



EUROMONTANA

Booklet of good practices

For the sustainable development of mountain areas

2023



Table of contents

Agriculture & rural development	1
GORTA: when social innovation helps revitalise abandoned land	1
Education & training	3
Training unaccompanied minors to mountain jobs for a future in the Pyrenees	3
Boosting entrepreneurship education for youth employment in the mountains.....	5
Energy	7
Rhodoshop: a One-Stop-Shop on energy efficiency for the Rhodope's municipalities	7
Environment & climate	9
Dinara back to LIFE: restoring mountain grassland birds' habitats	9
Forests & wood chain	11
Formicable: training professionals to develop the mountain wood industry	11
Mobility & infrastructures	13
Ummadam: a reward-based carpooling model for a more sustainable mobility	13
Services of general interest	15
Balcões Móveis: bringing administrative services closer to mountain citizens	15
Sustainable tourism	17
Soča Evergreen: a year-round tourism strategy in the Soča Valley	17
Youth	19
"Mountain municipality - Youth, our future": a label to encourage mountain municipalities to act for youth	19
Return of Young People to Aragon: supporting access to employment in mountain regions	22

This booklet is the result of the exchange of good practices carried out by Euromontana in 2022 with the aim of showcasing innovative initiatives for the sustainable development of mountain areas in Europe.

January 2023, Brussels.



GORTA: WHEN SOCIAL INNOVATION HELPS REVITALISE ABANDONED LAND

The abandonment of agricultural land in the Rioja Valley, Spain, is a growing problem with consequences for the attractiveness and competitiveness of the region, but also for the maintenance of landscapes and local biodiversity. The GORTA Operational Group is seeking to find new models for the exploitation of abandoned walnut plots through social innovation.

Scope and consequences of agricultural land abandonment

Land abandonment is a challenge in Spain, where one million hectares of arable land were affected by land abandonment in 2017 according to a survey carried out by the national Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Environment. The Rioja Valley, in Northern Spain, is no exception. For the sector of walnut cultivation alone, the Department of Agriculture of the Autonomous Community of La Rioja reported in 2017 that 32 hectares of land (117 plots) were semi-abandoned and 19 hectares (93 plots) were fully abandoned.

In the Rioja Valley, land abandonment is driven by different factors, including the difficult access to agricultural areas, which are often isolated and located on steep slopes. Moreover, the region is facing an overall demographic change with the ageing of the population, the lack of generation renewal, including in the agricultural sector, and depopulation.

The consequences of land abandonment are also diverse and lead to a vicious circle of lost productivity and attractiveness. From an economic point of view, the abandonment of land over a long period of time reduces the quality of production and makes the farms obsolete due a lack of renovation or modernisation of the infrastructure. The poor condition of farms de facto reduces the attractiveness of agricultural land for young farmers who want to start cultivating. Furthermore, from an environmental point of view, the abandonment of plots leads to the spread of invasive species and the growth of shrubs, thus increasing the risk of fires with impacts for biodiversity and landscapes.



Credits GORTA

Social innovation as an approach against land abandonment

In the Rioja Valley the [GORTA project](#) (Grupo Operativo de innovación para la recuperación de tierras abandonadas - Innovation Operative Group for the recovery of Abandoned Lands) is working to find a tailor-made solution for the territory to deal with land abandonment.

Solutions already explored elsewhere cannot be effectively applied in the Rioja Valley, such as land banks, which allow young farmers to rent plots from farmers or owners who are no longer farming. From the one hand such solutions are often too expensive for young farmers. On the other hand, it means legally transferring land ownership, which many landowners refuse despite wanting to stop production on their land, often for sentimental reasons. Local producers' associations have for example received support requests from landowners who were unable to manage their plots but did not want to give up on land ownership either.

MORE INFO

CARNA

Instituto Agrario y Desarrollo Rural

GORTA



To overcome this specific challenge, the GORTA project has chosen a social innovation approach. The overall idea of the project is to propose a new business model for these farms, in order to avoid the land abandonment while not transferring land ownership. The project started by quantifying the abandoned or semi-abandoned plots in the area. Partners then deployed communication efforts by organising workshops in different municipalities to inform farmers, landowners, communities and policymakers about the potential solutions. Feasibility studies were conducted with agricultural consultancies to analyse the conditions of use of these abandoned lands and landowners were connected with young farmers looking for plots to cultivate.

GORTA uses dialogue to find solutions that are tailored to each landowner and that result in a win-win situation, whether it is on access to land for young farmers or the fight against land abandonment. So far, the GORTA project managed to find agreements between land transferors and assignees on 12 walnut tree plots. Plots were never sold, and different approaches were used. In some cases, owners decided to opt in the end for a classic lease, others chose a model where they only grant authorization to cultivate, and others let the land be cultivated rent-free in exchange of a percentage of the land's profit.



The dialogue between the different actors involved has resulted in the rehabilitation of these 12 plots through cultivation and has helped new entrants to find land. In the long term, the GORTA project hopes to extend the dialogue to enable the reclamation of more abandoned plots, thus creating a virtuous circle for the attractiveness and agricultural competitiveness of the region.

Governance and resources

GORTA is an Operational Group led by [Carna](#), an agricultural technical advisory organisation. The project was carried out between 2019 and 2022 with an overall budget of 45,100 euros, funded by the 2014-2020 rural development funds dedicated to Operational Groups.



Innovative aspect

Land abandonment and takeover by new generations is a common concern in remote and hard-to-reach mountain areas. Existing solutions to land abandonment and land access may not be replicable in all regions, due to legal, financial or cultural barriers. The GORTA Operational Group's social innovation approach has demonstrated that dialogue between stakeholders can help overcome these obstacles by creating new models of land use adapted to each farm.



