

Stories of European cooperation

France, its neighbours and the Mediterranean area



Introduction

For nearly two years, the prolonged crisis situation has shaken up the daily lives of everyone, and even more strongly that of the inhabitants of cross-border living areas - or bassins de vie. However, in many ways, it seems to have generated many forms of cross-border solidarity and to have revealed the citizens' capacity to invent new solutions. This publication is a significant example.

After the sudden border closure paralysed Europe, cooperation has emerged as the only viable alternative. This unprecedented situation has strengthened the MOT's commitment to its mission and brought us closer to our institutional and European partners.

Following the launch of the 'European Cross-border Citizen's Alliance' in 2020, the rapprochement between MOT, AEBR and CESC was strengthened by the signature of the Strasbourg Declaration on 7 October 2021. Our three organisations agreed to establish ever-closer cooperation. We have the ambition to work together to remove obstacles, by acting at local, national and European levels.

In this respect, the upcoming year is already promising to be a great opportunity for cross-border cooperation! In the first half of 2022, France will assume the Presidency of the European Union. This Presidency will be built around three key words: Recovery, Power, Belonging.

As part of the French Presidency of the European Union and supported by the European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions and the National Agency for the Cohesion of Territories, the second edition of our Borders Forum will also focus on the challenges of cross-border citizenship and European belonging. We are therefore expecting the active participation of all -elected representatives, technicians, diplomats and citizens- to make this event a major European forum for cross-border cooperation.

While community values seem to be challenged by successive crises, the daily engagement of young Europeans in favour of cooperation, promoted by the Interreg Volunteer Youth programme, is more important than ever.



Christian Dupessey
MOT's President

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Tackling economic and social exclusion in the Channel area

France and England working together on a project focused on helping social housing residents out of long-term unemployment

*By Alessia Baratto
and Laurence Moureh-Ledig*

Increase Valorisation Sociale (VS) is a €12 million cross-border cooperation project designed by ten leading housing associations in France and the UK, including Archipel Habitat and Optivo. The project contributes to fostering social and economic inclusion in thirty-eight local communities covering rural and urban areas along the South and East Coasts of England from Southampton to Norfolk, and the North Coast of France from Brittany to Pas-de-Calais.

More specifically, this project focuses on delivering activities to help social housing residents out of long-term unemployment. Participants in both countries live in neighbourhoods characterised by above-average unemployment. For instance, in France, 35% of

social housing residents live in poverty according to statistics from 2016.

We are Laurence and Alessia and we joined the Interreg France (Channel) England Programme for a six-month IVY placement. As part of the Communication Team, we've gained a closer view of the many benefits that the projects funded by the programme are bringing to citizens of the Channel area. Let us tell you more!

Fostering gender equality and active inclusion

Increase VS draws on the experience of residents, training specialists, and housing associations to assess the clients' needs and barriers. Through



identifying these elements, the project offers tailored training, one-to-one support, assistance from peer-support groups, and ‘ambassadors’ to help residents.

Furthermore, it supports a diverse range of people back into the labour market. A total of 70% of participants are women, 13% declared being from minority groups, and 1 out of 8 clients said they had a disability.

These communities typically face long-term unemployment barriers, distance from the labour market, fragmented support, low trust, and confidence. They are often based in coastal areas where tourism and industry have declined, and job opportunities are thin. The project, therefore, contributes to gender equality and the active inclusion of persons at risk of discrimination.

Testimonial

In Calais, Virginie who joined the Increase VS course in 2019 says: “I have met people who have been living next to me for 20 years. They are people who are living in poverty or isolated. Thanks to Increase VS, we are giving them a little boom in their lives. There’s less anti-social behaviour, people talk to each other more. It revitalises the neighbourhood.”



You can find out more about her experience in this video

The project also delivers specialist cross-border training modules from its Housing Associations and various stakeholders, modules on providing microloans and opening popup shops, and training on digital skills and resilience, to foster the reintegration of residents into the labour market.

In Rennes, **Veronique**, another Increase beneficiary, plans to open a tearoom. She says,

“24H for a project allowed me to know the local stakeholders and to identify the needs. It gave me the tools to identify the added value of my project, build my market research, and the know-how to target my customers. I was helped by students and entrepreneurs who informed me a lot. I learned how to overcome the pitfalls and find the values for my project.”



