ENVIRONMENT

# Because neighbours share the same home

## The environmental dimension of cross-border cooperation programmes along the external borders of the European Union

February 2021

Funded by the European Union

Technical Support to the Implementation and Management of ENI CBC programmes, implemented by a consortium led by Particip

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TESIM

# Summary

# Introduction

Cross-border cooperation programmes under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI CBC) are a key component of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Strategic Partnership with Russia, and they have an important added value to other associated regional policies such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Eastern Partnership.*

The 15 ENI CBC programmes, involving 31 participating countries, are at the moment in full implementation and over 900 cross-border cooperation projects are running to date: from environmental protection to business development, from infrastructures to people-to-people cooperation, they are building a greener, more social, more cohesive Europe and its neighbourhood. We have analysed this precious material, to find out how and in which sectors these projects improve the lives of the citizens in both Member States and Partner Countries, paving the way to the future programming cycle.

* Within this document, the term "cross-border" applies to all types of programmes: land borders, sea-crossings and sea basins

**48**
calls for proposals

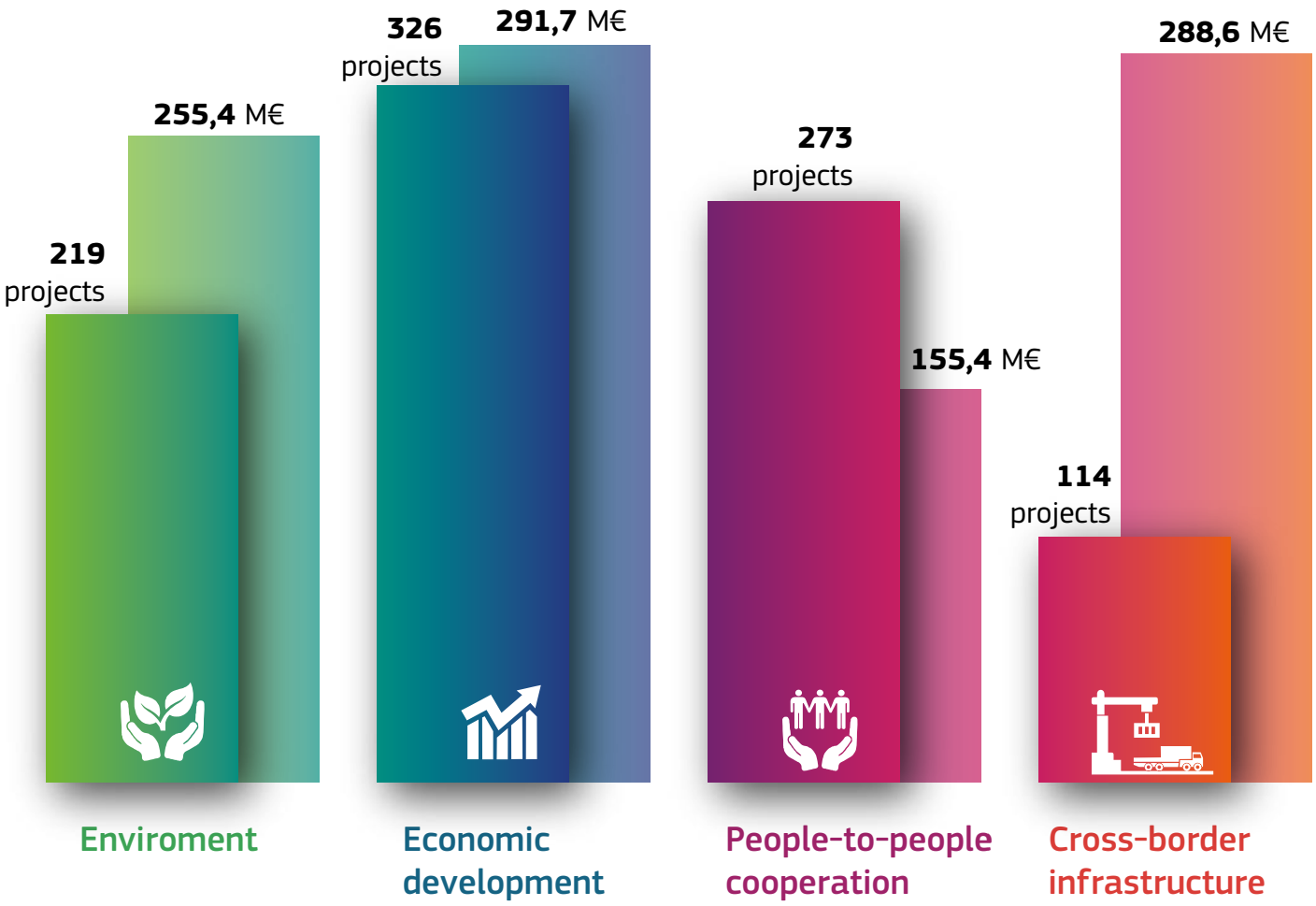
**4.815**
applications

**932**
projects funded

**€1,7 billion**
total budget of funded projects
(includes EU and national co-financing)


Following the analysis of the running projects, TESIM has identified four clusters of action. They are an attempt to show in a structured way the richness of the cross-border cooperation initiatives being implemented along the external borders of the EU. In this publication we focus on the one related to environment.

When confronting the four clusters, both in terms of number of projects and funding, the overall ENI CBC picture is as follows:




As can be seen, the environmental fight represents a substantial share of all the actions being currently implemented. In the next pages, we will analyse the diversity that exists within the environmental cluster itself, we will share with you those projects that we have found most representative and we will look ahead to the opportunities that the new generation of Neighbourhood cross-border cooperation programmes represent in such a crucial field of intervention.

Enjoy the reading!

The TESIM team

# The environmental fight under ENI CBC

# Environment across borders

*Environmental events rarely make a halt at national frontiers. Emissions and nuisances spread over natural territories and affect ecosystems and people on every side of a border alike.*

Tackling environmental and climate change issues in a cross-border setting is the obvious choice. Along the external borders of the EU, Member States and their partners involved in ENI CBC programmes know that very well.

The ENI CBC framework provided 11 thematic objectives (TOs), from which programmes could select a maximum of four. Ten ENI CBC programmes have explicitly selected TO6, dealing with environment. Popular topics under this TO are energy efficiency and renewable energies, climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity and green infrastructure, protection of coastal zones and the marine environment, waste management and circular economy and water management.

Four more programmes addressed environmental issues under TO5 and TO8, giving emphasis among others to capacity building, risk preparedness, environmental monitoring and spatial planning.

### Thematic objectives ENI CBC 2014-2020

**TO5** *Support to local and regional good governance*

**TO6** *Environmental protection, and climate change mitigation and adaptation*

**TO8** *Common challenges in the field of safety and security*

At the moment of issuing this publication, ENI CBC projects are in various stages of implementation. A number of them will be showcased to you, projects which – in addition to their technical value - also share a number of characteristics. They rely on a small number of dedicated individuals in the relevant institutions, building on former cooperation and trust as necessary ingredients. Additionally, they emphasize the need for exchange, capacity building, communication and the involvement of the local communities as pre-requisites to guarantee that they will make a difference. Most important, they guarantee that the outcomes will stand the test of time. Or, as Viktor Pleytukh from the lake Svityaz (North-western Ukraine) project says:

*“I live near the Svityaz lake. I have been enjoying the lake all my life and I want my grandchildren to enjoy it too”.*

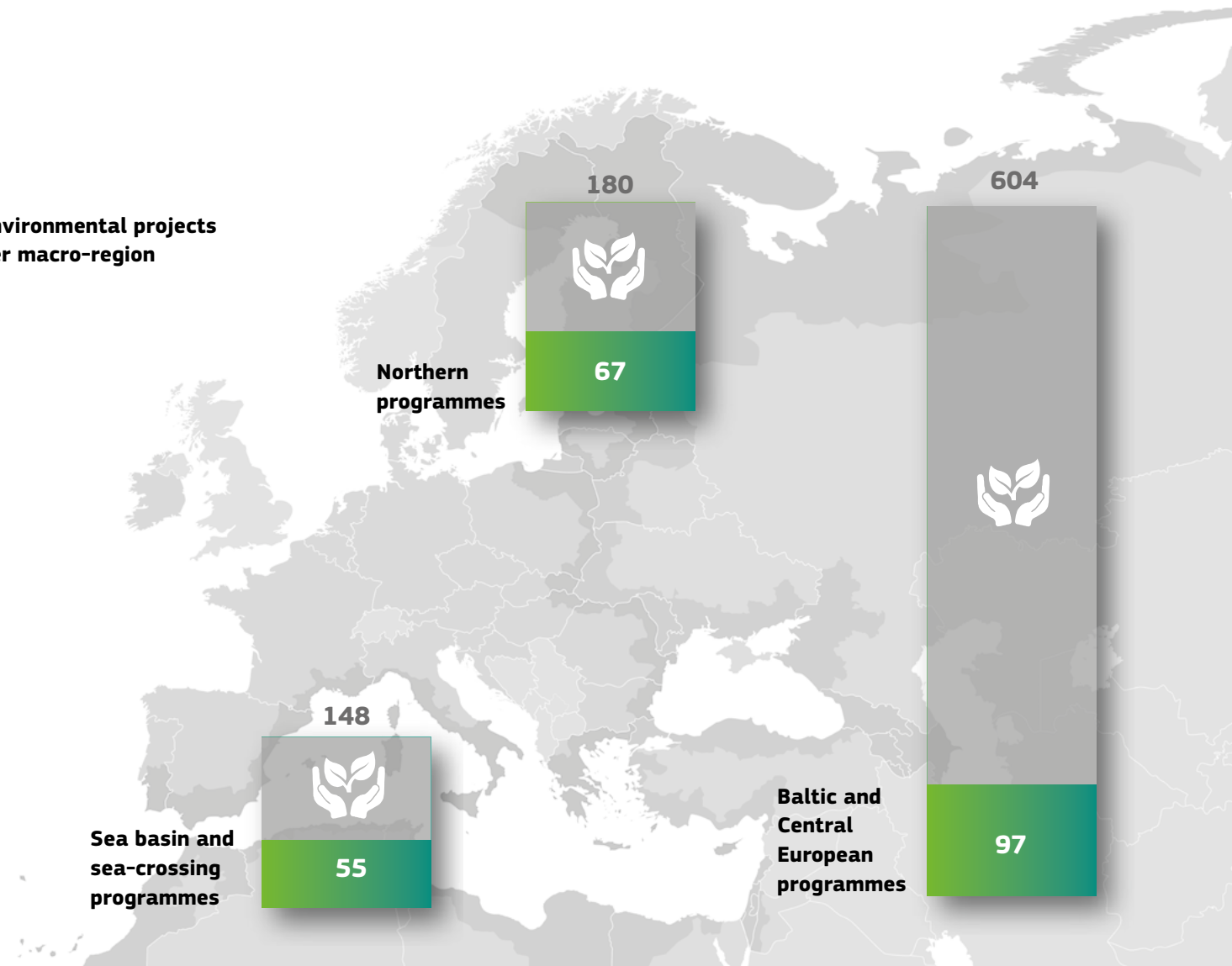
# Facts and figures

ENI CBC programmes have chosen to work on several aspects of the global environmental fight. They have committed so far 255 million Euro of EU funds to this fight, which is approximately 26% of the 991 million Euro already awarded to projects*. Over 600 organisations from 27 countries are working together in the field, implementing joint activities in a total of 219 projects, creating durable cross-border networks and alliances and proving the added value of European cooperation. Out of a total of 932 projects, over 23%, almost every fourth project, deals with environmental issues. 212 of the 219 projects were selected throughout calls for proposals under TOs 5, 6 and 8. Additionally, seven large infrastructure projects in the field of environment have been granted a direct award.