TRAINING UNACCOMPANIED MINORS TO MOUNTAIN JOBS FOR A FUTURE IN THE PYRENEES

The Pyrenees are experiencing various socio-demographic trends in the mountains, including an ageing population, an exodus of young people and an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors. By offering training in traditional mountain sectors, the AVENIR project aims to provide these young people with a future and encourage them to contribute to local revitalisation.

Challenges and hopes for the integration of unaccompanied minors in the mountains

Like many mountain areas, the Pyrenees are dealing with an ageing of the population. To ensure the region's future dynamism, it is therefore essential to encourage young people to settle in the Pyrenees.

MORE INFO

The region is facing a double demographic challenge, with a constant increase in the number of unaccompanied minors. Unaccompanied minors are young foreigners under the age of 18 who are separated from their legal representatives. Whatever their nationality, they are taken in charge by the child welfare system in order to follow training courses, learn the language if necessary and obtain a diploma. These young people are a hope for the revitalisation of the Pyrenean mountains if they decide to stay and work there.

Although the region has much to offer them, particularly in terms of access to employment and quality of life, the settlement of these unaccompanied minors in the mountains requires sustainable integration conditions and an understanding of the mountain environment. The lack of professional qualifications or language skills and the loss of socio-cultural references are obstacles to successful integration.

Training unaccompanied minors in traditional mountain occupations

Training and professional qualification are key elements when it comes to accessing employment for unaccompanied minors. The [AVENIR project](#) has enabled young people to discover a wide range of training and employment opportunities in the Pyrenees, in sectors that are constantly recruiting. In May 2022, 15 unaccompanied minors took part in training courses related to, among other sectors, high-altitude catering, maintenance and management of ski lifts, pastoralism, hospitality in tourist facilities and outdoor sports.



Credits AVENIR project

Focusing on these traditional mountain sectors is a win-win strategy for the region; on the one hand, it allows these young people to find a job quickly and, on the other, it facilitates recruitment for companies constantly in need of new skills.

Facilitating social inclusion

In addition to vocational training, the AVENIR project worked to remove barriers to employment and social integration for these young people, first and foremost the language barrier. Language courses

were provided to participants to increase their employability but also to facilitate their social contacts in the region. The language courses were provided in the French Pyrenees by the Apprentice Training Centres.

In addition, in order to remove as many barriers to employment as possible for these unaccompanied minors, the AVENIR project also carried out intercultural management actions with regional companies. These measures, such as the provision of a [guide for the recruitment and management of a young foreigner](#), aim to overcome preconceived ideas and allay any fears that might arise from a lack of knowledge of the other's culture when hiring.

Finally, the 15 young people supported by the AVENIR project were able to discover the mountain environment through various activities, in particular outdoor sports. These recreational activities were coupled with a mentoring programme with local sport and cultural associations, which volunteered to provide additional social support to the young participants.



Results

Thanks to the AVENIR project, [15 young people](#) under the protection of the child welfare system were trained to work in the mountains and received support for their socio-professional integration in the Pyrenees. Since the end of the project in May 2022, 8 of them found a job and the others are still in training. The majority of the young people decided to stay in the Pyrenees.

Resources and governance

The AVENIR project was carried out from 2019 to 2022 by the Regional Chamber of Trades and Crafts of Occitania, in partnership with various organisations from the social and employment sector, such as the School of Trades of the Hautes-Pyrénées, the Catalan Youth Agency and the Higher School of Trades of Haute-Garonne.

The project was funded by the Interreg POCTEFA programme. The total budget of the project amounts to 1,028,395 EUR, of which 668,457 EUR were financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

Cohesion Policy is an essential tool for development and social and territorial cohesion in mountain areas. Discover this example and other initiatives for youth and employment in [Montana174's](#) brochures.



Innovative aspect

The AVENIR project has developed a global approach to the integration of unaccompanied minors, focusing on vocational training but also on their social, cultural, and linguistic integration. By capitalizing on the traditional economic sectors of the Pyrenees, the approach paves the way for a more sustainable future for unaccompanied minors, local businesses, and the territory as a whole.

BOOSTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE MOUNTAINS

Many rural and mountainous areas face the outmigration of young people, who leave to seek employment in urban areas. In order to face the employment challenge and to improve the image of mountain work, the YESpecialists project focuses on youth entrepreneurship by creating adequate entrepreneurial ecosystems and changing mindsets about mountain employment.

The lack of attractive jobs drives young people out of the mountains

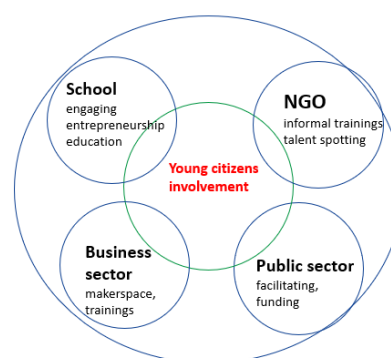
Many mountain areas suffer from a lack of attractiveness and depopulation. The shortage of attractive jobs in mountain areas often causes young people to leave their territory to find better opportunities elsewhere.

MORE INFO

In this context of depopulation combined with a lack of promotion of existing opportunities in rural areas, entrepreneurship becomes a key element to build an adversity-safe future of Europe and a tool to find alternative ways to deal with labour market challenges. Yet, to further support entrepreneurship in mountain areas, support schemes must be developed, especially towards less experienced people such as youth.

Bringing local actors together to improve entrepreneurship ecosystems

6 territories across Europe collaborate in the [YESpecialists](#) project to build local youth entrepreneurship ecosystems. All relevant stakeholders are involved, such as regional and local authorities, businesses, NGOs and Vocational Education and Training schools. The objective is to develop an innovative approach to entrepreneurship education, by bridging the formal and non-formal sectors, and involving young people in the development of their local community. In schools, activities can, for example, include business simulation games with students or accounts of successful local entrepreneurs to create role models for the entrepreneurs of the future.