Veronique, an Increase VS beneficiary.

The length and intensity of support offered by Increase VS enables participants to break through challenges and gain the self-confidence needed to re-enter the labour market. **Kerry**, who started a photography business in 2020 says “I feel I have made huge progress on building my business and my self-confidence. Lockdown has been stressful and Increase VS meetings have kept me sane throughout”.



Employment training (Rouen, 2019).

Impact of the project

As of September 2021, Increase VS has engaged 6,950 people in deprived neighborhoods, trained 5,060 people, and helped 750 new businesses. Another 1,240 clients have moved into employment or further education.

The project's impact has been shared and recognized on both sides of the Channel. In France, Archipel Habitat's partnership with Pole Emploi received a Housing Innovation award in 2019, and UK partner Abri received a Housing Training award in 2020.

To support replication and sustainability of the project, cross-border partners regularly produce a transferability manual to communicate its goals, lessons, and results with 250 stakeholders, such as community organisations and housing associations in other regions.

Finally, the University of East Anglia, which is a UK project partner, has produced two Annual Reports, describing the innovative nature of Increase VS, and will publish in 2022 an academic study analysing the project's impact. The project expects the final report to influence strategies and policies in France and the UK.



Graduation ceremony (Boulogne, 2019).



Increase VS ambassadors (Dover, 2019).



Laurence Moureh-Ledig

- Age: 26
- Nationality: French
- Region where you are doing the volunteering activity: Channel region (based in Norwich, UK). Working remotely from France.
- Write three words that describe "European Cooperation" for you: exchange, cohesion, partnership.



Alessia Baratto

- Age: 25
- Nationality: Italian
- Region where you are doing the volunteering activity: Channel region (based in Norwich, UK).
- Write three words that describe "European Cooperation" for you: inclusion, sharing, progress.



Going local: a good way to reduce global carbon emissions

An alliance in the Mediterranean area is creating an alternative to the traditional ‘brick-and-mortar’ marketplace by bringing local products online

By Wish Yardpaga

Have you ever wondered where your foods come from? Are there any contaminants or are they organic? Whether or not the producers are fairly compensated for their produce? If you do, then you are taking the first step towards becoming part of the 32% of Europeans who are already buying and eating more organic foods.

But tackling unsustainable practices in farming is just only one piece of the puzzle. While it is true that agriculture and mostly factory farming or other methods of intensive agriculture is responsible for 17% of GHG emissions alone, shipping and transporting all the fresh and perishable goods are also responsible for a huge chunk of the carbon footprint of your favourite meals.

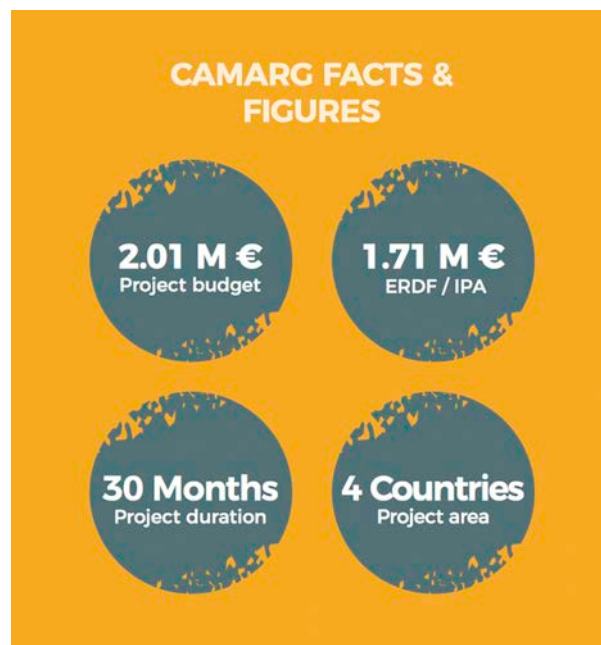
The solution is then not only to shift consumption patterns on what you consume but also to be conscious of where your product came from. Furthermore, the motto ‘Going Local’ not only helps with global carbon emissions, but it also helps your local community. A concrete example of an initiative in this spirit is project CAMARG, in the Mediterranean area.