While each project is unique, they also have many similarities. Only by screening these similarities and bringing them together, we are able to see the big picture, the map of environmental projects under ENI CBC.

* Based on data available in January 2021.

**Environmental projects per macro-region**



# TESIM mapping exercise

TESIM experts have conducted in 2019 and 2020 a mapping exercise on how ENI CBC programmes addressed environmental issues.

As a first step, the experts screened all programmes. They checked how the environment was addressed in each one of them, concluding in the identification of 36 keywords, ranging from sustainable agriculture to water management. Next, all projects were analysed based on their rationale and strategy and were linked to one or more of these 36 keywords.

**Environment categories**

- *Water protection*
- *Waste treatment and recycling*
- *Risk and climate change*
- *Protection of nature and biodiversity*
- *Marine and coastal areas*
- *Energy efficiency*

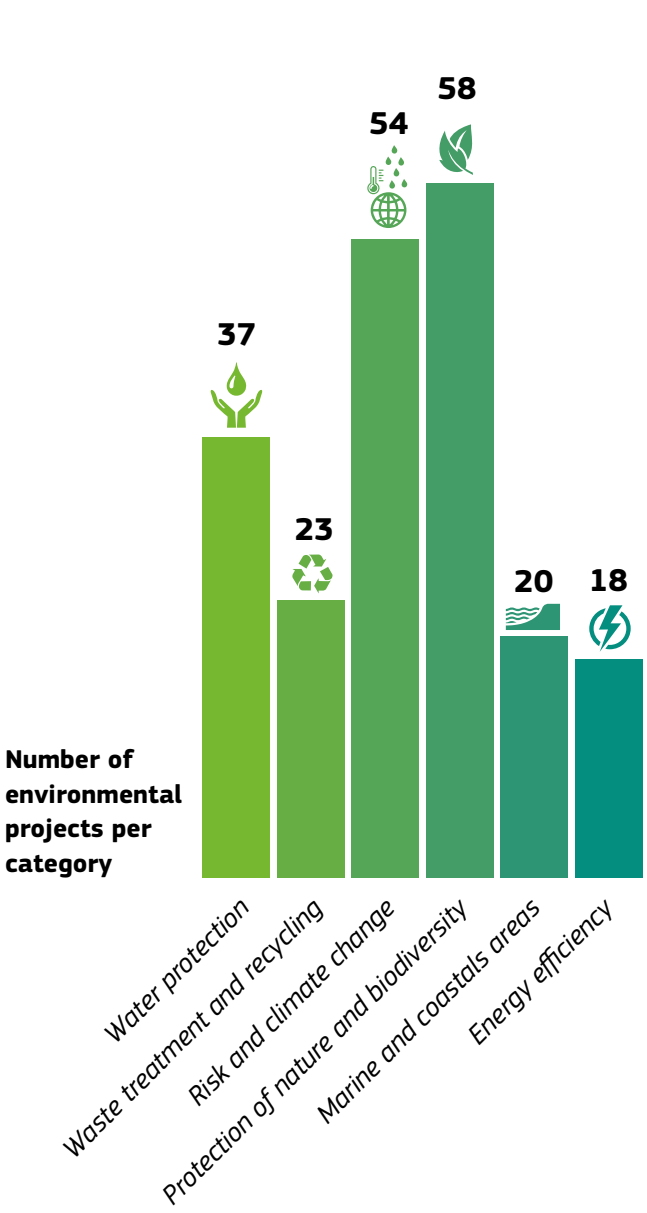
Additionally, stakeholders and target groups of the project were analysed and clustered. For example, one project assessing the status of streams and rivers and the health of salmonids in the Arctic was linked to biodiversity, ecosystem-based services and the livelihoods of indigenous peoples. This linking produced a colourful mosaic of the topics addressed and the people reached in every programme. Finally, all projects related with environment were clustered in **six larger categories**.

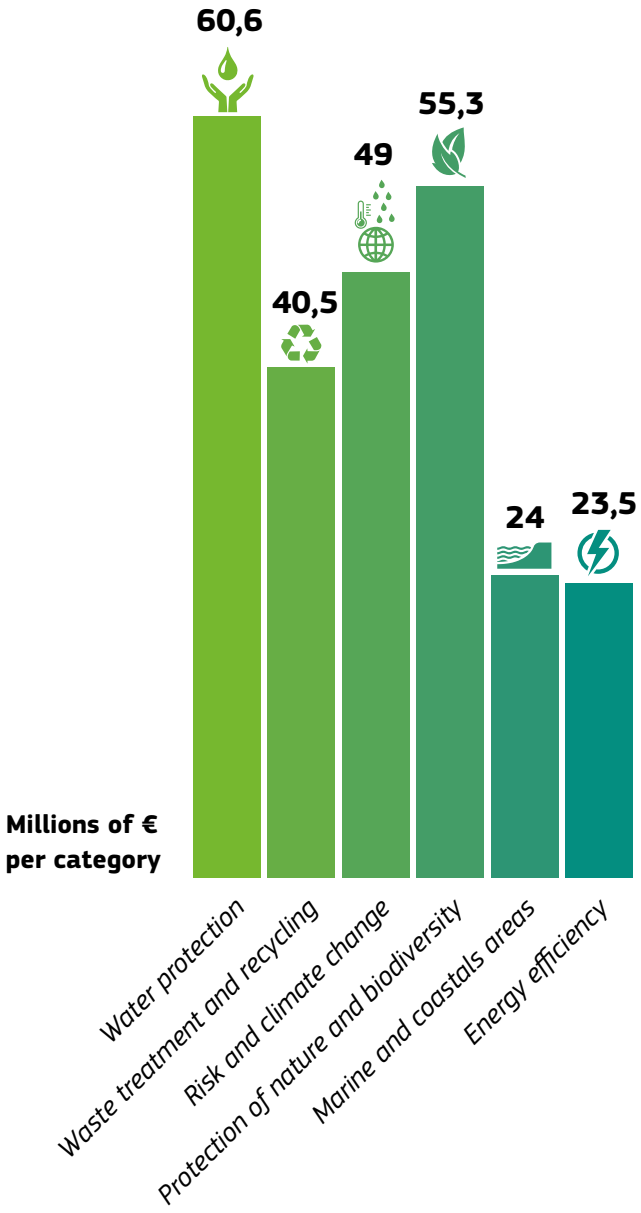
This way TESIM could aggregate figures, including budget allocations, and show where the environmental priorities lay. Even if following a logic specific to ENI CBC, these categories are close to the future policy priorities in terms of environment for Interreg NEXT programmes 2021-2027.

# Charts and infographics

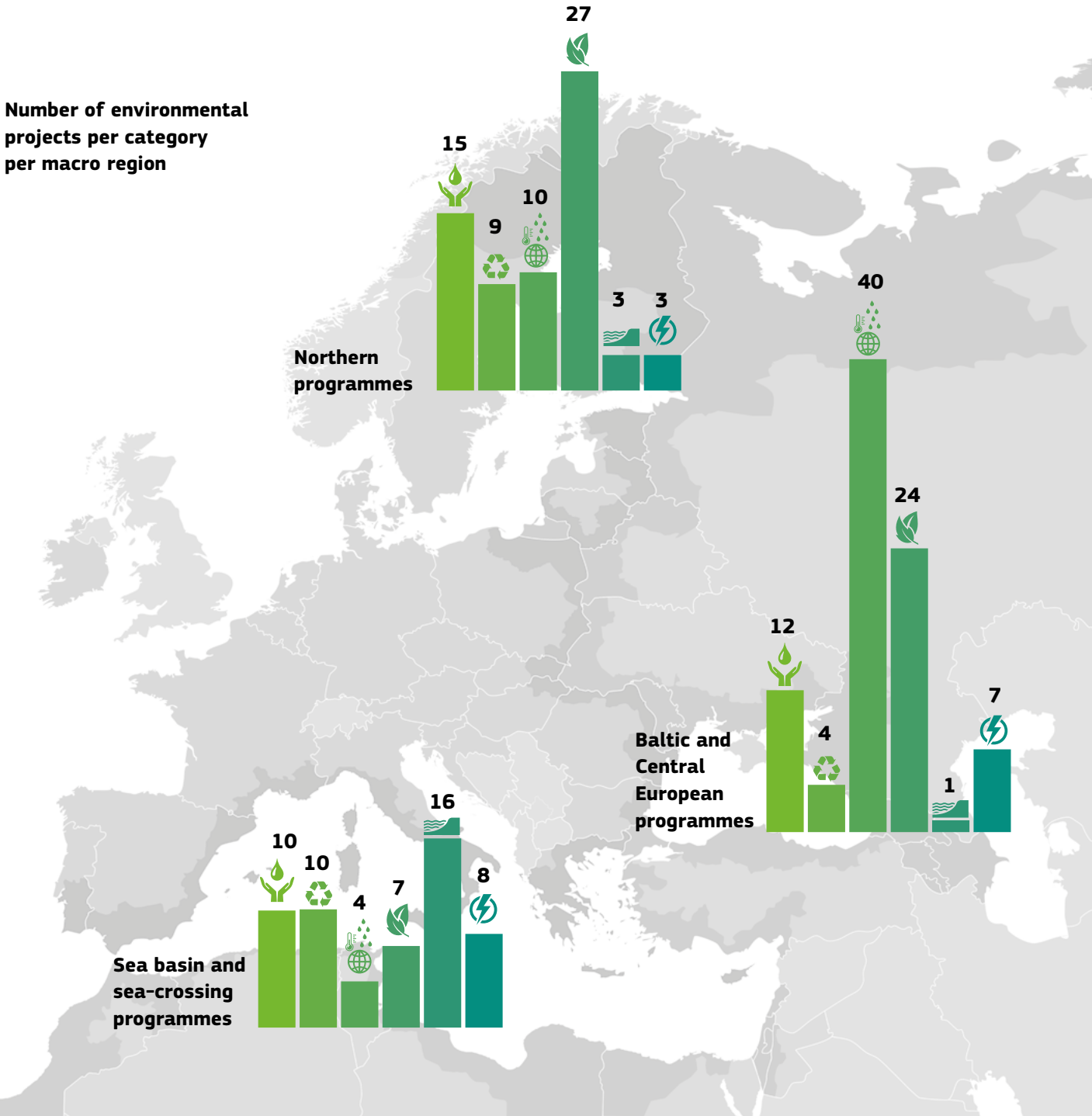
The majority of projects address protection of nature and biodiversity (28%), followed by answers to environmental risk and climate change (26%). 18% of projects involves actions related to water and water protection, while one project every ten addresses waste management (11%), marine coastal areas (9%) and energy efficiency (8%).

