

Interreg Europe DETOCS Project Newsletter 2

Exchange of Experience Event in Seinäjoki

From the 8th-9th November 2023, the project consortium and stakeholders of the Interreg Europe project, **DETOCS – DEcarbonising the TOURism Industry Post Covid-19 Support**, convened in Seinäjoki, Finland for an exchange of experience event followed by a Steering Committee meeting. At the event, which was jointly hosted by **Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (RCSO)** and **Thermopolis Ltd.**, partners shared their initial results from their regional PESTEL and SWOT analyses, selecting key points to be included into the joint thematic survey. Partners and their stakeholders were also introduced to several good practices from the region of South Ostrobothnia.



Prior to the knowledge exchange event, partners convened to provide suggestions and solutions for weaknesses identified through the regional analyses. Analyses were revised before the second exchange of experience event in Finland, so they could improve their solutions in advance and put forth their initial ideas for good practices.

The exchange of experience event included site visits to the Kuortane Olympic center, which has the target to achieve carbon neutrality by 2027, and a presentation of energy efficient systems in the Hotel Alma and Kalevan Navetta. Participants of the event learned about the virtual tourism projects of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences onsite as well, an exemplary good practice in using virtual reality to enhance the travelers' experiences.



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Upcoming News

Next partner meeting and Exchange of Experience Event to take place on 15-16 May 2024 in Malta

Project Budget

Total Budget: €1,980,883.00
 Interreg Funds: €1,567,416.40

Timeline

01 March 2023 – 31 May 2027



Co-funded by
the European Union



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Regional Stakeholders' Meetings

In each partner country, regional stakeholders' meetings are held on a biannual basis in order to share project progress and results at each stage of the project, engaging key players in decarbonising the tourism industry at the local, regional and national from the very start of the project and ultimately ensuring the sustainability of DETOCS.

A main goal of the biannual regional stakeholders' meetings is to identify political, economic, legal, social, natural and technological challenges, and problems hindering the decarbonisation of the tourism sector—as well as any existing good practices in the region—from the input of key stakeholders. By involving stakeholders from the very start of the project, the consortium aims to ensure the longevity of the DETOCS project.

Regional Updates

The DETOCS project consortium consists of 13 project partners and 1 advisory partner from 9 different European countries. Project partners from Slovenia, Greece, Malta, Finland, Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary and the Netherlands have continued to make progress in identifying good practices for sustainable tourism.

The following section outlines partners' progress within DETOCS through their SWOT & PESTEL analyses (i.e., frameworks used to identify and monitor macro-environmental factors for a given partner region), developed and enhanced through biannual regional stakeholders' meetings. The goal of the regional analyses is to identify and closely analyse the policy instruments addressed as well as other policies and instruments relevant for the decarbonisation of the tourism sector.



Slovenia

The DETOCS project is led by the **Local Energy Agency Spodnje Podravje (LEASP)**, located in the municipality of Ptuj (pictured above). LEASP's SWOT analysis of Slovenia's sustainable development in the touristic sector highlights various aspects of the nation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Regional stakeholders were engaged through direct contact, ensuring comprehensive insights. Slovenia's strengths lie in its pioneering efforts in sustainable tourism development. Slovenia integrates energy efficiency measures and embraces digitalisation to not only foster local and regional growth, but also to safeguard its rich cultural heritage.

Despite the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Slovenia is strategically positioned to leverage opportunities in the tourism sector. Investments in sustainable accommodation infrastructure and digital transitions, and the utilisation of incentives for tourism development, align with global trends, providing avenues for post-pandemic prosperity. However, Slovenia faces certain weaknesses that demand strategic

attention. Disparities in digital literacy, outdated tourist infrastructure, and the complexity of regulations pertaining to renewable energy and heritage preservation underscore areas requiring focused planning and intervention.

The delicate balance between heritage preservation and energy efficiency poses a significant threat to Slovenia's sustainable development goals. Regulatory and technological challenges in harmonising these aspects highlight the need for streamlined processes and collaboration among stakeholders to overcome administrative hurdles. Moving forward, collaboration among stakeholders is imperative to address the identified challenges effectively. Streamlining regulations, investing in digital literacy initiatives, and exploring innovative financing options are essential steps toward mitigating weaknesses while preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainability.

Greece

Tourism is the major industry in Crete, Greece, having a share higher than 50% in the regional domestic product, while it contributes significantly in the creation of new jobs. The **Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (CIHEAM MAICH)**, as the technical partner, and the **Region of Crete**, as the policy maker authority, work together to develop the region's **SWOT analysis**, identifying several internal and external factors which positively or negatively affect the green energy transition of the local tourism industry. The SWOT and PESTEL analysis for Crete was presented at the second regional stakeholders' meeting on 23 February 2024 at CIHEAM MAICH, which was attended by various stakeholders from academic and research institutions as well as public and private bodies.



