

Interreg Europe DETOCS Project Newsletter 3

Exchange of Experience Event in Malta

On 15-16 May 2024, the project consortium and stakeholders of the **Interreg Europe** project, **DETOCS – DEcarbonising the TOURism Industry Post Covid-19 Support**, held its third Interregional Exchange of Experience Event & Steering Group Meeting in Sliema, Malta. Representatives and stakeholders from the 8 participating partner regions gathered to share the findings of their regional Eisenhower Matrix analyses and explore various solutions aimed at the decarbonisation of the tourism sector in their respective regions. During the meeting, several common strengths and opportunities were identified among the partners.



waste water for irrigation, grows its own vegetables and herbs, and uses solar heating throughout the premises.

The second visit was to a state-of-the-art medium-sized hotel located in a historic city. The site's limitations were cleverly addressed by ensuring protection from solar overheating whilst maximising the benefits of diffuse natural sky illumination. It features high-efficiency water heating systems using heat pumps, smart control of all services, and a commitment to sourcing local foods. This hotel has been recognised for its sustainable practices through the Green Key Certificate.

Read more on findings from the third Exchange of Experience event on our [website](#).

The afternoon session included study visits to small, medium and large tourist establishments that have implemented effective energy solutions in their operations. One notable visit was to a family-run wellness guesthouse that has embraced the Energy, Water and Food Nexus. This guesthouse uses sustainable materials for building, collects rain water, reuses



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Upcoming News

Next partner meeting and Exchange of Experience Event to take place on 24-25 October 2024 in Crete, Greece

Project Budget

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

Timeline

01 March 2023 – 31 May 2027



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DETOCS



4th Exchange of Experience Event of the DETOCS project

Project partners and stakeholders will convene this October for a fourth exchange of experience event and Steering Committee meeting in Crete, Greece.

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 focus of the 4th exchange event, specifically, will be placed on the partners' presentation of proposed **good practices for sustainable tourism** in the partners' respective regions, which the consortium has been working to define since the project start through regional analyses (i.e., PESTEL/SWOT; Eisenhower Matrices, etc.).

The event will be hosted jointly by **Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (CIHEAM MAICh)**, as the technical partner, and the **Region of Crete**, as the policy maker authority, on 24-25 October 2024 in Chania, Crete.

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.

Slovenia

The DETOCS project is led by the **Local Energy Agency Spodnje Podravje (LEASP)**, located in Ptuj, Slovenia. At the 3rd Exchange of Experience Event in Malta, LEASP presented a potential good practice to be highlighted by the DETOCS project: *Contact Point RES*. This initiative gathered significant interest from other partners and stakeholders and will be showcased as a best practice in the coming months.



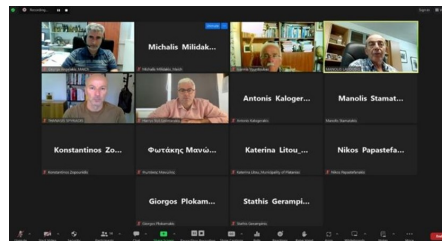
(Above) Lead Partner, LEASP, and their regional stakeholder from the Municipality of Ptuj, at the 3rd Exchange of Experience event in Malta

The Network of Local Energy Associations in Slovenia has teamed up with **BORZEN d.d** to establish a special contact point to promote renewable energy. This "Contact Point RES" aims to provide investors with important information to make it easier to invest in renewable energy. The Contact Point has the following roles: It helps investors secure the permits and consents needed for constructing, operating, or renovating renewable energy facilities. It also facilitates the connection of these facilities to the electricity grid and guides investors through the processes involved in renewable energy support programmes. The main goal of the Contact Point RES, initially intended for the private sector but opened up to the public sector, is to provide information and advice to investors, encouraging more investments in renewable energy.

Greece

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 represent Crete, Greece within DETOCS. Together, they hosted the third regional meeting with the stakeholders of Crete, held virtually on 28 June 2024 and attended by representatives from academic and research institutions, public and private bodies, the commercial and economic chamber, hotel owners, and other stakeholders of the DETOCS project. After a short presentation of the project, the results of the region's **SWOT/PESTEL analysis**, which identified several internal and external factors that affect the green energy transition of the local tourism industry, were presented.