The distribution among subcategories changes partially when the analysis is based on the projects' budget. This is particularly the case for water-protection related projects, that represent almost a quarter of the total financial envelope (24%).



The orientations of environmental projects also demonstrate interesting variations linked to the macro region in which they are conceived and implemented. Actions linked to risk and climate change, for example, are mostly present in the Baltic and Central European regions (74% of the subcategory and 18% of the total). The majority of projects that address the challenges of marine and coastal areas (80% of the subcategory and 7% of the total) concern the basin programmes and maritime borders of Southern and South Eastern Europe. At the contrary, waste treatment, water protection and energy efficiency are, instead, more uniformly distributed among the macro-regions. Projects addressing protection of nature and biodiversity are less represented in the sea basin and sea-crossing programmes.



# Key characteristics of environmental projects

In terms of size and duration, projects range from small, focused projects implemented within a period of just a few months and with a modest budget, like the project FIREBRAKE in the Karelia Programme, to large multiannual infrastructure projects with multimillion budgets like the SAFETISZA under Hungary – Slovakia – Romania – Ukraine or the water supply and sewage infrastructure around lake Svityaz in Poland-Belarus-Ukraine.

Beyond the distribution under categories, projects cover a very broad thematic range. Topics include buildings' energy efficiency in the Arctic and in the Mediterranean, environmentally sound water supply and management, forest fire suppression, environmental monitoring, marine litter, flood protection, cross-border river management and other. Horizontal aspects such as awareness, communication capacity building and monitoring, are also an integral part of the projects.

A huge number of partners is involved, ranging from universities and local authorities to private companies and environmental State authorities. Many other institutions, such as civil society representatives and citizens (including pupils, students, tourists and business operators), are involved as associated partners. They do not implement actions directly but are involved in networking and communication.

TESIM selected 9 out of these 212 environmental projects to present as case studies in the next pages, offering a representative picture of their native programmes, the people involved and the topics addressed.

In addition to their technical value, these projects also share a number of characteristics:

- they rely on a small number of dedicated individuals in the relevant institutions, building on former cooperation and trust as necessary ingredients;
- they emphasize the need for exchange, capacity building, communication and the involvement of the local communities as pre-requisites to guarantee that they will make a difference.

Global warming, pollution and biodiversity eradication are a real threat to our planet and its inhabitants, but the awareness has increased, and people are more and more conscious of the need to change attitude and to multiply efforts, as the next pages are going to show you.

*Take a look at how many different ideas and initiatives are being carried out across the external borders of Europe: because neighbours share the same home!*

# ENI CBC
# Case studies

*Water protection*

*Waste treatment and recycling*

*Risk and climate change*

*Protection of nature and biodiversity*

*Marine and coastal areas*

*Energy efficiency*

Kolarctic
**GRAB**
Green Arctic Building

Karelia
**FIREBRAKE**
Development of forest fire risk assessment capacity and collaboration in the context of climate change

Estonia-Russia
**NARVAWATMAN**
Water Management of the Narva River: harmonization and sustention

Estonia-Russia
**ADRIENNE**
Increasing capacity of environmental protection to maintain biodiversity and ecosystem performance in the Gulf of Finland under multiple human uses and climate change pressure

Poland-Belarus-Ukraine
**SVITYAZ**
Improvement of the environment within the Shatsk National Natural Park by building sewer systems in rural settlements around Lake Svityaz

Hungary-Slovakia
-Romania-Ukraine
**SAFETISZA**
Strengthening of cross-border safety by joint measures aimed at flood and inland water prevention in the interfluves of Tisza-Tur rivers

Black Sea Basin
**ZEWSGES**
Zero Waste Strategy for Good Environmental Status

Mediterranean Sea Basin
**MED-ECOSURE**
Mediterranean University as Catalyst for Eco-Sustainable Renovation

Mediterranean Sea Basin
**COMMON**
COastal Management and MOnitoring Network for tackling marine litter in Mediterranean sea

# GRAB

## *Green and sustainable buildings to save energy and challenge the high north*

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|---|---|
| PROJECT TITLE | **GRAB – Green Arctic Building** |
| IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD | 01.10.2017 – 30.09.2020 |
| ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED | LEAD BENEFICIARY UIT-The Arctic University of Norway<br>PROJECT PARTNERS University of Oulu (Finland); Murmansk State Technical University (Russia); Petrozavodsk State University (Russia); Umeå University (Sweden) |
| PROGRAMME | Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 |
| TOTAL BUDGET | EUR 1.716.057 |
| PROGRAMME FINANCING | EUR 1.544.451 |
| PROGRAMME PRIORITY | Viability of arctic economy, nature and environment |
| THEMATIC OBJECTIVE | Environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation (T06) |
| THEMATIC INDICATOR | Number of participating institutions/organizations cooperating across borders for viability of Arctic economy, nature and environment<br>Number of participating young entrepreneurs/SMEs cooperating across borders for business cooperation and development<br>Number of enterprises substantially and actively involved in projects as final beneficiaries<br>Population benefiting from cross-border activities in the field of renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions<br>Surface area covered by improved shared environmental monitoring capacity or joint monitoring actions<br>Number of persons actively participating in environmental actions and awareness raising activities |

*The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.*

*"Life in the north is not always easy, and our regions are not always the most hospitable. From the distance everything looks like snow and skiing, but the urban environment is a totally different matter. The quality of buildings and housing is crucial for quality of life in our latitude".*

Bjørn R Sørensen, professor at the Arctic University of Norway.

On one hand the severe climatic conditions of the Arctic region pose specific requirements on building technologies, energy efficiency and implementation of sustainable construction principles in all countries of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. On the other, an ageing population, growing demand for energy, risks of global warming and the unique vulnerability of Arctic ecosystems underline the need for common action.

These facts led five universities to cooperate in a project aiming to evaluate the urban environmental quality in their regions and to promote green and sustainable building standards.

It was not the first time that partners worked together on the topic; cross-border cooperation began many years ago. UIT (Arctic University of Norway) started already in 2005 with Russian partners on a first project on building technologies and knowledge transfer, including the construction of a Norwegian house in Archangelsk for demonstration purposes. In 2012 a project followed with Murmansk, Oulu and Umeå on "Sustainable buildings for the high north".

In those common undertakings, partners identified many issues that set the path for the GrAB project. All countries face similar challenges, like severe weather conditions, increasingly unpredictable weather caused by climate change, ageing stock of buildings with poor energy efficiency, and an ageing population with changing needs. Yet, urban structures and standards differ considerably. Green building standards need to be adapted to the owner structure, standards and capacity of each country.

GrAB aims at creating excellence and innovation in the region on green and sustainable building standards; at increasing quality of life and housing comfort; and at enhancing the capacity of local stakeholders to introduce and maintain such standards. The project actions target local and regional authorities, private companies in the construction sector, building owners and students of related faculties.

GrAB is in the third year of implementation. In the initial phase the partners focused on evaluating the urban environmental quality, energy use and building standards in the four countries. It was necessary to make a comparison between existing environmental requirements, rules and regulations. The next step was the construction of two demonstration green buildings in Murmansk and Petrozavodsk, including performance audits and life-cycle assessments. This step will be followed by capacity building and knowledge transfer activities.

Cross-border cooperation is of great value for GrAB. While the participating countries face similar weather conditions, approaches and standards are very different. Thomas Olofsson, professor at the Umeå University in Sweden asks: "What would happen if we could transfer a Swedish building, built using the Swedish standards, to Russia? How would it perform according to the Russian standards? What would we change in the aftermath? There is so much we can learn from our partners. In Sweden we are very good in working with municipalities, but we need to work closely also with construction companies, which at the end of the day are the ones to implement the standards. Our Finnish university partners are excellent in working both with local authorities and the private construction industry". Bjørn R Sørensen agrees: "So far in this part of Norway we are used to one-family, separate houses. But after 2010 less and less one-family houses are built; people get older and rather go to a multi-apartment building. This has been the standard in Murmansk for decades. We can learn a lot from our Russian neighbours."

In addition to common learning, common doing is also important. The two "demo" green buildings are central in the whole effort: students from the universities of the two cities will have the opportunity to see green building technology "in action". Dissemination and awareness are also an integral part of the project: publications, trainings, seminars and the "demo" buildings are incorporated in the work plan. The ultimate result is that stakeholders in the Arctic region will fully integrate "modern green" thinking in planning and operating settlements and buildings.

Project partners agree that there is still a lot to learn. Thomas Olofsson points out that "...sustainability is not a short-term project: settlements and buildings constructed today will influence sustainability for decades. A continuous dialogue between research, local authorities, companies and citizens is necessary to identify needs, challenges and joint solutions. Cross-border cooperation seems to be the right framework for the continuation of the dialogue".