Connecting local producers with consumers and businesses

CAMARG is an alliance of urban and peri-urban in four European countries: France, Croatia, Spain, and Italy. This projects aims to link local producers in large metropolitan areas with consumers and businesses. The project is

supported by the European Union through the cooperation programme Interreg MED.

In the case of France, CAMARG is focused on business clients. The project is carried out by two partners: The Regional Chamber of Agriculture for PACA Region (Chambre Régionale d'Agriculture Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur), and the Regional Centre for the Innovation and Transfer of Agrifoods Technologies (CRITT Agroalimentaire). This ambitious project aims to create an alternative to the traditional 'brick-and-mortar' marketplace and to bring local products online.



Testimonial

The 'Bouches-du-Rhône département' offers a strong advantage in terms of local agricultural production compared to elsewhere in France. This region is among the leading producer of fresh vegetables, fruits, and flowers in France. Moreover, the share of land use dedicated to organic farming, at 28.8%, speaks for itself in terms of environmental consciousness.

"For this project, we've partnered up with MIN Les Arnavaux (Arnavaux wholesale market) and EM Lyon to conduct a market study to assess the buying patterns of local businesses" says **Sabine Picard**, project officer from the Regional Chamber of agriculture. In addition to the website, both CRITT and CRA PACA were also responsible for setting up partnerships with local farmers and managing logistics. There's a lot more than what meets the eyes when it comes to running such an operation.

Nevertheless, the project in France was not as successful as one might have hoped. "The

results are that although a website to sell locally-made products could be interesting for end-consumers, various types businesses are much more selective when it comes to the quality of their products. This requires the development of additional services. For the time being, they prefer to conduct their businesses offline", explains the project officer.

However, the CAMARG project also brings interesting insights to the table. Picard highlights that "we have learned and exchanged with our overseas partners in Spain, Italy, and Croatia. Although somewhat limited as each country's background is different, we were able to share our experiences with our partners". She also points out the Croatian pilot model in the same project, which went further than in France. The Croatian partners were able to be as successful because they had the expertise and know-how of other project partners and favourable conditions.



The steering committee of the project, which includes internal partners (CRITT & CRA PACA), as well as external partners and experts.

The importance of being online

The project also brings about another interesting insight for online commerce of fresh produce. Although the project itself hasn't faced the tribulations of a global pandemic (the project ended in early 2019), consumer patterns are shifting. During the pandemic and the confinement, we have

seen an explosion of sales online, as not only consumers are barred from the marketplace but also there is a need to find an outlet for agricultural produce. Although sales are slowly returning back to normal, the consciousness that e-commerce exists as a viable solution is now irreversible.

More information:

<https://camarg.interreg-med.eu/>



Wish Yardpaga

- Age: 26
- Nationality: Thai
- Region where you are deployed: Marseille, France. (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur)
- Write 3 words that define 'European cooperation' for you: synergy, solidarity, sustainability



A new world of opportunities in the Pyrenean area for Unaccompanied Minors

Moussa - restaurant Les Galopins (Tarbes, France).

The AVENIR project looks to develop and test an open, global, and inclusive approach between France and Spain

By María Fernández

Let's start by setting the scene. Nowadays, migration is a well-known phenomenon all over the world. In Europe, we have been witnessing for years the arrival of immigrants and refugees. A part of these groups of immigrants is known as 'Unaccompanied Minors' (UM). Each country has its policies, laws, and ways of managing these waves of migrants and specifically of Unaccompanied Minors. In France, these young people are defined as follows by a 2016 law: "Minors temporarily or permanently deprived of the protection of their family". Since 2016, they are referred to as MNAs, 'Mineurs Non Accompagnés' in French, after a change in national law which referred to them as 'Isolated Foreign Minors' resulted in a pejorative and not welcoming feeling towards these children.

In 2019, more than 16,000 unaccompanied minors were registered in France and around 12,000 in Spain. These young people arrived

mostly from Africa and Asia, running from poverty, war, and violence. They are looking for a brighter future for themselves and their families if they have any. They come alone, to a new country, new language, and new culture, facing all the possible challenges we can think of and more. Once they arrive to their destinations they are taken under child welfare services and placed in homes or dorm rooms, but in general, the conditions are far away from ideal and sometimes they end up in the streets. As if this were not enough, they also face social isolation, which makes it even harder to start a new life.