More specifically, Mr. Angelakis Georgios from CIHEAM-MAICh presented the DETOCS project, highlighting the expected results and the progress made so far. The external collaborator in the project, Dr. Vourdoubas Ioannis, followed up by referring to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as well as the social, economic, environmental, political, technological and legal issues in the energy and tourism sector, while Mr. Lygouris Konstantinos and Mr. Konstantinos Georgios from the consulting company, Innoveco, presented a platform for measuring the energy footprint in hospitality spaces.

Malta

The **University of Malta** and the **Ministry for Tourism and Public Cleanliness** are working together to involve different stakeholders from the tourism industry, experts and NGOs in order to provide a holistic approach to the decarbonisation process in the tourism sector. Their joint efforts proved successful with the hosting of another stakeholders' meeting on 7 February 2024, during which key players from government entities, public authorities, business associations and academia gathered in Valletta, Malta.



In preparation for the second regional stakeholders' meeting, a detailed online questionnaire was shared among stakeholders to identify the level of importance, urgency and feasibility of all the 92 points previously identified through the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis.

Two online sessions were organised on 29 September 2023 and 10 January 2024 in order to answer any queries and support stakeholders in this important task. The goal of the sessions were to identify the priority areas that the project should focus its efforts on for the next two years.

If fostered, the opportunities can potentially become examples of good practice, while the weaknesses can be addressed through changes in policy or other appropriate actions. The results from Malta's Eisenhower Matrix analysis are available [here](#) on the Interreg Europe DETOCS project website.

Finland

In Finland, **Thermopolis Ltd.** (Energy Agency of the South Ostrobothnia) is supporting the **Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (RCSO)** in identifying relevant improvements to achieve emission reductions in the tourism sector to be included in the improved Regional Strategy. The local stakeholder group met for a second time in September to further develop the SWOT and PESTEL analysis.



South Ostrobothnia, Finland (photo credits: G-R Mottez grmot)

One of the questions tackled at the meeting was, "What are the threshold issues and challenges for promoting responsible tourism?" The following were some of the pressing issues mentioned by the stakeholders: (1) high prices and high interest rate; (2) the importance of public transportation and complementary timetables versus the lack of these; (3) the need to find and encourage synergies between regional operators; (4) the unstable global situation, (5) staying up to date on green tourism and digital issues especially amongst smaller operators; (6) the need for behaviour guidance with potentially increasing numbers of tourist in relation to trash, and energy efficiency, etc.; (7) and green washing versus actual greening.

These topics have provided a good basis for the SWOT and PESTEL analysis of the South Ostrobothnia region. The analysis will be presented to the Climate Working Group of the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia in order to gain further relevant input.



South Ostrobothnia, Finland (photo credits: Iltta Lahti)

Current Opportunities for SME Financing in Burgas

This March in Burgas, the Municipality of Burgas, in partnership with DIGIHUB (Southeast Digital Innovation Hub) and ICT Cluster Burgas, hosted a discussion with local tourism-related businesses on the topic, "Current Opportunities for SME Financing in Burgas: Business Development and Green Growth." Presented at the meeting was the open procedure for financing projects for energy efficiency in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) up to €10,000 per project under the EENergy programme, along with other opportunities for business development using funds from the European Union. The attendees were also introduced to the opportunities for energy efficiency and remote monitoring of electricity for SMEs.



DETOCS in the News

The regional activities of the Municipality of Campobasso within the DETOCS project have been recognised on numerous occasions by the press. Check out this [online version](#) of one news article, which was also printed as a newspaper and distributed throughout the Molise region, published in February 2024.



Third Exchange of Experience Event of the DETOCS project

Project partners and stakeholders will convene on 15-16 May 2024 for a third exchange of experience event and Steering Committee meeting in Valletta, Malta. Valletta's 320 monuments make it one of the most concentrated historic areas in the world — and an excellent location to exchange on good practices in the field of green tourism in the post-pandemic climate.

The purpose of the experience exchange event is to discuss the identified key priorities for each region, share experiences and elaborate on the best strategies to address them. The event will be jointly hosted by the **University of Malta** and Malta's **Ministry for Tourism and Public Cleanliness**.

Pictured above is the Blue Grotto in Zurrieq, Malta, a natural Cave in the sea visited by around 100,000 tourists every year (Photo Credits: Ministry for Tourism and Public Cleanliness)

Italy

The tourism sector is particularly influenced by the effects of climate change — especially in a region like Molise, which offers rich natural landscapes as its main points of attraction. Meanwhile, European policies such as the EU Green Deal indicate ambitious decarbonisation objectives to be achieved by 2050, while simultaneously encouraging the strengthening of planning tools useful for supporting sustainable development of infrastructure and territory. For this reason, the **Municipality of Campobasso** has become a partner of the Interreg Europe DETOCS project.

In order to engage regional stakeholders, a meeting was held on 27 February 2024 in Campobasso, Italy. At the meeting, the first phase of the SWOT analysis conducted within the DETOCS project was presented ([see the SWOT analysis results](#)). Present at the stakeholder meeting were representatives of the local tourism sector, who were called upon by the municipality to act as spokespeople green tourism in the region.