# FIREBRAKE

## *Fighting forest fire: a growing common threat*

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| **PROJECT TITLE** | **FIREBRAKE - Development of forest fire risk assessment capacity and collaboration in the context of climate change** |
| **IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD** | 04.10.2018 – 31.03.2019 |
| **ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED** | **LEAD BENEFICIARY** Arbonaut Ltd (Finland)<br>**PROJECT PARTNER** State Government-financed Institution "National park" Vodlozerskiy (Russia) |
| **PROGRAMME** | Karelia CBC 2014-2020 |
| **TOTAL BUDGET** | EUR 50.000 |
| **PROGRAMME FINANCING** | EUR 45.000 |
| **PROGRAMME PRIORITY** | Clean and comfortable region to live |
| **THEMATIC OBJECTIVE** | Environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation (T06) |
| **THEMATIC INDICATOR** | Number of concrete actions taken to eliminate identified threats to biodiversity in cross-border areas. |

*The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.*

*"Forest fires do not care about the national borders. If there is a fire in Russia, it can spread to Finland, and vice versa. And not only the fire: it may be smoke, or any other effect of the fire. So, this is really a shared problem"*

Elisa Korpelainen, project coordinator from Arbonaut Ltd.

In the Karelia region, forest is the dominant ecosystem, stretching over thousands of square kilometers. The global climate change and extreme weather conditions, like draught and heat waves, have increased the risk of forest fires both in Finland and Russia. The fires not only threaten human lives, but also heavily affect the environment: the improvement of monitoring and modelling capacities could reduce threats to biodiversity, speeding up forest fire response and control, before blazes get bigger.

Though the problem is a common one, yet the cooperation on the issue between the actors across the border could be improved. Thus, the Finnish technology company "Arbonaut Ltd", specialized in forest fire services and risk analysis, came up with the idea of collaborating with the National park "Vodlozerskiy" (Russia), an institution which deals with forest protection and fire prevention.

"FIREBRAKE" is a micro-project designed to improve knowledge and collaboration in the field of forest fire risk assessment, among the relevant Finnish and Russian organisations. The project is implemented within the Karelia CBC Programme 2014-2020. "This framework creates a space where the organisations can cooperate, share knowledge and experience: in this sense - continues Korpelainen - it is unique".

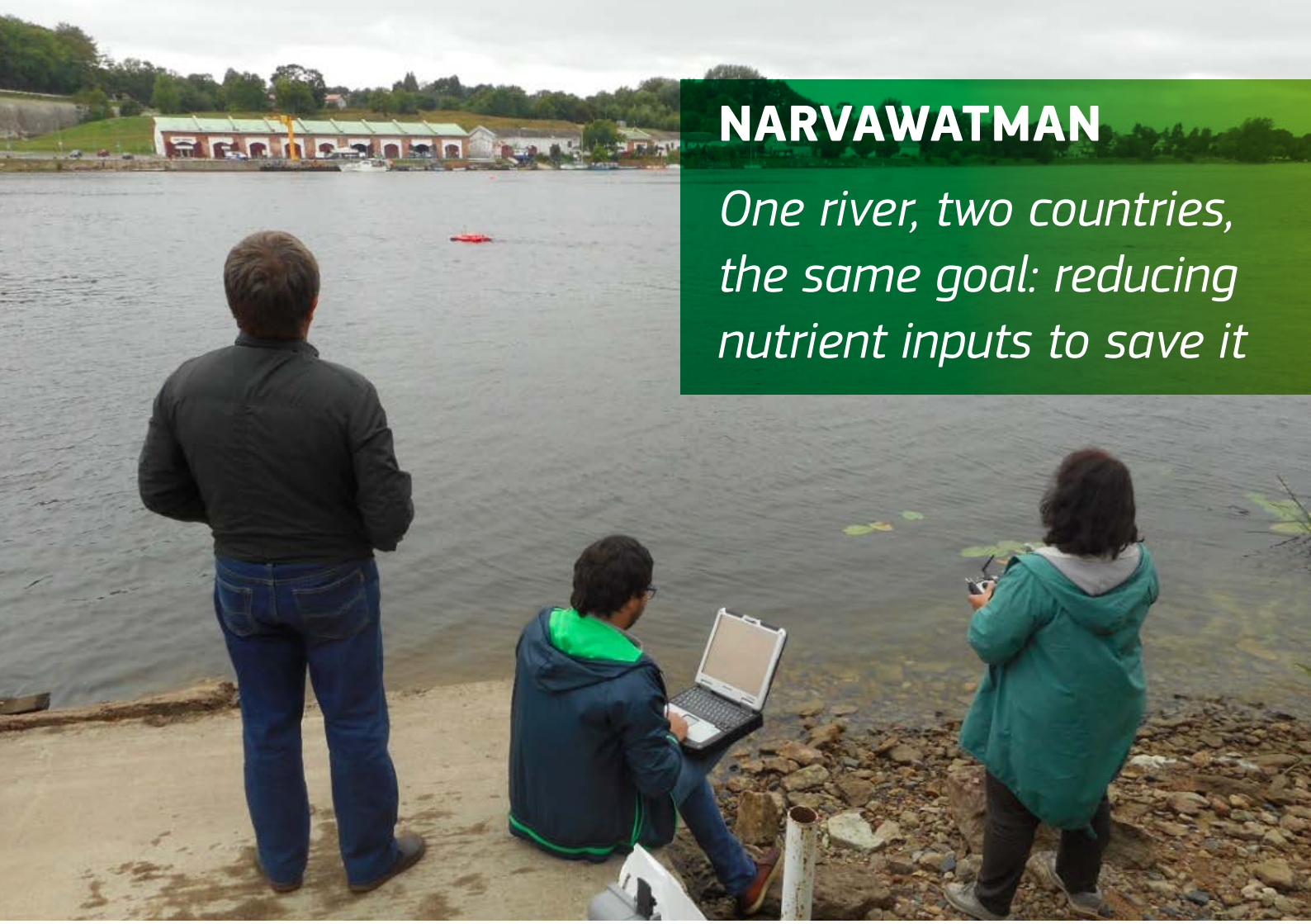
FIREBRAKE was launched in October 2018, bound to last only six months. "First of all, we wanted to study the field: how forest fires and wetland fires are handled in the border regions, how the organisations are working with that issue, what kind of resources and technologies they have in hand" – says the project manager. The first step was to identify the organisations dealing with forest fires and risk assessment both in Finland and Russia - 23 in total - and to analyze the resources available and challenges encountered. This part culminated in a comprehensive gap analysis report.

"After that, we conducted a study on the different tools, technologies and solutions available for forest fire monitoring, suppression and prevention – Elisa continues - that is what we know best". This study has laid the path for a reinforcement and implementation plan, showing how the Russian and Finnish stakeholders could put their findings into use.

Last but not least, all project conclusions were wrapped up in an information package disseminated among the stakeholders and published on the project website for further use. Any entity interested in the subject and working with natural resources can use it, looking for more effective tools to prevent and monitor wildfires.

"Technologies are moving forward, but the principles used in forest fire monitoring and prevention remain the same: thus, the project outputs can be used for years to come" – concludes Elisa.

The lead beneficiary believes that, due to ever challenging climate conditions, the topic of forest and wetland fires will be unfortunately very relevant in the upcoming years. FIREBRAKE has laid the ground for improved collaboration in the field of forest fire risk assessment, and management and coordination between both national entities and their counterparts across the border. Based on the results of this project, it could be now interesting to develop a tool for a more dynamic communication between entities: fed by weather conditions data and background data about the forests, it might enable organisations to faster react to what is happening on either side of the border, and to save time in spreading the essential information to fight this powerful enemy.



# NARVAWATMAN

*One river, two countries, the same goal: reducing nutrient inputs to save it*

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| PROJECT TITLE | **NARVAWATMAN - Water Management of the Narva River: harmonization and sustention** |
| IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD | 15.03.2019 – 02.11.2021 |
| ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED | LEAD BENEFICIARY Tallinn University of Technology (Estonia)<br>PROJECT PARTNERS Federal State Hydrological Institution (Russia); St. Petersburg City Government State Geological Unitary Company "Mineral" (Russia)<br>ASSOCIATED PARTNERS Narva City Government (Estonia); Administration of municipal formation "City Ivangorod Kingisepp municipal district of Leningrad Region" (Russia) |
| PROGRAMME | Estonia-Russia CBC 2014-2020 |
| TOTAL BUDGET | EUR 565.850 |
| PROGRAMME FINANCING | EUR 509.265 |
| PROGRAMME PRIORITY | Improving the quality of shared water assets by reducing their pollution load |
| THEMATIC OBJECTIVE | Environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation (TO6) |
| THEMATIC INDICATOR | Increased capacity in environmental protection for joint water assets<br>Increased awareness in environmental protection and energy efficiency amongst inhabitants and institutions in the programme area |

*The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.*

*"Each of these two countries, Estonia and Russia, must reduce the level of pollution it is throwing into the Narva River: they both have defined targets to reach, but the problem is that they calculate them differently. We are experts, and we think that we are talking about the same thing. But, in reality, we refer to things that have different meaning for each of us.*
*This is where the problem lays: and this is what this project is trying to change"*

Alvina Reihan from the Tallinn University of Technology, the lead beneficiary organisation.

The Narva River is one of the main tributaries to the Gulf of Finland: its source is at the Lake Peipsi, and for the entire length of 77 km - until it reaches the Baltic Sea - the river is the border between Estonia and Russia. Even if it is not very long, it is the second largest affluent to the Gulf of Finland. Phosphorous and nitrogen from anthropogenic sources brought by the river are contributing to the acceleration of the eutrophication processes in the Baltic Sea.

As the river is the border between the two countries, it doesn't make monitoring and controlling pollution easier. That's why hydrologists at the Tallinn University of Technology (TUT) in Estonia and the Federal State Hydrological Institution (FSHI) in Russia, as well as experts of the St. Petersburg City Government State Geological Unitary Company "Mineral", came together in 2017 under the ENI CBC Estonia – Russia Programme and started working on Narva Water Management (NarvaWaMan), focusing on the harmonisation of approaches and the environmental assessment of the Narva River ecosystem.

It is not the first time the scientists cooperate: they have been working together already previously in the framework of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), and are well aware that there is no common starting point for a joint action. At the moment data are not compatible, as there are significant differences in measuring and calculating the total nutrient load of the Narva River between the two countries. This results in the lack of common agreements on shares in transboundary loads, and the incorrect assessment of each country's progress in reducing the nutrient input.