Here is where the AVENIR project plays its part. AVENIR means 'future', and it looks to develop and test an open, global and inclusive approach between France and Spain aimed at improving access to employment and social inclusion for UMs in the Pyrenean area.



How to offer the UMs the best solutions for the long run?

AVENIR is financed by the Interreg POCTEFA Programme, a European territorial cooperation programme among France, Spain, and Andorra, more specifically the area of the Pyrenees Mountains. This POCTEFA area is characterized by the progressive aging of the population and a high rate of inactive people. There is also a certain lack of labour force in specific sectors such as mechanics or the food sector. Therefore, it only seems perfect that these minors that come to Europe looking for opportunities of a better and more stable life, studies, and an occupation, can come to this area and find what they were looking for while contributing to the revitalisation of the territory.

Partners from Spain and France work together by learning from one another's experiences coming to common conclusions on how to offer the UMs the best solutions for the long run. The project started in June 2019 and will touch its finish line by June 2022. It is organised around

two areas of work: training and professional qualifications, and exploring the mountain area from a recreational, sporting, and cultural point of view.

The second point is as important as the first one because these children come to Europe with huge ideas and dreams, that is not necessarily located in rural and mountain areas but big cities as Barcelona. Therefore, working on the allure of the territory and of what it can offer against a metropolis, is also part of the work in place.



Ahmed Chabou, young migrant in Catalonia (Spain).

What are Avenir's main objectives?

Avenir is articulated around 3 main actions:

- Improving mutual knowledge in the field of training and employment
- To improve cooperation in the field of training and employment for the emancipation of UMs
- Action Evaluation and Capitalisation

Up until this moment, the project seems to be a success both for the minors and for the companies that hire them. These young people, mostly boys, are thrilled with the opportunities that are opening up to them through this project. Not only from a professional point of view but also because they see their mentors as a new family in their new homes.

Interview with a testimonial: Stéphane Bouils

“When these children arrive they had lost their smile, now they smile. And that is very important”

To know more about the project and the actual experience of these young people in the French territory, I had the opportunity to talk about it with Stéphane Bouils. He is the director of the training centre in Rivesaltes, Perpignan (CFA Pyrénées-Orientales, France), who sees this project as a great initiative for the UMs as well as for the local businesses that hire them, and as first step at a local level to change and improve the situation of the immigrant youth.

“There are 4 training centres in France taking part in this project, in Toulouse, Perpignan, Tarbes, and Foix. The POCTEFA programme and this project are very focused on the mountain areas, nevertheless, Tarbes and Foix are the two centres that are really in a rural and mountain area. In Toulouse and our centre in Perpignan, we do not have apprentices in a mountain area but we are part of the project and we take migrants and train them the same ways”, he explains.

Question: What kinds of training does your centre offer?

Answer: We do all things related to the food sector: bakery, pastry, chocolate, traiteur, charcuterie, butchery... Then we have mechanics: bikes, motorbikes, cars, bodywork, trucks, tractors... We also have hairdressing, dental prosthesis, fibre optic, and production line management.

Among the migrants, mechanics and bodywork are two of the most attractive pieces of training.

Our community is an apprenticeship community, and that is the particularity of our training centres. That means that they combine 1 week of training with 3 weeks of work.



Training centre in France.

They will pass a basic certification diploma called CAP (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle) and this diploma usually takes two years. The particularity with the UMs is that we put in place a three-year diploma, in which the first year is mainly dedicated to learning the language; as most of the immigrants that we receive do not speak French.

We gave a special name to this class of UMs that have their diplomas in three years: Promotion Senghor; in honour of the work of former Senegalese President and member of the French Academy Léopold Sédar Senghor.

How many Unaccompanied Minors are part of your training centre?

Last year we had around 10 apprentices in the Senghor group, this year we have 3. But as I said before, we are not the only training centre; there are three other centres some with many more people than us, like Tarbes and Foix. For example, in Foix the UMs' class must be around 80 people.

How do they arrive to you?

They come to us through a very important associative network that takes them in, takes charge of their papers, and assigns them a personal tutor. It is the different associations that do most of the work and mostly the social integration work, and then brings them to us for the training part.