Credits YESpecialists project

YESpecialists build on partner knowledge and exchange of experiences to also explore how coaching and incubation programmes, co-working spaces, Smart Villages, promotion of entrepreneurship in high schools' programmes among others can help boost youth entrepreneurship in mountain regions.



Credits YESpecialists project

Boosting the entrepreneurial spirit of young mountain people

YESpecialists will boost youth entrepreneurship in mountain areas in 6 territories. It will help develop an entrepreneurial spirit among mountain youth and encourage them to envisage an entrepreneurial future.

Moreover, a repository of initiatives that actively involve youth in local ecosystems, guidelines for building up regional ecosystems to promote youth entrepreneurship, and training materials on entrepreneurial competences will be developed for the use of teachers and youth workers.

Resources and governance

YESpecialists will run from 2020 to 2023 and is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Youth programme of the European Union. The project is coordinated by Vestland County Council (Norway) and involves the Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Principality of Asturias – Department of Education, Ringkøbing-Skjern Kommune, Tuscany Region, Varazdin County Council and EARLALL.

YESpecialists was presented at the [XII European Mountain Convention](#) on Smart Mountains. You can find this project and other good practices in the event's brochure of initiatives, available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Italian](#).



Innovative aspect

Supporting youth entrepreneurship creates job opportunities for young people and encourages them to stay and live in mountain areas, thus also paving the way for a more positive future for mountain territories. Moreover, the bottom-up approach adopted contributes to building smarter mountains, where local communities play an active role in their local socio-economic development.

RHODOSHOP: A ONE-STOP-SHOP ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY FOR THE RHODOPE'S MUNICIPALITIES

Energy efficiency is a key area for public action to reduce energy consumption and cut greenhouse gas emissions. However, this requires significant investments, including by local public authorities. These authorities sometimes have difficulties in identifying sources of funding, especially in small rural municipalities. In Bulgaria, the Rhodoshop project aims at increasing the capacities, skills and knowledge of local authorities from the Rhodope region to identify and use the funds that are available for energy efficiency.

A One-Stop-Shop to centralise information on energy efficiency

MORE INFO

In order to improve energy efficiency in the rural municipalities of the Rhodope mountains, the [Rhodoshop project](#) created in 2018 a One-Stop-Shop dedicated to all energy efficiency initiatives in the region. This One-Stop-Shop informs local public authorities of existing legislations in terms of energy efficiency in buildings and street lighting (which are the two main fields of action for municipalities in terms of energy efficiency) and of the possible financing solutions to apply these legislations at local level.

The team of Rhodoshop's One-Stop-Shop consists of local experts with experience in projects led by local and regional public authorities. These experts work in cooperation with the six pilot municipalities (Banite, Devin, Zlatograd, Nedelino, Smolyan and Chepelare) to support them in planning investments and implementing projects for energy savings.



Credits Rhodoshop

Their mission is to identify suitable funds to finance investments in energy efficiency in the region, such as Engineering, Procurement, and Construction Contracts, bank loans, national funding sources, resources from the European Energy Efficiency Fund etc. In the framework of the project, a training in green public procurement was also organised to inform local authorities of these rules.

The Rhodoshop's One-Stop-Shop also encourages the exchange of project ideas to create a pool of potential projects in energy efficiency. This way, it helps to aggregate different projects, to find resources and to reduce some of the costs related to the preparation of projects.

Impacts and energy savings

Since the start of the project in 2017, about € 3.8 million were invested in energy efficiency projects in 14 municipal buildings of the Rhodopes (like community centres, schools, nurseries, kindergartens, cultural buildings like the Planetarium in Smolyan, etc.) and in 35 street lighting systems. In total, these investments enable to make 4.5 GWh of energy savings per year and to save 592 tons of CO2 annually.




Moreover, in terms of socio-economic benefits, the Rhodoshop project stresses that such investments also contribute to creating jobs in the energy sector in the region.

Resources

Rhodoshop is a 5-year Horizon 2020 project (2017-2022) gathering the Sofia Energy Centre and the Association of Rhodope Municipalities. The project was fully financed by the Horizon 2020 programme, with a total budget of € 470 550.



Innovative aspect



The Rhodoshop initiative replicates the One-Stop-Shop concept at regional level to support stakeholders in identifying and accessing funds channelled towards energy efficiency. Hence, it supports rural mountain municipalities in the access to funds and in their efforts for a more sustainable energy. The Rhodoshop model is easily replicable in other mountain areas across Europe.

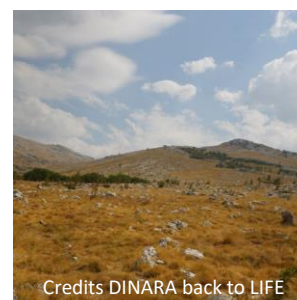
DINARA BACK TO LIFE: RESTORING MOUNTAIN GRASSLAND BIRDS' HABITATS

Mountain grasslands in Dalmatia are facing a loss of biodiversity due to the decrease of grazing practices. Rural migration and land abandonment are leading to the progressive reforestation of these pastures and to an increase in the risk of fire, which results in the degradation of habitats and species specific to this region. In Croatia, combined actions of manual restoration, targeted grazing and burning are implemented to restore mountain grassland birds' habitats.

Abandonment of grazing practices damages grassland habitats

MORE INFO

The southern Croatian region of Dalmatian hinterland is facing a longstanding and wide loss of dry grasslands, which is a key habitat for some bird species. For centuries, these grasslands were maintained at first by wild species, later followed by livestock grazing. Yet, in the last decades, the area was severely hit by outmigration, leading to a loss of population, industries and infrastructures, as well as abandonment of extensive livestock grazing practices.



The progressive disappearance of these practices converted open habitats into shrublands, bringing negative impacts on grassland habitats caused by the invasion and / or thickening of undesired woody species. Such afforestation, combined with the decline of grazing practices, leads to high fuel load vegetation and increased risks of wildfire during summer droughts.

