-year award-winning project carried out by Cork County Council helped to push the environmentally-friendly agenda in Ireland.

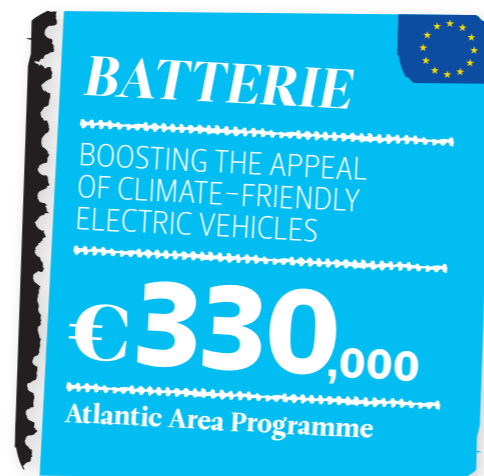
BATTERIE, which stands for Better Accessible Transport to Encourage Robust Intermodal Enterprise, ran from 2012 to 2015.

It sought to encourage a shift towards public transportation and also to increase the appeal of electric vehicles through applied smart technologies such as journey planners and mobile applications.

The development of the E-Journey Planner included the locations of charging point stations making journeys EV driver-friendly.

Elaine Walsh, EU Projects Manager at Cork County Council, says the project was unlike any other in Ireland and has inspired other initiatives.

“Electric vehicles (EVs) are at the forefront of a lot of people’s minds nowadays, but that wasn’t the case five or six years ago,” she says.



“Our project acted as a slight precursor for Energy Cork, an initiative which promotes Cork’s energy industry in the country. BATTERIE didn’t have a direct role in this but I think the levels of engagement we saw from our project was an influence.”

Ms. Walsh says the project was well received by locals who were educated on the availability, development, costs and environmental impacts of EVs and modal transport.

The results culminated at the Cork Transport 2020 conference in 2014 which saw huge numbers with local TD Simon Coveney and members of the project’s 12 EU partners speaking.

In 2016, it took top prize at the Atlantic Area Awards in the Accessibility and Connectivity category.

BATTERIE received funding of €330,000 through Interreg which was then matched by Cork County Council.

“We wouldn’t have been able to do it without getting the funding,” says Ms. Walsh.



# Managing Our Mountains

**Overlooking the coastal Gaeltacht village of Gweedore is Mount Errigal – the tallest peak in Co. Donegal and the second tallest in all of Ulster.**

It's one of Ireland's most beautiful sights but copious footfall and natural erosion has led to degradation in some parts of the mountain, including the loss of unique bio-diversity and bio-resources.

Thanks to a project led by Donegal County Council and funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), innovative measures are being implemented to better manage and conserve the site for future use.

ASCENT, a three-year project launched in 2016, not only looks at improving the environmental sustainability of Mount Errigal but is a collaboration between seven of Europe's most beautiful sites in Northern Ireland, Iceland, Norway and Finland.

Rosita Mahony, ASCENT's Lead Project Coordinator, says the project has three key objectives. Firstly, to bring international learning into a design phase across the five partner regions. Secondly, to apply techniques and solutions to maintain the natural resources of the regions, and lastly collaborate with stakeholders for long-term sustainability management.

Technology will play a key role in achieving these objectives.



“Over the past 20 years there has been an increased usage of the mountain and people enjoying the panoramic views and on top of that there has been an increased appetite for hiking which has become more accessible through technology and drone technology and people socialising information online,” says Ms. Mahony.

“One of the other key elements is we were tasked with designing mobile apps for all seven sites, and we use 3D technology as a good way of monitoring the sites.”

Ms. Mahony proudly admits that ASCENT is an ambitious project made possible by EU funding.

“It couldn't have been achieved without the funding,” she says. “It has allowed us to open up our networks to achieve our ambitious workplans.”

She adds: “There's about half-a-million people to account for across the seven partner sites, all facing similar challenges so to be able to share solutions and collaborate is a huge benefit.”





# The Cycle of Success

**“It’s all about getting the name out there to show off what we have here in Mayo and Ireland in terms of cycling.”**

This is how Mayo Sports Tourism Officer Donal Newcombe describes the new Atlantic on Bike European tourism project, a three-year initiative aimed at increasing visitor numbers and boosting the local economies of participating locations.