What are some of the difficulties?

As I mentioned before, these trainings are usually organised over two years. But with the UMs we have adapted this and they are apprentices for three years instead. The main difficulty is to find businesses that want to sign three-year contracts. But once they do, they are all very happy with the experience. They are all satisfied, it's systematic.

Another difficulty might also be the social insertion, sometimes people are still close-minded and they have a hard time accepting these migrants in their villages or towns.

How does this project help these youngsters in the long term?

When they arrive, as they are minors, they cannot be sent back to their countries of origin. They are protected by the law. Then, one of the conditions to keep their rights in France is to have a job contract, and that is what we give to them at least for three years. They are hard workers, very serious, very motivated because it is not only their job at stake but their lives. So once they have their diplomas they usually get a job, sometimes where they did their apprenticeships, and this allows them the stability that they were looking for and it is what guarantees their stay in France.

And you know when they arrive they had lost their smile, now they smile. And that is very important. Their eyes start to shine.

What do you think is next? Do you want to continue with this initiative once the project is over?

We are going to keep receiving migrants, and I believe more and more in the next years.

So we will continue with this kind of work, helping them and offering them the opportunities they are looking for.

The question that remains is if these young people will be interested in staying in our area once they have their diplomas a few years from now. Or if they will try and find another job, thanks to their diplomas, in bigger cities.

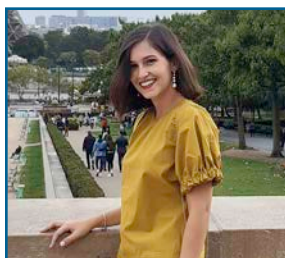
What is territorial cooperation for you?

I'd say first of all that it is necessary. We live in a border region so cooperation is needed in order to have a transparent border. We face the same challenges. And honestly, between French and Spanish, the reasoning is almost identical. We work on the same issue, which is professional and social integration of migrants.

And the border programmes like POCTEFA allow the financing of our actions which is great because it is all very expensive: I have to pay the teachers and get French teachers for the language courses, and pay for materials. We will be very much in favour of continuing to take part in POCTEFA projects.

More information:

<http://www.poctefa-avenir.eu/es/>



María Fernández Iglesias

- Age: 24
- Nationality: Spain
- Region where you are deployed: Jaca (Huesca, Spain)
- Write 3 words that define 'European cooperation' for you: learning, opportunities, common goals



France and Italy cooperate to boost local entrepreneurship

The InnovLab Summer School (2019).

**Here where the Alps tower and nature creates borders,
a cooperation project has been developed in the
French-Italian frontier to make this area more competitive**

By Giacomo Di Girolamo

The so-called InnovLab project is part of the Alcotra French-Italian cross-border programme and aims at making the local micro and small enterprises system a competitive and sustainable environment. It does this by promoting a new generation of entrepreneurship, renewing the enterprise's business operating models, and by providing them with digital transformation.

The InnovLab focus territory, although transnational, shares some common features in its rural areas where mountains and plains alternate with each other, a fact that triggered a low population density mainly composed of the elderly. This led the five involved partners located between the metropolitan regions of Chambéry

and Turin to cooperate for the same goal: to offer tools and training for the local population to acquire the suitable skills that can encourage the digital transformation of in-place entrepreneurship.

As a result, “Communauté de communes Coeur de Savoie”, the InnovLab project leading partner, together with “Federazione provinciale Coldiretti di Torino”, “Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato e Agroalimentare di Torino”, “Syndicat Mixte de l’Avant Pays Savoyard”, and “GAL Valli di Canavese” managed in offering six different kinds of high-skilled training courses to the French and Italian citizens that live in the concerned region.



InnovLabs schools & camps, and business modeling

These activities offered by this cooperation project can differ in target groups, goals, and carrying out procedures. Both the InnovLab Schools and the InnovLab Camps share the same aims, namely to help young people understand, during practical formal or informal meetings, what it means to become an entrepreneur and let them build up marketable expertise in this field. What diversifies the two courses is the age-range of the participants, 15-18 years for the former and 19-25 years for the latter.

Another action put into effect within the project is the design of new business models, also called business modeling. These are collective services addressed to the micro and small enterprises willing to renovate their business format. Through ateliers and workshops, company members are taught about the importance of a template that focuses on innovation, rules, and ideal strategies.