The project is driven not only by the scientists, it is also supported and facilitated by the representatives of the municipalities of Narva on the Estonian side, and Ivangorod on the Russian one. Both municipalities act as associated partners, but people are involved also at national level through the environmental agencies, and also at local level, with inhabitants of both shores of the river.

In the long term, the strategic aim of the project is to improve water quality in the region. This will be achieved by developing common methodologies, for example regarding nutrient load, water quality and load sharing estimations between the two countries. Another objective of the project is to increase public environmental awareness in the region.

NarvaWatMan is a good example of management of a shared water body: the purpose is to start with a more "local" action on the Narva River, to finally contribute to the more global objective of a cleaner Baltic Sea.

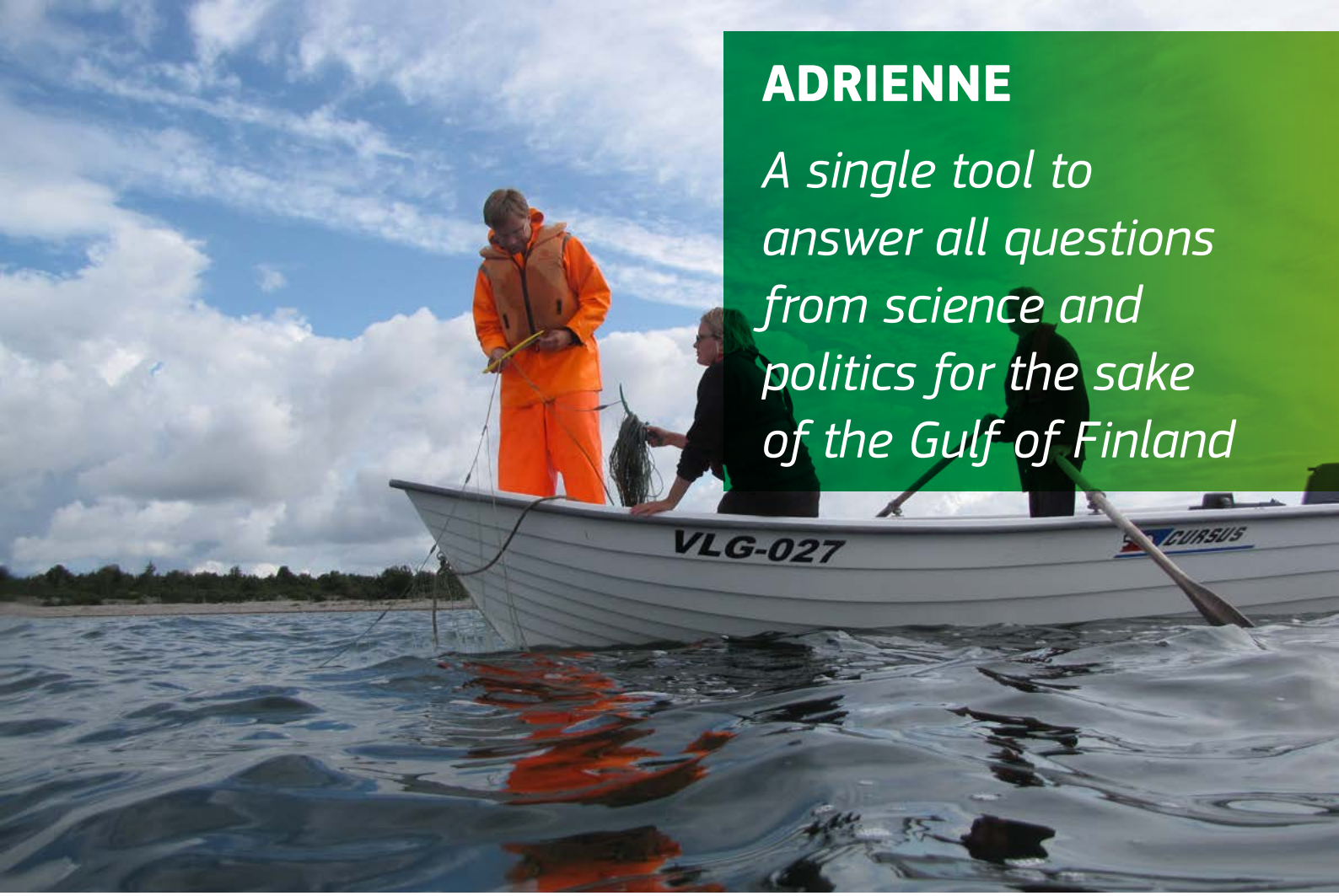
NarvaWatMan is well embedded in other initiatives. For example, it contributes to the "Save the Sea" and the "Clean water in the sea" objectives of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region; it also contributes to the collection of nutrient input data used by HELCOM for monitoring. On top of this, project results will support the implementation of obligations set out in the national (Russian Water Code) and bilateral (Estonian-Russian agreement for transboundary waters protection) documents and agreements.

Scientific cooperation however is only part of the story. While scientists can improve knowledge about water quality, raising of awareness and involvement of local populations is crucial. That is why NarvaWatMan will organise eco marathons and public environmental information days; the people of the region are already showing great interest.

More than 600 participants have already taken part in organized activities: schoolchildren, specialists, teachers, whereas a wider public has participated in games, quizzes, laboratories of Eco-art, Eco-lab and Eco-sport. According to Alvina Reihan, the project coordinator, "participants were so interested, that even when the Narva River day reached the end, our presentation of the project had to continue, as people did not want to leave. They made analysis of water quality using lab equipment, and we explained the meaning of different parameters, and how they impact the water biota. People were very curious, asking all kinds of questions, especially children".

Project implementation has proved to be fascinating, but also demanding. For example, specific permissions for the discharge measurements on the transboundary water have to be renewed annually. "In Estonia the permission was granted in May 2019, but the Russian colleagues could obtain it only in July. So, the joint measurements could only start after both sides were allowed to do so. We underestimated the time needed for procedural aspects", says the project coordinator.

Increasing water quality at both river and Baltic Sea level is not a short-term endeavor. Ideally, when the project is completed, experts on both sides of the river will have more precise data and an agreed methodology for the calculation of the water discharges and the pollution load, that will help to better plan the nutrient reduction measures.




# ADRIENNE

*A single tool to answer all questions from science and politics for the sake of the Gulf of Finland*

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| PROJECT TITLE | **ADRIENNE – Increasing capacity of environmental protection to maintain biodiversity and ecosystem performance in the Gulf of Finland under multiple human uses and climate change pressure** |
| IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD | 01.04.2019-31.03.2022 |
| ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED | LEAD BENEFICIARY University of Tartu (Estonia)<br>PROJECT PARTNERS Federal State Budget institution of Science (Russia); Estonian Ministry of the Environment (Estonia)<br>ASSOCIATED PARTNERS Committee for Nature Use, Environmental Protection and Ecological Safety of the City of St. Petersburg (Russia); All-Russian non-governmental organization Russian geographical society - Leningrad oblast branch (Russia); Finnish Environment Institute (Finland); Kotka Maritime Research Centre (Finland) |
| PROGRAMME | Estonia-Russia CBC 2014-2020 |
| TOTAL BUDGET | EUR 551.006 |
| PROGRAMME FINANCING | EUR 495.905 |
| PROGRAMME PRIORITY | Improving the biodiversity of joint natural assets |
| THEMATIC OBJECTIVE | Environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation (T06) |
| THEMATIC INDICATOR | Increased strength of cross-border activities by institutions in education, R&D, and innovation sectors<br>Increased awareness in environmental protection and energy efficiency amongst inhabitants and institutions in the programme area<br>Increased capacity in environmental protection for joint water assets. |

*The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.*

*"I observed that the scientific information available often is not used by the decision makers. They tend to look at things from a wider perspective, and science is often perceived as too complicated. In order to bring policy makers and scientists closer, I wanted to create an umbrella tool that would facilitate their communication"*

Jonne Kotta, Estonian Marine Institute (EMI), University of Tartu

Bringing together science and policy making is not an easy task. The three partners of the ADRIENNE project and their associated institutions know that very well.

However, communication struggles between scientists on the one side, and decision makers and the society as a whole on the other, are not the only problem in a cross-border environment. Scientists from Estonia, Finland and Russia, all working in the Gulf of Finland, use different methodologies in their research; often data and findings are not compatible without further manipulation.

A common approach on terminology and methodology would make life easier for everybody: scientists would be able to generate a complete picture of the status quo in the Gulf of Finland, and decision makers could go on with planning and implementation, taking into account all relevant aspects in the densely populated area of the Baltic Sea.

So they started cooperating quite some time ago, with the project "TOPCONS" under the previous South-East Finland – Russia ENPI CBC Programme 2007-2013. All three countries were and are also cooperating within the framework of HELCOM (Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission). When asked by EMI to continue their work on a tool that would "translate" scientific data into knowledgeable information for decision makers, they did not hesitate.

Hence, the ADRIENNE project came to life. It is now in its second year and Jonne Kotta and his colleagues are getting closer to their objective of building a tool that would allow decision makers to get data they need from a single source, without browsing through different databases and getting involved in cumbersome data integration exercises.

Actually, the tool will be much more than a mere combination of the information available in different sources, as – on the basis of data – it will also enable analysis and modelling, showing the relationships, as well as the consequences of the human activities. "Prognosis is very important - explains Jonne Kotta. For example, we are going to model what consequences has climate change for our nature: not an easy task since we have not really witnessed climate change before, therefore we cannot use previous knowledge. To build a model – continues Kotta - we put together an experimental model and the field data, to find out what the future measurements could look like". The tool will allow the marine spatial planners to assess responses in the ecosystem of the Gulf of Finland to various human-induced stressors, under different nutrient loads and climate change scenarios.

There are different possibilities for the application of this tool. The Estonian Ministry of Environment will use it for the maritime spatial planning, and HELCOM is very much looking forward to the results of the project. A recent meeting with the stakeholders in Russia confirmed their interest in the further development and use of the tool, both for the scientific community and for educational purposes.

The project is well on track and will continue until spring 2022. In the early phase the focus was on the harmonisation of the available data: this was not an easy task, as often the data is incompatible, incomplete or simply not available. The project then moved to field data collection from Estonian, Finnish and Russian teams.

Marina Orlova from the SPBRC says that the field work has not only been useful, but also exciting. Project partners made some unexpected discoveries: Russian scientists came across two new species in the Gulf of Finland, the Central American bivalve, discovered in large numbers in the warm waters near a nuclear power plant, and a polychaete worm, an indicative marker of climate change and human impact.