Protecting grassland birds by restoring their habitats

The [Dinara back to LIFE project](#) is being implemented on approximately 50 thousand hectares, out of which most part belongs to the Dinara Nature Park, the newest natural park created in Croatia - as the Dinara mountain area was recognised as an important site for natural heritage, wild species, habitats and rich geodiversity.

The project aims to restore a portion of overgrown grasslands and expand the habitat of three bird species – stone-curlew (*Burhinus oedecnemus*), short-toed lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*), and ortolan bunting (*Emberiza hortulana*). Grassland restoration efforts are focused on three habitat types:

- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco Brometalia*) (*important orchid sites)
- Eastern sub-mediterranean dry grasslands (*Scorzoneratalia villosae*)
- Alpine and subalpine calcareous grasslands



Direct grasslands restoration activities were carried out, including manual restoration of overgrown vegetation, controlled burning and focused grazing. Moreover, the Dinara back to LIFE project is also supporting livestock keeping in order to encourage the maintenance of grazing practices and good grassland management. To do so, wells, ponds, mountain paths and dry stonewalls were restored. In addition, the project raises awareness among local communities on the benefits of grazing practices, in terms of ecosystem services but also in terms of economic opportunities for farmers.

Impacts of the tested methods

Manual restoration has proved to be an effective, albeit a time-consuming activity. 47 hectares of grasslands were cleared during the first season of the project. It has also been found out that, when different types of grazers are introduced in farmers' herds, livestock grazing has more efficient results.

Controlled burning has also been successfully tested on a small plot of 7 hectares. Yet, the practice remains a challenge. Indeed, it is still a relatively new practice in Croatia, with many administrative obstacles and so far, little political support. Dinara back to LIFE therefore intends to further promote the practice and advocate for a change of administrative framework.

Overall, Dinara back to LIFE is testing various methods for grassland restoration in order to later transfer this knowledge. Technical guidelines for sustainable grassland restoration and management will be published.



Resources and governance

Dinara back to LIFE – full name “Management planning and restoration of Dinara dry grasslands to save biodiversity and support sustainable development” - is a 3 years project (2020-2023). It is co-funded by the EU LIFE programme, the Croatian Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency Fund and the Government of the Republic of Croatia Office for cooperation with NGOs, with an overall budget amounting €1,296,509.

Project partners include the Local Action Group “Cetinska Krajina”, the University of Zagreb – Faculty of Agriculture, the Croatian Forests Ltd., and the project is coordinated by the Association Biom.



Innovative aspect

Dinara back to LIFE shows that traditional methods such as pastoralism are essential for the good management of mountain grasslands. However, more novel practices in some countries, such as controlled burning, can also be beneficial, calling for changes in policy and administrative frameworks. Similar or additional methods have been tested through LIFE projects such as Oreka Mendian in the Basque mountains or LIFE to Grasslands in Slovenia and can provide further inspiration on the management of mountain grasslands.

FORMICABLE: TRAINING PROFESSIONALS TO DEVELOP THE MOUNTAIN WOOD INDUSTRY

Forestry can be difficult in mountainous areas due to natural constraints, and some techniques, such as cable skidding, can be used to overcome steep slopes with minimal impact on soil and biodiversity. The Formicable project supported the training of professionals in the French forestry sector and the development of skills and specialised companies thanks to cross-border cooperation.

Advantages and challenges of cable skidding in the mountains

MORE INFO

Cable skidding is a timber extraction technique that has significantly developed in mountain areas since the 1970s. This method is used to extract timber from steep forests without the use of machinery, such as skidders and tractors, but by conveying the trunks in the air with cables.

Cable skidding has many advantages for mountain sites. From an environmental point of view, cable transport provides better protection for forest soils, as it avoids the construction of roads accessible to large machines and the trampling of sensitive soils and shrubs by these same machines. The use of cables also reduces carbon emissions from forestry operations and limits noise pollution for wildlife. These benefits are regularly highlighted by sustainable timber labels, such as the PEFC label. From an economic point of view, cable skidding facilitates sustainable exploitation of mountain forests in the steepest plots and thus contributes to the development of local wood value chains.

However, this specialised sector is facing a progressive decline due to a lack of workforce. In France, the last cable training course closed in 2008 and less than 50,000 m³ of wood are now extracted using this technique in the Northern Alps. According to the [French National Forest Office](#), there are only 16 companies specialised in this technique left in the country.



Taking advantage of cross-border cooperation to boost the timber sector

The [Formicable](#) project was carried out with the aim of revitalising the cable skidding sector in the French Alps, by training operators on this technique and drawing on the experiences of Alpine neighbours. Formicable took advantage of the knowledge and skills of the Swiss sector, which has remained very dynamic; 300,000 m³ of wood are extracted annually using this technique in the country.

From 2016 to 2019, several stakeholders in the timber industry on both sides of the Franco-Swiss border worked together to develop in France the skills adapted to the constraints of the mountains through cable skidding. To this end, professionals from both countries have developed several short

technical training courses for workers in the sector. In addition, a certified training course was created, based on a common reference framework for professionals in the sector, in order to develop the training offer in the long term.

Formicable also produced a [technical guide in French](#) for companies and site managers, guiding them through the specificities of mountainous conditions, in order to encourage the maintenance of cable transport.

Results

Formicable helped to identify the French Alpine territories where forestry exploitation is only possible by cable and where a qualified workforce is needed for such exploitation. The training of apprentices and professionals supported the qualification of this workforce and thus contributed to the development of the forestry sector and the local wood value chain. The development of technical skills will also allow to benefit from the environmental advantages of cable skidding in the mountains, and to market products with sustainable wood labels.