Digital support

A further means InnovLab operates on the ground is through digital support. The project is provided to local companies that aim at obtaining specific digital skills such as the ability to search for, find, assess, create, share, and promote content using the internet and digital technology. This tool allows beneficiaries to engage on a learning path that enables participants to effectively carry out the company's internal processes, ameliorate the relations among companies, and improve the so-called business-client relationship.

"We learned how to better analyse our needs, how to make a call for proposals or master the software suitable for our activities; during the training course we also improved decision making skills in our field... so we moved from theory to practice. Now we know how to manage orders as well as the supply chain, logistics, and billing procedures, in brief, the whole working process" says Cécile from ASVA, an industrial subcontracting company whose 90% of its staff has the recognition of disabled workers.



InnovLab Camp (November 2019).



Hackathon Presto! Innovons pour demain (September 2019 at Coeur de Savoie).

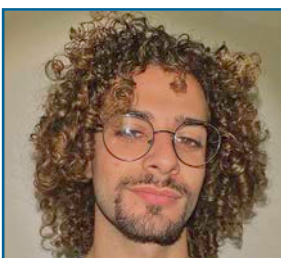
Creative activities to produce and develop ideas

Some activities that InnovLab put into place are strictly dependent on each other, that's the case of the Hackathons and the Design Thinking Workshops. The first is a 24/32/48 hour-long competition amongst developers, designers, and 'digital artisans' who, once split into groups, try to utilize their technical skills to develop the best project the jury can judge. Only the winning team can benefit from the above-mentioned workshop, namely a training course where the Hackathon winning idea is developed with the support of professionals.

That's the case of Aline, Marie, and Romain from Unitoit with an inclusive habitat project-based company, "on a technical level, the experience helped us in spelling out our project, making it comprehensible and

synthetic, we also learned how to improve it and how to explain it to beginners".

Despite the Covid-19 global pandemic, the cooperation project continued its path and in some cases, as promoted by 'Communauté de communes Coeur de Savoie', some partners implemented further measures aimed at helping local enterprises not to go bankrupt during the tough time. To date, Innovlab's actions are still ongoing; students, young entrepreneurs, digitally skilled persons, and tutors are still crossing the French-Italian frontier to join together with the project's initiatives, thus making the cross-border dimension an added value for the present and future local enterprises.



Giacomo Di Girolamo

- Age: 25
- Nationality: Italian
- Region where you are doing your IVY volunteering activity: Montmélian, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France
- Write 3 words that define 'European cooperation' for you: mutual understanding, goals, teamwork

An underwater photograph showing a dense forest of coral and seaweed. The scene is dimly lit, with light filtering through the water, creating a serene and naturalistic atmosphere. The coral structures are intricate and varied in color, ranging from light beige to deep brown and green.

Enabling cohabitation between maritime facilities and marine species

Copyright: Ecocean

The ‘Blue Growth Community’, resulting from the Interreg MED programme, promotes the blue economy, supports SMEs, and build synergies in the Mediterranean