But there are many more places to be visited - some of them never researched before - and still many things to add and do. Jonne Kotta and his partners are confident: "At the end of the project we will have a tool that will allow to make a decision based on the most updated data and knowledge. For example: if you are an investor and you want to install a wind turbine, you want to find the location with the best economic performance and the least environmental impact. The tool will show the best possible trade-offs and options, to make an informed decision. Apart from that, the tool is not static. It encompasses new data and analysis results. It is like Google; you pose a question on the Gulf of Finland, and you get a map".

# SVITYAZ

*I want my grandchildren to also enjoy my lake: it's time for a good sewage system!*

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| PROJECT | **SVITYAZ - Improvement of the environment within the Shatsk National Natural Park by building sewer systems in rural settlements around Lake Svityaz** |
| IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD | 31.08.2018 - 20.08.2020 |
| ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED | LEAD BENEFICIARY Shatsk District State Administration of Volyn Region (Ukraine)<br>PROJECT PARTNER Administration of Gmina of Wlodawa (Poland) |
| PROGRAMME | Poland-Belarus-Ukraine ENI CBC 2014-2020 |
| TOTAL BUDGET | EUR 6.450.000 |
| PROGRAMME FINANCING | EUR 5.805.000 |
| PROGRAMME PRIORITY | Support to joint activities for the prevention of natural and man-made disasters as well as joint action during emergency situations |
| THEMATIC OBJECTIVE | Common challenges in the field of safety and security (TO8) |
| THEMATIC INDICATOR | Population covered by improved health services as direct consequence of the support: 7.500 (Shatsk Region inhabitants and tourists' annual polls) |

*The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.*

*"I come from this area; I live near the Svityaz lake. I have been enjoying the lake all my life and I want my grandchildren to enjoy it too"*

Viktor Pleytukh, deputy head of Shatsk District State Administration of Volyn Region.

The Svityaz lake, located in the north-western corner of Ukraine, close to the borders with Poland and Belarus, is the second largest in the country, with an area of approximately 25 square kilometers. The lake is part of the Shatsk Biosphere Reserve in Ukraine, and the cross-border biosphere reserve "Western Polesie". The weather in the region, and the lake's clean waters and sandy bottom, make it a very popular destination for tourists both in Ukraine and across the region.

Tourists bring prosperity, but also infrastructural strains, for example when it comes to the sewage system. Summer visitors cause load peaks in the drainage and treatment facilities: often local municipalities do not have the infrastructures and the funds to handle those peaks. Many smaller villages do not even have a proper sewage network themselves. As a result, the lake water and connected groundwaters are often polluted and contaminated. The problem is not new, and it has troubled local authorities for more than ten years. Pollution ignores national borders and the water quality is affected in the entire border region of Belarus, Poland and Ukraine. Cross-border problems require cross-border solutions, and the ENI CBC Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Programme has offered the opportunity to tackle groundwater pollution. The main purpose of the project is simple: to protect nature and to ensure water quality, as Lake Svityaz is a source of drinking water for the whole region. However, the project aims at other beneficial effects: less contamination means fewer diseases, more tourists, therefore more jobs. In a word, prosperity.

While the infrastructural component of the project is implemented only in Ukraine, activities are conducted also in Poland and Belarus, since discharges affect the Western Bug (Poland and Belarus) and Pripyat (Belarus) rivers. The cross-border cooperation approach, after all, is also about bringing local communities together, to define how to effectively protect nature and to improve life quality. Last but not least, in a cross-border cooperation programme one is never alone: not only projects are the result of teamwork, but neighbouring municipalities are there to share their experience and good practices. The impact then multiplies.

The project is now in the second year of implementation: it was progressing according to schedule, when the outbreak of COVID 19 disrupted activities, causing some delays in March and April 2020. Field works were halted and procurement has become more complex. As a consequence, the lead partner has requested an extension until June 2021. When the project is finalised, approximately 90 km of sewage network will be available, connecting more than 2.600 households and increasing treatment capacity by 2.000 m3/day at least.

The struggle for clean water and a clean lake Svityaz does not end with this project. Partners are already discussing about expanding the sewage system throughout more settlements of the biosphere reserve and investing in a pipeline for reliable water supply. These investments will favour a coordinated handling of discharges, and will assist a centralised supply management. They will also support the introduction of a sound and sustainable fee system, thus increasing awareness of responsible water usage.

The project taught the partners a lot. The experience of other countries is always very valuable, and technical expertise is essential, but better if it is linked to the knowledge of the affected sectors, for example tourism, which is very seasonal. Also, synergies should be explored; water treatment facilities roofs, are an excellent spot for solar panels.

"This all takes time. It is essential to plan properly: if you are planning water infrastructure - says Viktor Pleytukh - better not jump in the water headfirst!"

# SAFETISZA

## *Living safely along the Tisza river banks*

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| PROJECT TITLE | **SAFETISZA - Strengthening of cross-border safety by joint measures aimed at flood and inland water prevention in the interfluves of Tisza-Tur rivers** |
| IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD | 13.08.2019 - 28.06.2022 |
| ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED | LEAD BENEFICIARY Tisza River Basin Water Resources Directorate (Ukraine)<br>PROJECT PARTNERS Upper Tisza Regional Water Directorate (Hungary);<br>Vynohradiv Interrayon Department of Water Management (Ukraine);<br>Vynohradiv Rayon State Administration (Ukraine);<br>Public organisation Ekosfera (Ukraine); |
| PROGRAMME | Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC 2014-2020 |
| TOTAL BUDGET | EUR 4.161.670 |
| PROGRAMME FINANCING | EUR 3.714.876 |
| PROGRAMME PRIORITY | Support to joint activities for the prevention of natural and man-made disasters as well as joint action during emergency situations |
| THEMATIC OBJECTIVE | Common challenges in the field of safety and security (TO8) |
| THEMATIC INDICATOR | Flood protection dike reconstructed: 9.56 km of flood protection dike reconstructed<br>Channel system reconstructed: 5.9 km of riverbed channels reconstructed Water regime is improved<br>Flood protection centres developed; Flood protection centre is constructed and equipped in Tysobyken' (UA) and in Sonkad (HU) is improved<br>Maintenance service of water management organisations is strengthened<br>Mower and small maintenance technique are purchased, laboratory devices purchased, water gauging post is established, monitoring system extended<br>Communication plan is fulfilled, ecological educational trainings are held, information and promotional materials issued, website functioning<br>Conferences, workshops, trainings, study tours are held, 32 trainings with children are held |

*The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.*

*"Many writers describe Tisza as a river of gentle, incredible beauty, and at the same time as a river with its own, harsh temperament. The people of Zatissianschyna know it: they were twice affected by its catastrophic flooding, in 1998 and 2001. Thanks to this project, we want them to live safely on the Tisza's bank, to forget the fear and to only enjoy its beauty!"*

Marina Skral, the Head of the International Cooperation Division of Tisza River Basin Water Resources Directorate.

The Tisza is not an easy river; floods and droughts are common. A flood starting in Ukraine reaches Hungary in a very short time. Evacuations are hardly possible, so it is necessary to improve the infrastructure, both upstream in Ukraine (reconstructing dikes to gain time) and downstream in Hungary (cleaning up the channels to ease water masses management).

The problem is not new and neither are the efforts to address it: the partners have been working in cross-border cooperation programmes since 2006. Preparatory work has included data collection, documentation and exchange of information with the local municipalities. Many of them have experienced the floods literally on their own skin, but had little experience with cross-border cooperation.

The Tisza River Basin Water Resources Directorate from Ukraine has been working on ideas for new projects for a long time: motivation and knowledge were there, only the opportunity was missing. It was provided by the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC Programme, and the Ukrainian directorate was followed in the adventure by two trusted partners: the Upper Tisza Regional Water Directorate in Hungary, and the Public organisation EKOSFERA, also from Ukraine. The SAFETISZA project combines different kinds of activities: research, infrastructure construction and education. It also supports Ukraine and Hungary in complying with the EU Flood Directive, and with bilateral and national legislations.

An important part of the project is the construction of a flood protection centre in Tysobyken', in the Ukrainian Vynohradiv rayon, actually an idea of the Hungarian partner. No such facility existed in this flood-prone region in the past, hence the project closes a big gap. The centre will focus both on maintenance of the infrastructure in normal times and on flood management and communication with the downstream partners in times of emergencies. It will contain a coordination room, quarters for emergency brigades, and storage and maintenance facilities. All necessary components will be thus available in one spot.

But that is not all; infrastructure works include on the Ukrainian side the reconstruction of the left bank of the Tisza flood protection dike, with a length of 9,5 km, including bank consolidation. And on the Hungarian side, work will aim at the rehabilitation of several streams and channels bed with a length of 5.9 km.

In parallel the project will research the region's flora and fauna, to make sure that the construction of the infrastructure will have no negative impacts on the environment. As a matter of fact, part of the project area has been granted the status of a protected zone due to the project's field research. Last but not least, the project aims at raising awareness and educating local schoolchildren about the importance of protecting water resources, and how flood protection works. The experience of "EKOSFERA" is paramount in catering for this last part.

In the course of implementation – now in its second year - local communities have been involved and neighbours have already expressed their interest to engage in similar projects in the future. After the completion of activities in 2022, the partners hope that flood risk will be substantially decreased, with a dike able to handle a flood event for up to 100 years. The infrastructure will help water management bodies to handle floods and droughts expected to intensify as the climate changes. It will also allow local farmers to go about their businesses without the constant fear of their harvests being wiped out.

Work on cross-border water management should continue in the post-2020 programming phase. This could include management coordination, for example in the form of a transboundary flood protection programme; but also infrastructural construction, for example in relation to reservoirs and retention areas, as well as riverbed restoration and treatment facilities rehabilitation.

The partners have already expressed their interest and will to continue their cooperation. What they have learnt from the current project is that cross-border water management is not a job for hydrologists only. It needs a strong team of engineers, lawyers, economists, and it also requires a lot of communication with the local communities. Understanding their values and communicating the role of the project in protecting them is crucial.

"It is no accident that the name of the project is SAFETISZA. I am sure that the results of this project will have a positive impact on the safety and security in the region" closes Marina Skral.