The involvement of companies in this project, the communication carried out and the training provided contributed to raising awareness of the use of this technique and to supporting the development of local companies in the sector. In addition, certain actions aimed at the general public, such as a photo exhibition, helped to raise awareness of the importance of maintaining dynamic forest management in sensitive landscapes.

Resources and governance

Formicable is an Interreg France-Switzerland project, coordinated by the Pôle d'Excellence Bois - Pays de Savoie and the Association câblage Suisse romande and conducted from 2016 to 2019.

The total budget of the project amounts to €1,304,502, of which €761,614 was financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Interreg France-Switzerland programme.



Innovative aspect

The actions carried out by Formicable allowed to take advantage of the cross-border cooperation and the neighbouring competences to support the development of the regional wood value chain and sector in the mountains. The creation training for a qualified workforce supports the creation of jobs and businesses in the mountains and encourages workers' mobility in a mountainous area where the job market knows no borders.

UMMADUM: A REWARD-BASED CARPOOLING MODEL FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

In some mountain areas, residents have no alternative to the car for daily commuting. Ummadum is an Austrian carpooling app that works on a reward model and involved companies and municipalities. The aim is to further encourage carpooling to reduce traffic congestion, decrease greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality.

MORE INFO

The challenge of mobility and employment

The Pitztal Valley is a 40 km long side valley consisting of 7,400 people in four communities: Arzl im Pitztal, Jerzens, St. Leonhard im Pitztal and Wenns. The area is mainly attractive for its highest ski area in Austria, but the region offers poor employment opportunities aside from tourism and agriculture. Therefore, a large number of residents work outside the Pitztal Valley and commute every day to Imst or Innsbruck, respectively 15 and 60 kilometres away. Yet, the car occupancy rate is in general less than 1.1 when commuting, meaning that most people drive alone.

Traffic density is a challenge for air quality and environmental pollution and impacts on the commuting experience. In regions where little public transport exists, or where multimodality is not optimal for commuters, shared transport solutions are particularly suitable in the mountains. Yet, regular carsharing struggles to find users. To further encourage car sharing, the [Ummadum app](#), proposes a new incentives-based model. The service is used in the four communities of the Pitztal Valley and was identified as a smart approach to mobility by the [Smart Villages project](#).



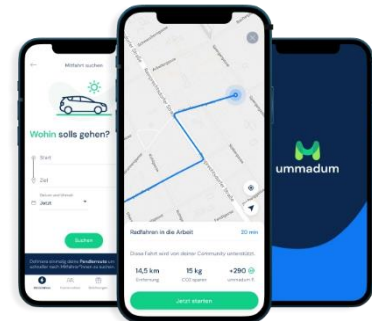
A win-win solution for users, municipalities, and partner companies

The Ummadum app was developed in 2017 by a local SME to facilitate car sharing between commuters and enable people to work outside the valley. Although mainstream car sharing apps already existed, Ummadum proposes a more integrated approach that includes rewards for users and involves both municipalities and private companies.

The app works on a on the reward principle. Each user of the car sharing app, whether they are a passenger or a driver on a shared ride, receives points to be used in partner shops. For each 17g of CO₂ saved, users get 1 point. Considering that for a 60km journey, the distance between Arzl im Pitztal and Innsbruck, the estimated emissions amount at 11.8 kgCO₂e, users could collect around 69 points for a single shared journey.

Municipalities and companies can become Ummadam partners and create a “community” of carpoolers. They allocate a budget for their users’ community, which is converted into Ummadam points. More than 80 municipalities and companies are now partnering with the Ummadam app. To join a community, users can contact their affiliated municipality, employer or local business and ask for membership.

Companies and shops are also get involved in the concept by becoming redemption points. Ummadam users can exchange their points for vouchers in these shops. About 30 regional shops and 3 important Austrian retail companies are involved; in total, they represent more than 2400 redemption points locations in the country. They can become partners for free, as a way to demonstrate their commitment to more sustainable mobility practices, and they can benefit from more visibility on the Ummadam app.



Credits Ummadam

Governance and resources

The business model is similar to other applications available in rural areas. The Ummadam team makes the application available for free to individual users, municipalities, and companies. Municipalities and companies interested in being part of the scheme become partners and finance the operation of the model. By allocating a monthly budget to their community of users, they finance the Ummadam points that carpoolers can then collect and exchange in local shops.



Innovative aspect

By offering rewards and getting municipalities and companies on board, Ummadam proposes an integrated model to encourage car sharing in mountain areas. Where fuel savings or reduced greenhouse gas emissions are not sufficient incentives to carpool more frequently, the reward model can encourage commuters to change their behaviour. The business model relies on municipalities and companies engaging directly in the fight against traffic congestion, for better air quality and for a reduction of CO2 emissions. Such practices can be promoted at the level of functional areas, to encourage mountain people who work in the nearest town and have no alternative to car to carpool more often.

BALCÕES MÓVEIS: BRINGING ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES CLOSER TO MOUNTAIN CITIZENS

The closure of public administrations and the access to services of general interest are challenges that arises in more and more mountain territories, especially if they are isolated. To address this problem, the Intermunicipal Community of Terras de Trás-os-Montes, Portugal, decided to bring these facilities to citizens thanks to mobile services buses.

MORE INFO

Remoteness and ageing affect the provision of services

The Intermunicipal Community of Terras de Trás-os-Montes is a grouping of 9 municipalities from the Northern region of Portugal (Alfândega da Fé, Bragança, Macedo de Cavaleiros, Miranda do Douro, Mirandela, Mogadouro, Vila Flor, Vimioso and Vinhais). This mountainous territory is affected by the lack of services of general interest, in particular in remote villages.

Moreover, the population of the Intermunicipal Community of Terras de Trás-os-Montes is ageing and has mobility difficulties. The [SILVER SMEs](#) project, working on the development of the Silver Economy in rural areas, has demonstrated that older adults have specific needs in terms of mobility and access to services. The geographical and demographic specificities of this territory, in particular remoteness and ageing, therefore called for placed-based solutions.