By Lea Ferrandi

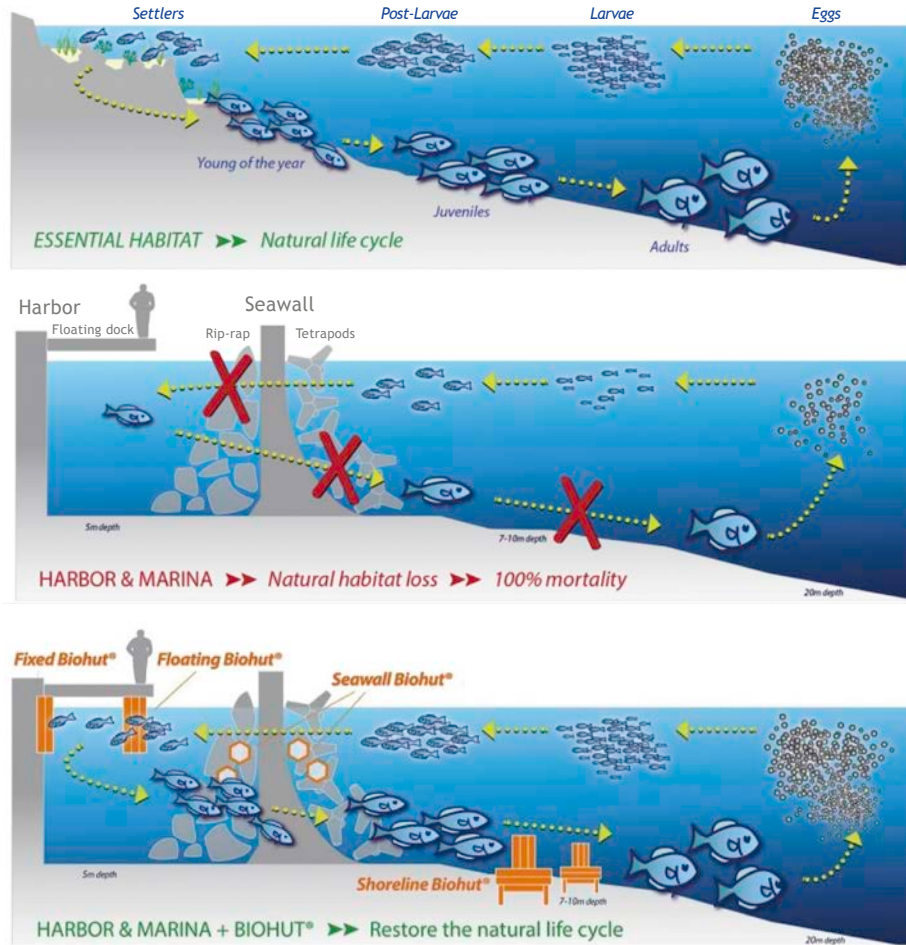
The so-called ‘Blue Growth Community’ resulted from the Interreg MED programme and cooperates to promote the blue economy, support SMEs, and build synergies between maritime actors in the Mediterranean –ship owners, water sports companies, researchers, decision-makers, and institutions.

This community has been cooperating for 5 years to develop tools for Mediterranean actors. Among these tools, the coaching and investment assistance workshops are activities that have enabled the advent of projects led by small and medium enterprises. Indeed, the search for

financing is only the tip of the iceberg of the needs of companies: their structural development, networking, as well as the capacity to receive this financing are facets of their needs. The development of these workshops has enabled the support of several hundred companies by members of the community.

As an example, the PSAMIDES project, led by the Pôle Méditerranée, has assisted 10 SMEs in their financial, structural, and strategic development. This project has enabled the company Ecocean to get in touch with marinas in the Mediterranean to host two important projects: BioHut and BioRestore.

Shallow coastal habitats



Innovation at the service of aquatic biodiversity

The human settlement of the coasts has systematically raised the issue of cohabitation between urban installations and marine flora and fauna species. Indeed, the human presence on the coasts has challenged the balance of nature in these particular geographical locations. Between the land and sea, coastal areas are transitional places for some marine species, especially small fish who use these spaces for reproduction. The presence of human settlement (ports, concrete infrastructures, boats and liners, dykes, fishermen, industries discharging pollutants...) strongly disturbs the present fauna and flora. The cohabitation with nature is therefore delicate.

Currently, over 50% of commercial species are exploited to their maximum sustainable yield, and 32% are considered overexploited, depleted, or recovering. In the challenge of cohabitation, the projects BioHut and BioRestore play an important role. BioRestore repopulates places deserted by fish after the urbanisation of their marine territory. On the other hand, BioHut develops a range of artificial habitats offering shelter and food to promote the survival rate of larvae and thus restore the function of a nursery to areas damaged by man, such as the ports.

The numbers speak for themselves. Today, 33 French harbors host 4,414 BioHut nurseries. A total of 282 aquatic species have been counted, and 27,200 fish have been saved thanks to BioRestore.