Bulgaria

The second Bulgarian stakeholder event of the DETOCS project, "Investments in RES - Opportunities & Challenges", was held on 20 February 2024 in Burgas. The event programme was centred on how investment projects in renewable energy sources (RES) could help the **Burgas Municipality** on its way to a sustainable energy community with an environmentally responsible tourism sector.

Experts and representatives of public administrations and the tourism sector, NGOs, energy agencies, and SME associations discussed how investment projects in the field of renewable energy sources can help the Municipality of Burgas towards a sustainable energy society with an environmentally responsible tourism sector.

Attendees were also introduced to opportunities for financing SMEs for implementing measures to improve energy efficiency and reduce overall energy costs in their facilities, as well as the steps to obtain the



international Green Key certificate — a leading standard for excellence in environmental responsibility and sustainable operations in the tourism sector.

The event (*pictured above*) initiated a public debate on the topic how RES projects could be deployed in the touristic sector, good practices in this area, stakeholder involvement, and what needs to be done at policy level.

The Municipality of Burgas as policy partner within DETOCS is supported by the technical partner, **Regional Energy Agency of Pazardzhik (REAP)**, an association of local authorities from Pazardzhik province.

Hungary

The SWOT analysis for Hungary was prepared by the **Central Danube Development Agency Nonprofit Ltd. (CDDA)**. In terms of policy, energy modernisation appears to be a significant solution, both at the conceptual and strategic level and at the level of operational programming (i.e., sectoral, national and county level). Within the economic context, the rise in energy prices has been positive for greening, encouraging all users to save and raising awareness of the importance of investing in energy efficiency — although in many cases frugality has led to temporary or permanent suspension of activities and/or significant restrictions on the available services.

Environmental awareness is becoming increasingly popular among tourism operators —not only in terms of reducing energy costs, but also in the potential of "green communication". However, behaviour change is still in its early stages, with waste

The second regional stakeholders' meeting in Hungary hosted by CDDA Ltd. — [read more](#)



still present in hotels and spas (i.e., high levels of energy consumption associated with the operation of hotel buildings and the generation of food and municipal waste associated with hotel services).

Overall, it can be concluded that one of the most important tasks in the period ahead will be to spread a green attitude towards all actors in the tourism sector, on one hand through education, and on the other hand through the promotion of green accommodation and service providers through conscious promotion and media support.

The Netherlands

In November 2023, the **Municipality of Middelburg**, alongside DETOCS stakeholder “Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed” (RCE), organised a four-day exhibition with the theme, “Sustainable monuments within reach”. The RCE is a national body within the Department of Education, Science and Culture in The Netherlands and specialises in how to make (national) monuments and traditional buildings sustainable. The exhibition took place mainly in a medieval church (*pictured right, photo credits: Municipality of Middelburg*) in the historic city center of Middelburg. The interactive provided citizens with information about ventilation, heating, isolation and solar power through informative videos. As the tourism season ends in October, the exhibition was timed so governmental hospitality and tourism branches could visit. More than 100 entrepreneurs were in attendance of the multi-faceted event.

Why DETOCS?

The Interreg Europe project, **DETOCS – DEcarbonising the TOURism Industry Post Covid-19 Support** – aims to support the recovery of EU tourism infrastructure sector following the Covid-19 pandemic, amidst the energy crisis, in a sustainable and low carbon way. In doing so, DETOCS complies with EU long-term policies for the decarbonisation of the economy. During the project implementation, good practices for sustainable tourism will be identified and exchanged amongst partner regions in Slovenia, Greece, Malta, Finland, Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary and the Netherlands; meanwhile, project partners will aim to improve related policy in their regions through capacity building in the participating regions and the adoption of policies proven to be successful in other regions.

DETOCS contributes to EU Cohesion Policy, and specifically to the “Policy Objective 2 (PO2): A greener, low-carbon Europe”, as it promotes clean and sustainable energy transition of tourism infrastructure. The four-year DETOCS project has a total budget of €1,980,883.00, with €1,567,416.40 provided by Interreg Funds.



Elfi-Tech as Advisory Partner

In addition to the 13 project partners of the project, the DETOCS project invites 1 advisory partner—the **European Institute for Innovation - Technology (Elfi-Tech)**— to support the partners in project communication & dissemination. Additionally, Elfi-Tech supports the partnership in designing, promoting partners’ engagement in, implementing, and monitoring project activities, including the SWOT and PESTEL regional analyses.

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Project Partnership



Local energy agency Spodnje Podravje (SI) - Lead Partner

Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (CIHEAM MAICh) (EL)

Region of Crete (EL)

University of Malta (MT)

Ministry for Tourism and Public Cleanliness (MT)

Thermopolis Ltd. (FI)

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (FI)

Municipality of Campobasso (IT)

Regional Energy Agency - Pazardjik (BG)

Burgas Municipality (BG)

Central Danube Development Agency Nonprofit Ltd. (HU)

Middelburg Municipality (NL)

The European Institute for Innovation-Technology (DE)