# ZEWSGES

## *Fishing for litter is everybody's business*


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| **PROJECT TITLE** | **ZEWSGES - Zero Waste Strategy for Good Environmental Status** |
| **IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD** | 14.08.2018-14.08.2020 |
| **ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED** | **LEAD BENEFICIARY** Namık Kemal University (Turkey)<br>**PROJECT PARTNERS** Tourism Development Council in Nessebar Municipality (Bulgaria); Ukrainian Marine Environment Protection Association (Ukraine); International Association "Civitas Georgica" (Georgia) |
| **PROGRAMME** | Black Sea Basin ENI CBC 2014-2020 |
| **TOTAL BUDGET** | EUR 872.118 |
| **PROGRAMME FINANCING** | EUR 802.348 |
| **PROGRAMME PRIORITY** | Promote common awareness-raising and joint actions to reduce river and marine litter |
| **THEMATIC OBJECTIVE** | Environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation (TO6) |
| **THEMATIC INDICATOR** | Level of awareness of environmental challenges and good waste management practices related to river and marine litter |

*The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.*

*"Marine pollution is an extremely serious environmental problem which does not recognize any boundaries; there is no way of tackling this issue without international cooperation"*

Professor Fatih Konukcu from the Namik Kemal University.

At a global level, every year 6.4 million tons of litter are dumped from the land into the sea. For every square meter in the sea, there are about 18.000 pieces of micro-plastics. They become food for fishes, entering (also) the human nutritional chain.

The Black Sea is a semi-closed sea surrounded by a large number of nations, and it is not spared by this calamity. Marine litter is everywhere: it is multisource, it affects many sectors, and it is getting quite visible. As sea-basin problem, it requires cross-border cooperation. Raising awareness among the population is a key issue, as it is establishing cross-border monitoring to control discharges and to improve practices. Institutions from the states surrounding the Black Sea have cooperated many times in the past, but tackling marine litter is a long-term goal.

As they were sitting at the final conference of a previous cooperation project, the different partners came across a brochure with the picture of young people engaged in cleaning up the seacoast. This photo ignited the idea of a potential new project, aimed at raising awareness among young people. It was a logical decision to come together once more, and this is how the ZEWSGES project was born.

ZEWSGES aims at contributing to the reduction of marine litter around Bourgas (Bulgaria), Guria (Georgia), Odessa (Ukraine) and Tekirdag (Turkey). Specific attention is dedicated from the project to items bigger than 2.5cm, coming from fishery and sanitary discharges.

To achieve this objective ZEWSGES has established a cross-border marine litter monitoring system, based on an integrated database built on the model of the EU Marine Litter Watch programme. Twenty organizations from partner states have received training and have been integrated into the system.

Based on the findings of the monitoring, four clean-up activities have been organized in all partner countries, involving 1600 teenagers and their teachers. Participants were called as well upon monitoring activities, hence increasing their awareness and motivation to protect the area. Beaches clean-up actions have been accompanied by four "fishing for litter" campaigns, involving 330 fishermen, for the collection of sea waste with their boats.

But nothing has a more lasting impact than education. ZEWSGES has introduced an Ecosystem Education Programme for children, with three multi-media sets and a web-based online game, launched not only on coastal areas, but in the entire territory of the participating states. After all, marine litter starts its journey on the land. The education programme will be taken by a special Committee on a tour, meeting politicians, policy makers, activists and stakeholders to discuss environmental issues.

ZEWSGES is well in the second year of implementation and it is on track, achieving its goals. Most tasks have been completed as planned, but in early 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic affected some field actions like the "fishing for litter" campaigns, a high visibility action with the participation of young students, fishermen, media and NGO representatives. Two of them, in Bulgaria and Ukraine could be completed, but the one in Georgia - planned for April 2020 - and the one in Turkey - planned for June - had to be postponed.

Globally, the project will offer a significant contribution in reducing marine litter, both in developing knowledge and increasing awareness. As one of the teachers in Georgia said, ZEWSGES has made clear that what lands in the bin at home, might come out in the Black Sea at some point. A post-2020 initiative could bring activities one level up.

As global challenges like climate change are more and more impacting the Black Sea basin, as well as the planet, cross-border cooperation is becoming even more necessary.

"Marine litter, being everywhere, being visible and affecting everybody, is a good indicator of any cooperation success in the Black Sea area. If we cannot manage marine litter, we can hardly manage anything else" closes Mamuka Gvilava from Civitas Georgica.

# MED-ECOSURE

## *Less money for heating bills: the eco-renovation of public universities*

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| **PROJECT TITLE** | **Med-EcoSuRe - Mediterranean University as Catalyst for Eco-Sustainable Renovation** |
| **IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD** | 01.09.2019-31.08.2022 |
| **ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED** | **LEAD BENEFICIARY** Mediterranean Renewable Energy Centre-MEDREC (Tunisia)<br>**PROJECT PARTNERS** University of Tunis-El Manar (Tunisia); University of Florence – Department of Architecture (Italy); University of Seville - Thermotechnics Group at Thermal Energy Engineering Department (Spain); An-Najah National University - Energy Research Centre (Palestine); Naples Agency for Energy and Environment (Italy); Spanish association for the internationalization and innovation of solar companies (Spain) |
| **PROGRAMME** | Mediterranean Sea Basin ENI CBC 2014-2020 |
| **TOTAL BUDGET** | EUR 2.900.000 |
| **PROGRAMME FINANCING** | EUR 2.600.000 |
| **PROGRAMME PRIORITY** | Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation (Address common challenges in environment)<br>Support cost-effective and innovative energy rehabilitations relevant to building types and climatic zones, with a focus on public buildings |
| **THEMATIC OBJECTIVE** | Environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation (TO6) |
| **THEMATIC INDICATOR** | Reduced and cleaner energy consumption in public buildings through the use of renewable energy measures and energy-saving interventions |
| **RESULT INDICATORS** | Estimated annual decrease of greenhouse gases as a result of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures implemented in public buildings<br>Total kWh generated (expressed in budget reductions) using renewable energy applied to public buildings<br>Total kWh saved (expressed in budget reductions) using renewable energy applied to public buildings |

*The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.*

*"Nobody doubts the rationality of investing in energy efficiency. But experience and funds are limited and the interventions are costly and complex. While national initiatives and international donor programmes are available, they have one drawback; you work alone. This is where ENI CBC MED comes in: it is a fantastic programme as it is not only a theoretical one, it is more of a concrete programme, enabling the delivery of real change. This is its main added value, compared to others"*

Dr Imad Ibrik - from the An-Najah University in Palestine.

The need of becoming energy efficient has been widely recognised: our buildings are a big energy consumer. Since the 80s, 40% of energy consumption world-wide is in the housing sector. Despite all innovations and improvements, this percentage remains fairly stable to date. The public sector, being an important owner and operator of buildings, needs to lead the process, demonstrating to private owners the benefits of energy efficiency measures.

Yet, not all countries are meeting their targets. A common problem often faced in the Mediterranean is up-scaling.

Universities play a key role here. On one hand they are usually owners or users of buildings built in earlier decades, with poor energy performance and limited funds for renovation. On the other, universities have the technological know-how and the capacity to bring together researchers and stakeholders, the mechanisms to ensure monitoring and the mandate to inform policy makers. Last but not least, universities operate autonomously and dispose over their own budget; less money for heating means more money for teaching and researching.

The Med-EcoSuRe partners have already been involved in several projects in their countries with their national institutions in charge of renewable energies. While these projects are essential, experts also realised that a multi-national, multi-stakeholder approach at sea basin level, could deliver a critical mass of applications and also promote energy efficiency more effectively.

Demonstrating the benefits of energy efficiency, comparing results and at the same time showing that "others do it too", this all could increase the chances of up-scaling. The ENI CBC MED Programme was one of the few options that the partners had to establish a cross-border platform of cooperation, and that is how Med-EcoSuRe was born.

Med-EcoSuRe aims at demonstrating how energy efficiency works: it does so by applying energy conservation measures and renewable energy applications, and as a consequence by decreasing energy consumption in nice old public university buildings, scattered in four different countries (Tunisia, Palestine, Italy and Spain).

The project is currently at an early stage. Energy audits and technical assessments were completed before the COVID-19 outbreak and the lockdowns had little impact on implementation since the early-stage focus was on desk research.

Activities included energy audits at university buildings and the selection of nine pilot sites. The researchers are currently designing a number of different interventions, equipment and technologies for those pilot sites. The interventions range from simple replacement of light bulbs, to elaborated central heating and ventilation controlling, to photovoltaic installations.

After the pilot sites performance has been monitored and the effects evaluated, the project partners will explore in the short term the replication potential in other university buildings, and in the long term at a larger scale of public buildings. Findings will be put together in toolkits, for example for operators and decision makers, and in cross-border strategic plans for university building retrofitting.

The results of the researches conducted throughout this project will be published along with the analysis of the technical and economic impact of such project in the participating countries. In this way the universities will be able to choose from a wide range of proven technologies, policies and financing mechanisms to improve energy efficiency and to introduce cost-effective energy savings in buildings.

But this is not the whole story. Apart from the immediate benefits, Med-EcoSuRe is expected to boost local demand related to the installation and maintenance of energy efficiency equipment in buildings, and to create jobs and business opportunities for local manufacturing, as well as marketing of energy-efficient construction materials. Finally, Med-EcoSure is bound to create a new culture amongst students, potential future decision makers: to believe in, and to promote the growth of green measures.

"The topic remains of great importance for future generations of the programme area. The universities are good to start with, but the private sector is much more cost-aware. If the idea catches with the private sector, then prospects are good. A lot of awareness-raising and introduction of new practices remains to be done to improve the level of our buildings in terms of energy efficiency" says Ines Khalifa from the Mediterranean Renewable Energy Centre.

# COMMON

## *We are all Med: let's clear the sea from marine litter!*

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| **PROJECT TITLE** | **COMMON – COastal Management and MOnitoring Network for tackling marine litter in Mediterranean sea** |
| **IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD** | 03.09.2019–02.09.2022 |
| **ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED** | **LEAD BENEFICIARY** Legambiente Onlus (Italy)<br>**PROJECT PARTNERS** National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technologies (Tunisia); International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies - Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (Italy); Amwaj of the Environment (Lebanon); University of Siena (Italy); Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (Lebanon); High Institute of Agronomy of Sousse University (Tunisia) |
| **PROGRAMME** | Mediterranean Sea Basin ENI CBC 2014-2020 |
| **TOTAL BUDGET** | EUR 2.223.421 |
| **PROGRAMME FINANCING** | EUR 2.001.079 |
| **PROGRAMME PRIORITY** | Incorporate the Ecosystem-based management approach to ICZM into local development planning |
| **THEMATIC OBJECTIVE** | Environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation (TO6) |
| **THEMATIC INDICATOR** | Newly adopted integrated strategies and tools for sustainable management of coastal areas<br>Number of coastal cities, relevant public authorities and other key stakeholders adopting |

*The information provided is subject to changes during the project's lifetime. Please refer to the project's website for the latest updates.*

*"Marine litter is a serious problem in our region; unfortunately, this topic is still given little importance by policy makers. We have a common problem across the region and we need a common solution to it".*

Dr. Nahed, Project Manager at the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (Lebanon).