The project is a new cycle route from Scandinavia to Spain via Ireland.

Mayo is one of 22 European partners across six countries – Ireland, the UK, Norway, Spain, Portugal and France – meaning one of the main features of the project is strong collaboration and integrated learning.

“We have conferences twice a year in different countries and I think one of the best things about the project is getting to look at different ideas, getting over barriers and languages and collaborating to get the name out there,” Mr. Newcombe says.

Total project funding of €4.5 million was provided by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Interreg Atlantic Area Programme.



Mr. Newcombe says this funding allowed partners to bring an idea to life, an idea which is now on track to benefit all regions involved not only in terms of tourism, but health and fitness too.

“Funding is key to projects like these,” Mr. Newcombe says. “It’s great to be backed by Europe and to be able to work with other partners to bring this to life.”

“Getting to work with different countries is huge especially for our tourism team as one of the main ideas of tourism is to collaborate with different sectors. That’s a key part of it and it brings huge benefits.”

Mr. Newcombe adds that cycling has boomed in the country in recent years and that Mayo’s Greenway has made its contributions.

One of the main impacts of the Atlantic on Bike project is the ability to provide safe and supported facilities and to improve overall cycling infrastructure in Ireland for both domestic and international cyclists.



# Save Our Water!

**When we think of the glass of water in our hand, we don't think of its cost or the energy needed to make it safe for us to consume, but Dr. Aonghus McNabola of Trinity College Dublin does. And he's not alone.**

Dr. McNabola and colleagues became partners on the REDAWN programme with the ambition to 'reduce energy dependency in Atlantic area water networks'.

With the help of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the partners set to work bringing a range of expertise and

experience to the joint initiative.

They turned on the tap of creative thinking. "In Southern Europe there's a far greater emphasis on irrigation which we don't need as much here in Ireland so the partners in Portugal and Spain are looking at that while we are focussing more on water for drinking and other

uses," explains Dr. McNabola.

"The glass of water in your hand is an expensive substance. Not only do we need energy to pump it around, but it also needs to be treated. That all costs money. We're looking at how we can reduce wasted energy without reducing pressure.

Less energy means less cost. We're looking at producing relatively inexpensive turbines to go into water pipes to help reverse water flow, generating energy at a fraction of the current cost."

The savings could be substantial for the state and consumers. Also, businesses which use a lot of water stand to benefit greatly.

"Thanks to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) we've been able to work on this for a number of years now, in both REDAWN and a previous Interreg-funded project," explains Dr. McNabola.

He adds: "We hope that our findings and developments can have a long-lasting and sustainable impact on how we consume and use water across Europe and the world. And that's to everyone's interests in the long-run."



# Discovering Coastal Gems

**Since the boats started coming, Tim O’Leary, has been busy. In his bar on the tiny Whiddy Island off the west coast of Cork, visitors from around the world sit to savour his locally sourced mussels, homemade brown bread and sink a pint of stout.**

“The Sail Cool Route has increased awareness of the small gems of businesses such as The Bank Bar on Whiddy Island and the experiences that can be enjoyed there,” explains John McAleer of the Cork Institute of Technology.

“Now the liners anchor off shore and groups of people visit these places in small vessels. If a group of 50 people come at one time that’s huge for a small business and the visitors absolutely love it,” adds Mr. McAleer.

The Sail Cool Route received funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and has become a significant success story.

Described in the International Yachting Press as ‘the World’s Most Adventurous Cruising Ground’, the award-winning sailing route hugs one of the most attractive coastlines globally.

It stretches from Cork to Western and Northern Ireland, on to Western Scotland and to the Faroe Islands and eventually Tromsø, in Western Norway.



“Because of the funding we were able to carry out extensive research into the people and businesses along the coast and devise a socially inclusive and sustainable model of regional development,” says Mr. McAleer.

As part of the project, a cruising preference study accompanied a marketing plan and soon the yachts started to appear at different locations, from tiny stop-offs such as Whiddy Island and larger locations, in greater numbers.

“People are looking for more experimental journeys. If they want the sun they can go to the Caribbean but for many, the experiences are what makes such a nautical trip very special,” says Mr. McAleer.