Mobile facilities to address the lack of administrative services

To tackle the challenges of access to administrative services for isolated rural mountainous residents, the Intermunicipal Community of Terras de Trás-os-Montes created in 2018 itinerant services points, the “[Balcões Móveis](#)” or Mobile Helpdesks in English. These consist of 9 buses equipped with computer equipment, internet access and support for online administrative procedures.

The 9 vans are electric vehicles and run through the 9 villages of the Intermunicipal Community. Citizens can request the presence of one of the buses in their village if they need to carry out administrative formalities. This way, mountain citizens can more easily pay they water bills or renew their identity card on their doorstep.

Itinerant services can benefit older adults and any person with restricted mobility. This also includes young people who are not of driving age but must complete their first administrative formalities, persons with disabilities or even families or couple with one private car for the household.



Resources

The “Balcões Móveis” bus helpdesks were financed by the European Regional Development Fund, under the 2014-2020 Operational Programme of the Northern region of Portugal. The total cost of the project amounted to 449.937 euros, of which 86% (382.446 euros) were financed by the ERDF.



This project, funded by the European Union's Cohesion Policy, concretely improves the daily life of mountain citizens. This is why it was also chosen as a [good practice](#) by [Montana174](#), a communication campaign funded by DG REGIO aimed at raising awareness of the benefits of Cohesion Policy in mountain areas. Find this example and many others on mobility, tourism, innovation, climate change, youth and employment in the [Montana174 brochures](#).



Innovative aspect

Itinerant services can be a way of addressing the lack of public services in mountain areas, especially where the viability of a permanent office is challenged by the remoteness or the sparseness of the population. Such solution brings public services closer to mountain citizens and, by using electric buses, it also takes into account environmental impact of the initiative.

SOČA EVERGREEN: A YEAR-ROUND TOURISM STRATEGY IN THE SOČA VALLEY

The Soča Valley in Slovenia is a popular destination for outdoor tourism. However, the high seasonality of activities can have negative effects on the concentration of tourist flows, on sensitive natural areas and on the sustainability of jobs in the sector. The valley has therefore developed a comprehensive strategy to make the region a sustainable and attractive year-round destination.

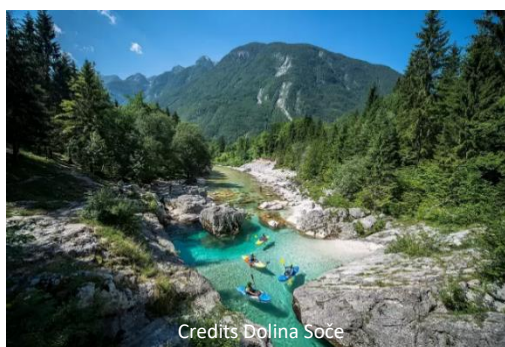
Dependence on the summer season

Slovenia's Soča Valley is a popular destination for tourists seeking mountain scenery and outdoor experiences, including water sports such as rafting. However, the area is a victim of its own success and faces over tourism: between 25,000 and 30,000 tourists visit the area every day in season, while only 18,000 people live in the Soča Valley and the neighbouring municipalities.

MORE INFO

Although the region welcomes visitors all year round, the Soča Valley also faces the problem of seasonality. Indeed, 87% of arrivals and overnight stays are recorded in the period from May to September.

Over tourism is damaging the natural areas in the mountains. Moreover, the strong seasonality of the activity makes the sector dependent on the summer season and therefore also less resilient in case of disruption of the activity, especially in relation to climate change.



A comprehensive strategy to make tourism more sustainable

In order to limit over tourism and its impacts on the mountain environment, the Soča Valley has set itself an ambition: to become a leading year-round destination in the Alps. In 2020, the valley adopted “Soča Evergreen” a [Strategy for the Development and Marketing of Soča Valley Tourism 2025+](#). This strategy gives a framework for more sustainable tourism development in the coming years and covers the 4 most visited municipalities of the Soča Valley: Bovec, Kobarid, Tolmin and Kanal.

To transform tourism in the valley, the strategy adopts a holistic approach to tourism and addresses 4 main objectives:

- Develop a 4-season approach: building on the flagship sectors, such as water sports and outdoor activities, while developing other activities such as those related to heritage, maintaining year-round employment in the sector
- Improving the quality of the tourism offer: aiming for quality rather than quantity of stays, trying to extend the length of stays, focusing on the quality of the tourism offer and the diversity of the experiences offered
- Make tourism more sustainable: limiting the influx of tourists in sensitive natural areas, reducing the carbon footprint of tourism by increasing public transport and reducing the use of private cars, preserving the valley's natural heritage

- Boost the recovery of tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic: strengthening the sector and supporting cooperation between stakeholders, using a new territorial marketing strategy to revitalise the activity, training stakeholders in the sector to meet the new expectations of visitors

Results

The Soča Valley strategy led to the implementation of a coherent marketing strategy on the territory and a reorganisation of the tourism offer. The communication about the valley has been completely redesigned in order to increase its reputation as a year-round destination. In order to develop a "4 seasons" approach, new activities are encouraged, such as wellness tourism, and offers have been launched such as weekend and New Year packages. The cultural offer has also been further developed to attract tourists all year round and the gastronomic heritage is better promoted, for example through the organisation of a culinary festival.



This strategy is also reinforcing the economic sustainability of the sector. Whereas tourism was more of a complementary activity, the aim is now to professionalise the sector by training staff and maintaining jobs all year round. An advisory service for tourism providers has been set up as well as a permanent training programme for employees in the sector.

The action plan includes a large number of other measures which are detailed in the strategy.

Resources and governance

The implementation of the strategy is carried out by the Soča Valley Tourism Board. The Board ensures co-ordination and consistency of action. Residents of the valley are also frequently consulted in order to ensure a balance between tourism and respect for the territory and its inhabitants.