Marine litter (human-created waste deliberately or accidentally thrown into the sea) is rapidly becoming one of the main marine pollution sources, with serious negative consequences for living organisms, marine ecosystems, human health and coastal activities, including tourism and fisheries.

In the Mediterranean Sea, a semi-enclosed sea with a large concentration of population and massive exploitation of natural resources in coastal areas, the problem of marine litter is increasing. It is an issue best addressed by a cross-border, multi-institutional and multi-stakeholder approach at basin level. In this context, the ENI CBC MED Programme represents a unique opportunity to study and address adequate solutions, and it is doing so through the COMMON project. This initiative aims at enhancing the capacity of public authorities in monitoring and managing the marine litter problem in five coastal areas: Tyre (Lebanon), Maremma and Northern Puglia (Italy), Kuriat Island and Monastir (Tunisia). These areas are implementing an integrated coastal zones management (ICZM) approach, directly engaging citizens in marine litter removal activities, and exchanging good practices and experiences among local institutions at Mediterranean level. Partners are building a network of coastal cities, researchers and civil society organizations tackling marine litter under the slogan "WE ARE ALL MED".

Many people are expected to profit from this project. Researchers and scientists will benefit from harmonised data collection schemes and analysis protocols related to marine litter. Policy makers and environmental protection agencies will have access to detailed data on the problem. The civil society will gain new perspectives on marine litter management, while fishermen will be supported in reducing the impact of human-created sea waste on their livelihoods.

COMMON is now in the first phase of implementation, and there is still a lot to be done. Marine litter comes to a great extent from land sources, but also from fishery itself, for example when fishing gear is discarded or lost, the so called "ghost nets", thus endangering non-commercial fish species, like sea turtles, and big marine mammals like dolphins and seals. The work under this project includes the collection of marine litter and fish samples, to be analysed in quality and quantity. The toxicological analysis of certain wild fish life as well as edible species (the so called "indicator species"), can provide evidence of the degree of impact of litter both on the marine environment and on human health: the extent to which food chains are affected will also be analysed.

But marine litter is not the only focus of COMMON. During the World Turtle Day (on 23 May 2020), after weeks of care and assistance, two turtles which were victim of accidental capture were returned to the sea in Monastir by the Tunisian partner (INSTM). As part of the event, the lead beneficiary launched the COMMON Turtle Quiz to test people's knowledge of sea turtles' world (A link to the quiz can be found here: https://bit.ly/TurtleQuiz_Eng).

Needless to add that tourism, an important economic sector in the Mediterranean, is also both a source and a victim of marine litter. COMMON brings together tour operators, tourists and local authorities, confronting them with awareness campaigns about a "Good practices dec-

alogue". Tour operators and service providers will be involved in country-specific contests to assess the sustainability of their services, such as the use of disposable plastic items. Last but not least, citizens, local associations and schools are engaged in the Citizen Science Activities. An online platform has already been made available: https://volontaripernatura.greenproject.info/common/site/

As the project is still in its early stages, the COVID-19 outbreak has fortunately had only limited impact on its activities. However, the pandemic countermeasures might have a significant negative effect on marine ecosystems; millions of disposable protective items, such as masks and gloves, might end up in the Mediterranean Sea. And, unfortunately, the first cases were already recorded: COMMON awareness campaigns are including development in their topics.

Marine litter reduction and removal is almost a Sisyphean task that will need decades of hard work. Yet the COMMON project has laid down some initial stepping stones in a long path of coordinated actions all over the Mediterranean.

According to Ms. Sana Ben Ismail from the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technologies (Tunisia), "COMMON is a very interesting project because it gives me the opportunity, as a researcher, to leave my laboratory and to go to the field and to contact people. This communication link between scientists and local communities is sometimes missing. In the future, emphasis should be given not only on research and innovation, but also on start-ups, small enterprises and plastic recycling units, attacking the marine litter problem through different angles".

# Looking ahead

## The environmental dimension in the post-2020 programming period

# From the UN Development Goals to the EU Cohesion Policy post-2020

*While environmental sustainability is contained in all Sustainable Development Goals, seven of them address environment head-on.*

Environment and climate change are considered crucial in helping the EU meet its commitments to implement the Paris Agreement and reach the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**. At an internal level, the future Cohesion Policy aligns with the European Green Deal presented in late 2019, promoting a green transition, with reduction of emissions, increased environmental research and innovation on green solutions and natural environment protection. To render these intentions concrete, Cohesion Policy programmes are expected to contribute at least 25% of their budget to supporting climate-related objectives. The 2021-2027 programming period is currently under preparation and the key regulations will be common to both internal and external CBC programmes, taking still into account, where necessary, the specificities of Neighbourhood programmes. While the debate is still ongoing and neither the priorities nor their implementation lines are set in stone, numerous indications are available about the environmental orientation of the future CBC programmes. The EU framework for Cohesion Policy post-2020 contains five policy objectives (PO). Relevant to environment is **PO2: "A greener low-carbon Europe and its neighbourhood"**, promoting a greener, carbon-free Europe and Partner Countries, contributing to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and investing in energy transition, clean renewables and the fight against climate change. During the debate, PO2 has gained more and more importance and in the last weeks of 2020 it became compulsory for all the future CBC programmes.




The ERDF Regulation, which is relevant also to Interreg, breaks down PO2 in seven specific objectives:

- Energy efficiency
- Renewable energy
- Smart energy systems and grids
- Climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience
- Sustainable water management
- Transition towards a circular economy
- Protection of biodiversity, promotion of green infrastructure and pollution reduction




These seven specific objectives correspond well to the TOs under ENI CBC. Moreover, Annex I of this Regulation introduces a number of common outputs and result indicators that can, and in part must, be used by Interreg NEXT programmes. While these indicators offer a good starting point, additional indicators might be needed to capture the coordination, capacity building and governance effects created by territorial cooperation.

To reflect the specific approach and impact of Interreg programmes, including Interreg NEXT, the draft Interreg Regulation contains two Interreg-specific objectives (ISO).



**ISO 1**

**"A better cooperation governance for Europe and its neighbourhood"**

For environmental issues, cross-border governance under ISO1 is essential and can relate to coordinated implementation of international and national policies, joint monitoring of environmental trends and risk management, coordinated response to disasters and events affecting security and safety and development of know-how and capacity. Last but not least, the inclusion of civil society is crucial; the potential of cross-border public participation needs to be further explored.



**ISO 2**

**"A safer and more secure Europe and its neighbourhood."**

Under ISO 2, Interreg NEXT programmes can focus on health issues, especially in relation to disaster management, contagious diseases and pandemics, for example in form of common or harmonised protocols, tracking and alert mechanisms, integrated monitoring at border crossings and joint capacity building.

For both ISO 1 and ISO 2 useful lessons learnt can be drawn from those ENI CBC programmes that address environmental topics, especially under TO 5 and TO 8. While waiting for the outcome of the negotiations on the regulatory package post-2020, the coronavirus outbreak has strongly put on the table the need to be flexible and strategic.

# Adapting to future challenges, the coronavirus lesson

In March 2020 the COVID-19 virus swept over the entire globe. Outdoor activities ceased as one country after another went in a more or less strict lockdown. The ENI CBC projects dealing with environment were also affected in many ways. Cooperation among partners shifted to the internet, events and workshops were cancelled, field work was postponed and project extensions were requested.

## LESSONS LEARNT AT PROJECT LEVEL

**A large number of physical meetings can be replaced by virtual meetings with little loss of quality.** While this discovery is not unique to environmental projects, such an approach has important environmental benefits, especially in programme areas with large distances or poor low carbon options.

**Environmental projects rely on field work.** The field work is usually related either to a) in-situ field data collection and b) construction works. In both cases, contingency plans need to be included in the project planning. In the case of field data collection, the use of remote sensing and surveillance equipment needs to be integrated. Where this is impossible, the experts need to be trained in dealing with contagious environments and protocols need to be adapted. In the case of construction works, it is necessary to introduce risk management approaches and distinguish delays caused from unexpected events such as COVID-19 from the usual delays encountered in infrastructure projects. For example, when field works pause, attention could be drawn in progressing with permits and licenses.

**The success of environmental projects depends also on communication, field campaigns, demonstration and outreach.** While some of these elements can be served by electronic media, it is still necessary to engage with local communities in "real-life" actions, such as wild-life observation, litter cleaning actions, etc; it is not wise to downgrade or postpone all field communication activities. Instead, projects could capitalise on the experience gathered since February 2020 on how such events can be organised without jeopardising health and safety of the participants.

But also programmes needed to adapt. Lockdowns and closing of national borders were a blow at the core of cross-border cooperation. Interreg NEXT programmes could consider expanding their thematic spectrum, especially in relation to capacity building, risk preparedness and environmental monitoring to include contagious diseases management. They could also introduce a new approach to how projects are handling cooperation and communication and introduce relevant sections in their manuals and application forms.

# Interreg NEXT projects as path setters

Looking ahead, Interreg NEXT programmes will continue being a special type of programmes. They cover big areas with relatively small funds. In spite of this, they are expected and required to achieve much more than in the past. While programmes need to respond to the specific needs of their areas, the UN framework and the EU strategies need also to be addressed as a good practice and as a future orientation aid.

At ground level, Interreg NEXT programmes could:

- Help create awareness for climate change adaptation approaches at local level,
- Introduce educational components for example in relation to the circular economy,
- Kick-off patterns of cooperation for example in risk prevention and disaster response,
- Demonstrate applications adapted to the local conditions related to energy efficiency and renewable energy,
- Establish common areas of biodiversity protection and promote green border crossings for flora and fauna.

Projects are therefore expected to be path-setters and help communities get together over the EU's external borders.