During the discussion, the economic benefits of energy interventions both in the mechanical equipment and in the building envelope of the hotels were highlighted. The necessity for small-scale hotel units to participate in the energy transition to remain competitive compared to other hotel units was also emphasised. Based on this necessity, one hotel owner highlighted the difficulty he faces to get a bank loan for energy interventions, which is an obstacle for the energy transition of small-scale hotels. In addition, it was mentioned that the time for the approval of the loan is very long, and the banks usually require extremely high, almost restrictive turnovers as prerequisite to approve the loan. It was therefore proposed, under the umbrella of the Region of Crete, to claim and provide funds to these small hotels for the energy upgrade in specific categories of equipment such as air conditioning units, refrigerators, domestic hot water, etc.



Malta

Earlier this May, the **University of Malta** and the **Ministry for Tourism and Public Cleanliness** jointly hosted a successful interregional DETOCS exchange event in Malta, during which participants visited tourist establishments of various sizes: Mulberries Guesthouse in Zabbar, the Embassy Hotel



(Above) A visit to the Mulberries Guesthouse Wellbeing Chateau in Zabbar, Malta

in Valletta, and the Hilton Malta in St. Julians. Following was a visit to the recently renovated Maritime Museum and concluded with an 18th Century Corsair dinner featuring local produce and ancient recipes, courtesy of the **Malta Tourism Authority**. On the second day of the exchange, a number of potential good practice examples were presented by all partners — including the Energy and Water Agency “GUEST” project and the TSI project of the Malta Tourism Authority—which aim to define sustainability indicators for the tourism sector.

Both Maltese partners are continuing their engagement of regional stakeholders to identify good practices and ultimately change policy within the realm of sustainable tourism. The Maltese partners work 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 in Malta. The results from Malta’s Eisenhower Matrix analysis are available [here](#) on the Interreg Europe DETOCS project website.

Finland

Thermopolis Ltd. (Energy Agency of South Ostrobothnia) and the **Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia** have continued to work together to identify tourism challenges and find solutions in their region in Finland. A wide range of stakeholders have also been invited to participate in the collaboration.

In May, two stakeholders attended the Malta partner meeting and two potential good practices were presented. These practices



(Above) Third stakeholders’ meeting in South Ostrobothnia, Finland

were solutions to two weaknesses identified in the SWOT and PESTEL analyses. Weaknesses were lack of digital skills in SMEs and the availability of work force. Good practices were improving digital skills in tourism businesses project and a participatory multi-professional training pathway project. in order to gain further relevant input.

A third stakeholder meeting was held in August. In particular, the accessibility of the sites was raised in the debate. At present, for example, tourism companies can organise their own transport, but public transport is not available to many places. Seinäjoki is the regional centre of South Ostrobothnia, where many trains stop; however, from the Seinäjoki train station onwards to other municipalities, it becomes difficult to travel. Especially in summer, bicycles for hire alone could make it easier to reach nearby destinations, but such a service is not yet available in Seinäjoki. One solution could also be a carpooling app, which already exists, Matkalink. In South Ostrobothnia there are currently no rides available, so the app may not have been widely adopted yet. In other words, the solution already exists — all that is needed is more information.

Italy

Following the stakeholders’ meeting hosted by the **Municipality of Campobasso** on 27 February 2024 (pictured below), attendees were presented with the results of a comprehensive **SWOT & PESTEL analysis** aimed at driving sustainable tourism development in the Campobasso area. Key questions were submitted to stakeholders via a Google questionnaire, addressing critical economic, environmental, legal, political, social and technological factors.