The measures implemented are financed by the budgets of the municipalities involved, the annual budget of the Soča Valley Tourism Programme, funds collected through tourism activity as well as via regional or European funds that finance projects related to the objectives of the strategy.



Innovative aspect

Many mountain destinations face the challenge of the seasonality of mountain tourism. The example of the Soča Valley shows that the dependence on the summer season can also be tackled with solutions that can be adapted to each territory. The valley has developed a global strategy to respond to the environmental, social and economic challenges raised by tourism. By developing a year-round tourism model at relevant territorial scale and by involving all the stakeholders in the sector, the Soča Valley seems to have found a formula for tourism to benefit local communities, tourists and nature in the long term.

"MOUNTAIN MUNICIPALITY - YOUTH, OUR FUTURE": A LABEL TO ENCOURAGE MOUNTAIN MUNICIPALITIES TO ACT FOR YOUTH

Youth migration is a major issue for many mountain areas; due to the lack of satisfying socio-economic opportunities or of territorial attractiveness, many villages are faced with the departure of younger generations. This demographic decline makes services and infrastructures less and less viable and results in a cyclical loss of attractiveness of the territory. The label "Mountain Municipality - Youth, our future" is awarded by the SAB to municipalities acting in favour of youth and intending to reverse this demographic trend.

MORE INFO

A label to encourage local action

Young people are the future of mountain areas, but they are struggling to remain attractive. The recent [Euromontana's report on youth](#) shows that 66% of young mountain people in Europe would like to stay and work in the mountains, but deplore the difficult access to employment, transport and education, which pushes them to leave.

In order to encourage municipalities to act in support of young people and for the attractiveness of the territory, the SAB (Swiss Association for Mountain Regions) launched in 2015 the label "[Mountain Municipality - Youth, our future](#)". The label aims to recognise the efforts of these municipalities and to give them a positive and attractive image towards new inhabitants.

In order to obtain the label, interested municipalities can [apply](#) to the SAB between September and December each year. Applications are assessed from January onwards and a decision is taken in the spring with a view to awarding the label in the summer. To be awarded, applicant municipalities must comply with a list of requirements. These criteria were drawn up by the SAB on the basis of a survey conducted among young people in mountain regions in 2014 as part of the project "A future for young people in mountain regions". The analysis of this survey helped to identify priority topics for young mountain people. Therefore, each theme has to be addressed by the municipalities applying for the label. However, not all measures listed in the award criteria are mandatory. To obtain the label, a candidate municipality must meet all the mandatory requirements and cover at least 50% of the optional measures.

Award criteria

Mandatory requirements for certification relate to governance. The aim is to maintain a constant dialogue between young people, the labelled municipalities and the SAB and to ensure that the priorities of young people continue to be taken into account over time. Mandatory requirements include the following:

- Include the topic of mountain youth in the municipality's school programme. This topic, which is addressed freely by teachers, should be discussed at least once a year. This should help

identifying the demands of pupils, which are then passed on to the SAB so that the voice of young people can be taken into account in the political advocacy at federal level.

- Delegate a young person from the municipality to the [SAB Youth Forum](#). In addition, the municipality must ensure dialogue with its delegate to the SAB Youth Forum in order to exchange information on the measures planned in the other labelled municipalities.

Optional criteria are more thematic. Municipalities are free to choose the topics that are relevant to them and to combine them as they wish, depending on the specific challenges of their territory and the profile and age of the young people on whom they wish to focus their efforts. In order to obtain the label, municipalities must cover at least 50% of the optional topics. However, the commitments made by the municipalities do not necessarily have to be implemented within their territory; indeed, they have the possibility to look for solutions on a regional scale, for example by financially supporting the construction of an infrastructure in the neighbouring municipality. The following topics are included in the list of optional themes:

- **School infrastructure:** municipalities must prove that they are committed to maintaining their school. The existence of a school avoids long journeys to the next town or village for families, contributes to the vitality of a community and attracts young adults. If the local school is already closed, municipalities can nevertheless introduce measures to facilitate and shorten the journey to neighbouring schools.
- **Childcare:** the municipalities should improve childcare facilities, either through private childcare or through the creation of a kindergarten.
- **Employment:** Municipalities should support youth employment, for example by taking measures to encourage local businesses to create apprenticeship or internship placements, or by promoting economic diversification and the establishment of new business sectors.
- **Mobility and accessibility:** municipalities should improve public transport provision.
- **Housing:** municipalities should facilitate access to housing for young adults.
- **Leisure:** municipalities should offer a range of leisure activities and should support related initiatives, for example by carried out associations or private individuals.
- **Intergenerational exchange:** municipalities should encourage intergenerational exchanges by creating a framework in which this exchange can take place, for example, a café, a demonstration or an event.

The label is valid for 10 years. Labelled municipalities must comply with the mandatory criteria throughout the duration of the label, on pain of withdrawal. After 10 years, the municipality must again comply with the requirements of the label by submitting a file summarising the measures taken during the previous period and the ambitions for the next.



Results

28 municipalities in 6 cantons have received the label "Mountain Municipality - Youth, our future". The [actions implemented](#) in these municipalities depend on the needs of young people and the target group of each municipality.

For example, the municipality of Hergiswil has supported a housing cooperative offering affordable housing for young adults and is committed to providing low-cost land to ensure the municipality's population growth.

In order to promote the professional insertion of young mountain people, the municipality of Leukerbad organises annual workshops for young people to familiarise them with local jobs and companies. Thanks to this measure, about 40 students find their apprenticeship placement in Leukerbad every year. Likewise, the municipality of Safiental has integrated a presentation of the region's jobs and sectors into its career orientation courses.

