

## THEMATIC IMPACT PAPER - ENVIRONMENT

### *CENTRAL EUROPE FACES A MULTITUDE OF CLIMATE CHANGE RELATED CHALLENGES*

Central Europe, as other parts of Europe and the world, is increasingly challenged by climate change. Evidence suggests that mean temperatures have been rising for years. Central Europe is likely to experience a decrease in summer rainfall, stronger and frequent weather extremes, including heavy precipitations, droughts and fire hazards. Regional biodiversity continues to decline at an alarming rate with most protected species and habitats confronting poor environmental management and conservation status.

Amid the climate and biodiversity crises, nature-based solutions are becoming increasingly important to reduce the impacts of climate change, and to protect ecosystems and biodiversity. Climate and biodiversity crises have accelerated the importance of climate change adaption and mitigation, making these efforts fundamental in Central Europe.

Public awareness and European wide environmental actions are becoming increasingly impactful in the Central Europe, leading to prevention and protection measures higher on the public agenda. Still, disparities at the administrative and governance level continue to pose an impediment in achieving unified results across Central Europe. The lack of unity at policy level poses a challenge due to the way the public sector actors and the citizens perceive ecological transition.

The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE (CE) Programme 2014-2020, a European Union funding programme that supports transnational cooperation in Austria, Croatia, Czechia, several regions in Germany, Hungary, Northern Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia, addressed these challenges by contributing to developing solutions for the sustainable management of natural resources, for effective water management, safeguarding soil and air quality, reducing waste and pollution, managing natural and man-made risks.

### *Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE – ENVIRONMENT*


**25 projects** to focus on environmental management in CE **190 project partners** engaging green cooperation

**9 countries** connected by activities to improve the CE environment


**47.5 million Euro from the ERDF** to support CE becoming greener

#### *The programme's contribution to CE environment*


#### *The programme's impact on the CE environment*


 **169 strategies and action plans** for implementing sustainable solutions


 **77 million Euro** of additional green investments

 **138 tools** to assist making green ideas reality

 **886 CE institutions adopted** the new or improved **strategies, tools or services**

 **189 pilot actions** to demonstrate the benefits of improving the environment

 **7,500 persons** received **training** to improve environmental management skills

 **222 trainings** to enhance environmental management skills

 **56 new jobs** were created

## THE PROGRAMME'S FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENT

From 2014 to 2020, the Interreg CE Programme addressed the environmental needs in Central Europe through its dedicated Specific Objective 3.1 "To improve integrated environmental management capacities for the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources" and Specific Objective 3.3 "To improve environmental management of functional urban areas to make them more liveable places".

Under Specific Objective 3.1, supported projects contributed to developing and implementing integrated environmental strategies and tools, focusing on protecting biodiversity and natural habitats. Several projects addressed water management, including flood protection, river basin management and ensuring sustainable supply of water resources. Other projects focused on topics such as air quality and circular economy.

Under Specific Objective 3.3, supported projects contributed to improving the management of environmental challenges in functional urban areas. They covered topics such as rehabilitation of brownfield sites, water management, air pollution, waste management and integrated management of urban green spaces, among others.

## THE PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTED TO PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND INCREASING SUSTAINABILITY IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS

The Interreg CE Programme 2014-2020 produced significant and a **wide variety** of positive **results** to address the environmental needs of the Central European regions and cities.

The Programme effectively supported **cooperation, coordination** and **collaboration** in various environmental policy areas within and beyond Central European borders. The areas included inter alia the integrated environmental management of functional urban areas, the rehabilitation and reactivation of brownfield sites, improvements in environmental management and planning to increase environmental quality (air, water, waste, soil, climate) or reducing land use conflicts.

### Interreg CE 2014-2020 programme effects for a sustainable environment

- 1 Supported cooperation, in environmental policy areas within and beyond Central European borders
- 2 Increased the quality of the urban and rural environment
- 3 Capacity building effects
- 4 Addressed the relevant environmental needs of Central Europe
- 5 Produced transferable solutions and tools
- 6 Made Central Europe more resilient to climate change
- 7 Made Central European cities and regions better working and living places

With that the quality of the urban and rural environment increases and with it the **local attractiveness and quality of life**. In combination with the rich cultural diversity, the valorisation of natural heritage creates new development opportunities, for example in sustainable tourism.

A good **example** for a **successful cooperation** is the Interreg CE TEACHER-CE project, which capitalised from the experiences, knowledge and networks of four previous Interreg CE projects (RAINMAN, FRAMWAT, PROLINE-CE and SUSTREE). Partners of these projects came together to develop and implement the TEACHER-CE project. In it, they created an international and interactive toolbox for an effective cross-border water management that benefits both, the public as well as policy makers at various levels of territorial governance.

The project and its toolbox had a direct impact on the involved partners and beneficiaries by providing a platform for the access and exchange of knowledge, which would not have been available in lack of such this transnational cooperation.