The Sail Cool Route programme concluded in June 2018 but the success of the initiative has benefited scores of communities and attracted interested worldwide.







# Igniting Ireland's Creative Sparks

**Along the Atlantic seaboard, creativity, artistry and design thrive. With each lapping wave a new concept or craft is born somewhere along Ireland's west coast.**



However, the struggle to bring those works of art from the humble workspace to the wider world has always been a task facing those in rural areas.

“In 2008, in response to the economic crash, the Western Development Commission (WDC) looked at how it could give a helping hand to certain sectors in difficult times. And so the Creative Edge Project was born aiming to assist and help artists to help themselves. It concluded in 2013 but there was still much work to do so Creative Momentum came on stream from 2015 to 2018 and was a huge success,” explains Pauline White, the Creative Momentum Project Co-Ordinator.

With support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the WDC, which lead the project internationally, teamed up with groups in Northern Ireland, Iceland, Sweden and Finland as well as colleagues from down the road in NUI Galway.

The focus was four-fold – to support individual creative entrepreneurs thereby increasing their capacity to innovate and trade, to connect creatives in the participating countries with each other so they could

exchange views and best practice, to connect creatives with the market through mediums such as the Creative Edge website and video pitches, and finally to evaluate the economic and social impact of the creative industry to the region.

“We also focussed on creative hotspots in each country to showcase events which successfully exposed creativity to the wider public. Here we chose the Galway Film Fleadh. By the time the programme finished in May 2018 so many groups were collaborating and sharing information and contacts,” explains Ms. White.

Photoshoot support was given to help those in the sector to promote themselves online and in the media and data analytics was even introduced to measure the impact of targeted marketing.

“The European Regional Development Funding has allowed us to strengthen the creative industries in our region and across many countries. The lessons learned and exchanges made will help this vital living sector for years to come,” says Ms. White.

# A Trail of Benefits

**Connecting and collaborating with like-minded agencies across Europe is one of the greatest benefits of EU funding for Irish organisations.**

This is something Donegal County Council can vouch for thanks to the Trail Gazers project – a new initiative inviting tourists to digitally and physically enjoy local trails in a contemporary and innovative manner, trails which are perhaps often excluded from popular guidebooks.

Along with its nine partner regions across Ireland, the UK, Spain, Portugal and France, Donegal County Council is using its EU funding to preserve and exploit local natural resources in a sustainable way, whilst using technology to promote the selected destinations and evaluate the impact of their investment.

“It’s a way to optimally harness the natural and cultural environment for the benefit of the community,” Loretta McNicholas, Research and Policy Manager at Donegal County Council says.

“We want to determine the return to the local community of every euro spent on walks and recreational trail development. By this we are not just talking of the actual monetary return, we are looking at the wider benefits to the community in terms of health, recreation, local employment and other such spin-offs.”



The Trail Gazers project has allowed Donegal to spread its roots across the Atlantic through the formation of dynamic and diverse partnerships, and Donegal County Council admits it’s an idea which would not have come to fruition without the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

“It is an absolutely huge endorsement to receive EU funding and we are delighted to be able to network with our partners across Europe,” says Ms. McNicholas.

The Trail Gazers Project team will work with a wide array of policy makers across the Atlantic region. In Donegal, for example, it will guide Donegal County Council’s Greenway Strategy and the wider North West region’s Greenway development to enhance tourism, ensure greater socio-economic returns whilst at the same time protecting the natural and cultural environment.

Ms. McNicholas adds: “We have selected a range of Atlantic Area trails to test different business to consumer initiatives, digital marketing techniques, footfall technologies etc. but most importantly to exchange learning and international best practice and we simply couldn’t have done it without the funding provided.”



# Putting Citizens First

*Local knowledge is key to life in rural areas. It's gathered, protected and passed on from generation to generation. It becomes innate and shapes decisions.*



It can be intrinsically useful knowing which roads and lanes get flooded in the winter, the waters to avoid, the impact a rolling storm can have on exposed terrain or the land to side step when building or planning that new sports field. This knowledge can have a huge bearing on public services too.

In Letterkenny, Co Donegal, Jose Manuel San Emeterio of ERNACT, and colleagues in Donegal County Council, understood the value of this knowledge and how it, and other elements, could be harnessed to see an increase in the level of innovation in technology-driven public service solutions.