Several municipalities are working to promote youth mobility. Since 2019, Albinen is financing and operating an on-demand night taxi service, which connects the community with Leukerbad and Flaschen. In Flühli-Sörenberg, night buses are available for young people on weekends.

Educational activities are also carried out in order to maintain the attractiveness of the area for young families. The municipality of Andermatt, for example, promotes cooperation with the other municipalities in the Urseren valley in order to maintain a school in the village. This includes the organisation of transport from Realp. The municipality has also invested funds to extend and refurbish the village school.

Other measures aim to better involve young people in local decision making, for example through the creation of youth councils at the municipal level, as done by the municipalities of Safiental and Poschiavo.

Resources and governance

"Mountain Municipality - Youth, our future" is a label registered by the SAB. It is awarded by the SAB Youth Forum, which is composed of young delegates from the labelled municipalities. The annual contribution for the use of the label amounts to CHF 200 per municipality. This fee covers the operating costs of the SAB Youth Forum and helps sustaining the initiative. The review procedure to maintain the label after the 10-year period is free of charge.



Innovative aspect

With the creation of this label, the SAB promotes public action in favour of young people and the attractiveness of mountain areas. Eligibility criteria allow municipalities to adapt measures to their own challenges and ensure both the involvement of young people in decision-making and the inclusion of their demands on the advocacy work at federal political level. The experience of labelled municipalities can inspire other territories facing similar challenges regarding the preservation or development of schools, transport, and employment.



RETURN OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO ARAGON: SUPPORTING ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT IN MOUNTAIN REGIONS

The "Return of Young People to Aragon" programme encourages young people to return to settle in the region of Aragon, Spain, by improving their access to employment. The initiative supports young people in their search for jobs, connects them with local businesses and facilitates their settlement in the region.

Access to employment drives youth outmigration

The lack of qualified and diversified jobs affects the attractiveness of some mountain areas. The recent [Euromontana report on mountain youth](#) shows that, on a European scale, access to education and employment are the two main factors that force young people to move elsewhere. In Spain, 87% of the young mountain people interviewed by Euromontana said they wanted to continue living in the mountains, but they also complained about the lack of jobs and housing opportunities.

MORE INFO

Youth employment is therefore an essential priority for mountain territories in order to maintain the attractiveness of these regions, to limit the brain drain to large urban centres, to halt the demographic decline and to maintain a socio-economic dynamism. To address this challenge, the programme "[Aragón Retorno Joven](#)" ("Return of Young People to Aragon") was launched in October 2018 by the Aragon region in Spain. This is a multi-annual initiative aimed at facilitating the return of young Aragonese who have left the territory due to the lack of jobs.

The initiative also aims to multiply the efforts of the different institutional and private actors to avoid this forced professional exodus. In the first year of the programme (2018-2019), 250 young people interested in settling in the region contacted "Return of Young People to Aragon", 14 of whom wanted to settle in the Province of Teruel. According to the statistics produced by the programme, in 53% of the cases, the factor that held back these young people was access to employment.

"Return of Young People to Aragon" is aimed at young people under 36 years of age who have left the territory of the Autonomous Community of Aragon for another country but who have either lived in a municipality in the region in the past or have graduated from a training institution there.



Support for finding a job, starting a business, settling down

To facilitate the return of young people to the region of Aragon, the programme offers assistance in finding a job. For example, "Return of Young People to Aragon" helps young people to adjust their CVs and find job offers in the region.

Thanks to various calls, 156 companies have joined the programme. They cover various sectors from health to education, computing, tourism, architecture, chemistry or automotive. Member companies of the programme can publish their job offers in a dedicated [online portal](#) and receive applications from young people.

Young people who want to start their own business can also benefit from entrepreneurship guidance. In addition to advice on administrative procedures, they can be supported in assessing the viability of their entrepreneurial project in the context of the needs of the Aragonese territory. Young entrepreneurs are also connected with the Aragonese Network of Entrepreneurship Centres (REDARCE), which informs and connects entrepreneurs.



Finally, young people can also receive economic support for their return, up to 3,000 euros. This can cover the following costs:

- Travel costs: the programme can provide young people with support for the full cost of the ticket to move from the former residence to the new municipality, as well as their dependent parents if necessary.
- Moving costs: support may be provided to help with the cost of transporting furniture and belongings
- Accommodation and/or storage costs: if no suitable accommodation is available, the programme can support the cost of temporary accommodation or furniture storage for two months.
- If the young person is self-employed, the programme also offers to cover the cost of a rental space in a coworking venue for two months for the exercise of his/her profession.

Thanks to the support offered by the programme, 332 young people have returned to settle in the region.

Resources and governance

The programme for the return of young people to Aragon covers the period 2018-2022. The programme is included in the Aragon region's Strategic Youth Plan 2016-2019. The overall budget of the programme amounts 2.509.500 euros.

All departments and agencies of the region are involved, and the programme is coordinated by the [Aragonese Youth Institute](#).



Innovative aspect

The "Return of Young People to Aragon" programme tackles a major issue for the future of the territory by encouraging the return of young people. The success of the programme lies in its comprehensive vision of the barriers to youth settlement in rural and mountainous areas of Spain. By supporting employment, business creation and access to housing, the programme offers comprehensive support to young talents.



EUROMONTANA

Euromontana is the European multisectoral association for co-operation and development of mountain territories. It embraces regional and national mountain organisations throughout greater Europe, including regional development agencies, local authorities, agriculture organisations, environmental agencies, forestry organisations and research institutes.

Euromontana's mission is to promote living mountains, integrated and sustainable development and quality of life in mountain areas. In order to achieve this, Euromontana facilitates the exchange of information and experience among these areas by organising seminars and major conferences, by conducting and collaborating in studies, by developing, managing and participating in European projects and by working with the European institutions on mountain issues.

www.euromontana.org

**FOLLOW US ON
SOCIAL MEDIA**



**SUBSCRIBE TO OUR
NEWSLETTER**