As a result, TEACHER-CE had significant **capacity building** effects on the twelve direct project partners and eighteen associated partners based in Slovenia, Germany, Poland, Italy, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, combining universities, think tanks and institutions. As an

effect, all these institutions increased their capacity to make their respective regions more resilient to extreme weather events and thus mitigate the negative impacts of climate change.

With such projects, the Programme addressed the relevant needs of Central Europe, by narrowing the East-West differences in the public sector’s **environmental management capacities**. Because of that, the Interreg CE projects could elaborate solutions to optimise the **sustainable management** of natural resources, including effective water management, safeguarding soil and air quality, reducing waste and pollution, managing natural, as well as managing man-made risks.

The Interreg CE projects demonstrated that due to the common environmental challenges in the CE region, the developed solutions are **easily transferred** and **adapted to additional local contexts**. The projects provided successful examples of place-based interventions, for example in relation to challenges affecting river basins, touristic hubs or Functional Urban Areas through projects such as SALUTE4CE where project partners collaborated with the local community to implement green and blue infrastructure through the concept of Urban Environmental Acupuncture.

As a result of the Programme and its projects, the involved areas became **more resilient to climate change**, and the CE cities and regions better working and living places.

*THE PROGRAMME IMPROVED CE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE, ADDRESSES MAJOR GREEN EU POLICIES AND MORE...*

While focussing on their originally intended tasks the Programme and the projects produced a significant value added.

Inter alia this includes **synergetic and multiplication effects**. The projects generated partnerships and cooperations that - once established - were long-lasting. Also, they aimed to exploit and roll-out their outputs and results generated through the Interreg CE Programme into other EU projects and policies, thus multiplying the initial support received in through Interreg Central Europe.

To illustrate, some Interreg CE projects created synergies with other Interreg programmes, such as

the Italy-Austria programme and the Alpine Space Programme. Other projects gained access to national funds to scale up their results (for example LUMAT), while others were successful in securing funding from other EU programmes such as LIFE, URBACT or Horizon (for example SALUTE4CE).

The Programme’s activities contributed to improve **governance** and the **coordination** among various national, regional and local actors. This included strengthening horizontal local coordination of different regions and cities within and across national boundaries, as well as vertical coordination and enhancing vertical coordination of multiple governance levels.

These improvements laid the foundation for a lasting **change of practices** at the organisational and individual level. Thus, the projects established working frameworks, including the introduction of participatory approaches and various formal agreements that illustrate a change of attitude, practice, and behaviour with respect to environmental protection, climate change adaptation and the sustainable use of resources.

In addition, the Interreg CE environmental projects successfully addressed **strategically prominent issues at the EU level**, such as the implementation of the EU Macro-Regional Strategies such as the EU Strategy for the Danube Region or the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region (for example through the Interreg CE AMIIGA project).

**The Interreg CE 2014-2020 environmental value added**

-  **Synergetic and multiplication effects**
-  **Induced a change of practices at the organisational and individual level**
-  **Generated long-lasting partnerships**
-  **Improved governance and coordination among national, regional and local actors**
-  **Supported major EU environmental policies**
-  **Build local environmental management capacities**
-  **Supported a wide range of territories to become greener**

Additionally, through addressing the challenges in climate change adaptation and mitigation and biodiversity loss, commitments on the political level have increased since the beginning of the Programme. Thus, it contributed to wider European strategies and initiatives such as the Glasgow Pact, the European Green Deal, the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, the European Climate Law, or the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, all of which set ambitious targets and climate objectives.

In most cases the environmental Interreg CE projects **specifically focussed** on developing the capacities of local and regional public authorities. This was due to the fundamental role these authorities have in developing and implementing environmental management strategies and plans. Nonetheless, the Programme successfully integrated additional stakeholders, especially in higher education to support the direct cooperation between science and policy making.

Through also having a local focus, the Programme successfully supported a wide variety of territories, including urban, semi-urban, rural, as well as agricultural and industrial areas. Moreover, the Interreg CE projects' impact bridged various administrative borders, at the local or country level, as they covered natural landscape, particular areas, parks, or tourism destinations.

## SUMMARY

Overall, the Interreg CE environment projects contributed to developing solutions for the sustainable management of natural resources, for effective water management, safeguarding soil and air quality, reducing waste and pollution, managing natural and man-made risks.

The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme 2014-2020 increased the environmental management capacities of the public sector and related entities with respect to the protection and sustainable use of natural heritage and resources.

The Programme supported environmental cooperation beyond borders in Central Europe, through access to networks and funding. Through this, the Programme effectively addressed the most important environmental needs of Central Europe in an effective way.

The Programme's early engagement of the community, public and private stakeholders

through its projects resulted in a marked increase in the capacities of the local, regional and national actors. With that the Programme is likely to have a sustainable and lasting positive impact on environmental management in Central Europe.

The Programme strengthened the linkages between the stakeholders in different sectors and at different administrative levels. This allowed creating long-term visions and strategies that are necessary to successfully tackle the climate change related impacts.

The Programme created tangible effects for cities, smaller municipalities and rural areas. This not only helped improving their environmental sustainability but also made them better places to work and live for their inhabitants.