ERNACT, which focusses on inter-regional connections and regional development, launched the IMPROVE project thanks to funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Commencing in mid-2015, the programme operated across six Northern Periphery and Arctic Regions, including Ireland, enabling co-production on issues such as eHealth services and spatial planning.

“We were very eager to involve the community in the process from the very start. We wanted to enable local communities to use online services to participate more fully in the long-term planning and development of their area. This two-way street would allow them to engage on issues of public debate such as the balance to be achieved between sustainable energy and protecting the natural environment versus the case for large-scale mining projects,” explains Mr. San Emeterio.

In Donegal there was a particular focus on ongoing public consultation in relation to local planning issues. Thanks to EU funding, the onus now is on councils in the North West to reach out to the communities they serve to invite more consultation, innovation and local knowledge.

# Smarter Tools For Manufacturers

*Manufacturing as a process relies on a combination of tools and solutions working together towards a common goal.*



Sometimes manufacturers can get so caught up in the process and systems they've created that they miss the opportunity for increased efficiencies and capacity.

The TARGET Project, led by John Moore from the South West College in Northern Ireland, received funding under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to develop a toolbox for manufacturers in the Northern Periphery and Arctic areas embracing new technologies and best international practice.

Amongst the six partners involved in the TARGET programme was the Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre and the Local Enterprise Office in Cavan.

“It was amazing to link up with Universities in countries such as Sweden, Finland and Norway which have great tech know-how in this area,” explains Vincent Reynolds, Director of Cavan's Innovation and Technology Centre.



The TARGET website comes complete with a diagnostic tool so if the searching manufacturer doesn't necessarily know where or what the problem is, they'll still be helped to find the solution.

The tools include Creative Concept Development, Digital Scanning, Virtual Reality and Supply Chain Management.

“Sixteen tools have been developed in this open access portal. It's aimed at three groups; colleges and students as a teaching base; agencies which support enterprise and work with entrepreneurs and SMEs and businesses themselves,” explains Mr. Reynolds.

Developing leaner, better and more robust processes, the legacy of the TARGET programme is reflected in the success of businesses in the six partner areas which have embraced the initiative.

“By working together, all the partners have contributed to this toolbox of supports for new manufacturing processes and practices – and that wouldn't have been possible without the ERDF funding,” says Mr. Reynolds.

# Gastronomy on the Edge

**With an abundance of artisan producers, incredible natural ingredients, vibrant farmers' markets and award-winning restaurants, Galway, West of Ireland is the first Irish region to be awarded the status of European Region of Gastronomy for 2018.**

To build on the success of this award, EUREGA is a new €1.7 million Interreg Europe project that has the potential to transform the visitor experience and develop good local food throughout the region.

Brendan Mooney, Project Manager for the NWRA says: "The EUREGA Project is happening at the perfect time, as the Northern and Western region of Ireland is becoming world famous for its culinary excellence. With over €2 billion spent by foreign tourists in 2017 on food and drink in Ireland, together with the fact as a nation we need to focus on a healthier, more carbon neutral diet, EUREGA gives us the tools to deliver meaningful policy changes in the gastronomy sector."

The aim is to promote the strength and variety of locally influenced cuisine in regions across Europe by protecting and stimulating gastronomy as part of cultural heritage and also by identifying new opportunities for economic development.

JP McMahon Ambassador for the Galway and West of Ireland European Region of Gastronomy for 2018 says: "Galway has begun to embrace food as cultural



gastronomy, but we have a long way to go. My vision for a gastronomic region is one where all our key tourist sites sell local food products and where international visitors can learn about local food while experiencing our cultural and history."

EUREGA's main objective is to have food, food habits and gastronomy included and recognised in EU, regional and national strategies and policies.

Mr. McMahon said: "Food needs to become a mandatory subject in our primary and secondary curriculum, so our children understand the cultural relevance of food as a communal experience as opposed to something that you turn to when only hungry. This can only be done with an economic dialogue with local businesses, SMEs are the life blood of the local food movement.

"My vision is that our hospitals in the region offer a gastronomic experience in terms of the health of their patients. Good food does not begin and end in fine dining restaurants. It should stretch out into our health system and heal."



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