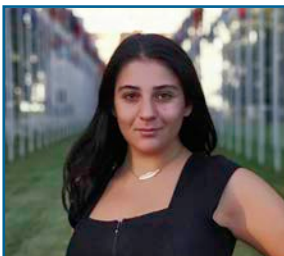
Copyright: Ecocean

Current locations of BioRestores and Biohut:



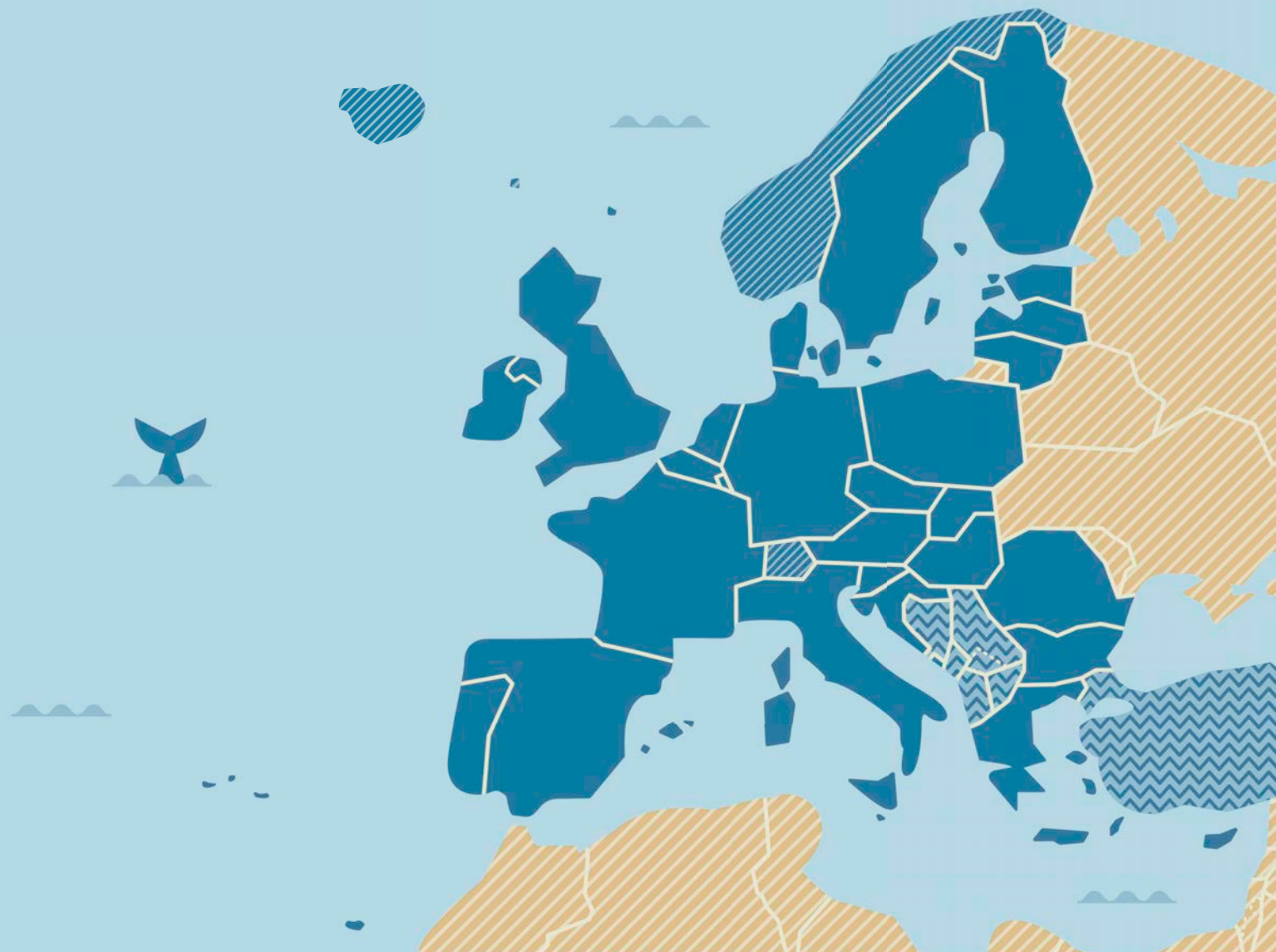
More information:

<https://www.ecocean.fr/restauration-ecologique/>



Lea Felice Ferrandi

- **Age:** 25
- **Nationality:** French
- **Region where you are doing your IVY volunteering activity:** Marseille, France
- **Write 3 words that define 'European cooperation' for you:** solidarity, synergies, strength.



Want to read more interesting stories about how Interreg
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