The responses were then analysed using the



Eisenhower matrix, revealing that all proposed actions are both important and urgent. The analysis pinpointed the most pressing needs in Campobasso, highlighting the necessity to address environmental concerns, particularly through innovative policies targeting the decarbonisation of buildings, including tourist facilities. A significant focus falls on the creation of Energy Communities and incentives for installing solar panels, for example. Meanwhile, to promote renewable energy use and circumvent bureaucratic hurdles related to landscape con-

The Greek National Plan for Energy and Climate and the hotel sector

The provisional Greek National Plan for Energy and Climate is the main policy tool in Greece for the achievement of the green energy transition between 2025 and 2050. It includes several proposals and suggestions focusing on the reduction in energy consumption and the minimisation of carbon emissions in commercial buildings including hotel buildings.

These proposals will help the hotel industry to reduce its carbon footprint and increase its sustainability complying with the EU and national targets for climate change mitigation and the zeroing of the net-carbon emissions until 2050. The provisional Greek National Plan is going to be adopted soon probably with small changes.

The main proposals and suggestions of the Greek National Plan for Energy and Climate regarding the hotels’ buildings include:

1. Energy improvements in the buildings’ envelope increasing its thermal insulation,
2. Increasing use of high efficiency heat pumps for heating and cooling,
3. Installation of solar thermal systems for hot water production,
4. Use of solar photovoltaics for on-site power generation and self-consumption of the generated electricity, and
5. Installation of electric battery chargers to help the owners of electric vehicles to re-charge their electric batteries.

For more, view the article about the Greek National Plan for Energy and Climate and the hotel sector [here](#) on our website.



Potential solutions highlighted in Bulgaria

During the regional stakeholders' meeting of Bulgaria this August, DETOCS partners introduced and discussed with the invited stakeholders potential solutions from different regions that could become good practices and, ultimately, be multiplied in other urban areas, tourist sites and resorts.

A public debate was held on how renewable energy sources (RES) and energy efficiency (EE) projects could be deployed in the touristic sector, as well as on how the stakeholders from the Pazardzhik Province can take advantage of DETOCS results in order to stimulate the development of environmental and eco-friendly tourism in the province.

For more information on this productive third regional stakeholders' meeting, read the article [here](#) on the DETOCS website.

Pictured above: The famous pink salt flats of Burgas

straits, Campobasso is developing Renewable Energy Communities. The concerted efforts in Campobasso highlight a strong commitment to sustainable tourism development, with a clear focus on environmental stewardship, enhanced connectivity, and collaborative governance. These initiatives are set to transform the area into a model of sustainable and innovative tourism. Read more [here](#) on our website.

Bulgaria

The third Bulgarian stakeholders' event (pictured below) was held on 2 August 2024 at the municipal building of **Peshtera**, Bulgaria. This time, the event took place on the territory of the technical partner **Regional Energy Agency of Pazardzhik (REAP)**, which falls within the Province of Pazardzhik, while the DETOCS policy partner, **Burgas Municipality**, joined online.

Experts from REAP presented the main objectives of the project, its progress, including mainly good practices of green tourism projects from Malta and Finland. Experts from Burgas Municipality provided an overview of the political instruments which has to be improved during the DETOCS project, and briefly introduced their main objectives within the project.

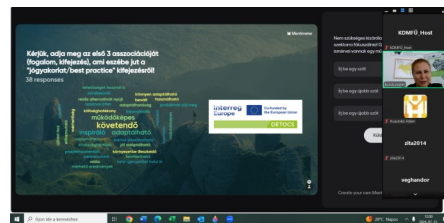


A wide range of stakeholders was invited to take part in the event as public administrations (Peshtera, Pazardzhik, and Burgas), as well as civil organisations ([Association CSEG](#)), energy agencies, social officers, and SMEs' representative, **NEST**.

DETOCS is particularly relevant to stakeholders from the Pazardzhik Province and Peshtera Municipality, as the region is famous for its mountainous and spa resorts, and therefore is a popular touristic destination to many Bulgarian and Balkan visitors.

Hungary

The third regional stakeholders' meeting in Hungary took place online on 31 July 2024. There were around 30 participants at the online workshop, titled "Sustainability (Green) Efforts, Local Good Practices"; attendees included representatives of local



hotels, municipalities, spas and other touristic attractions. During the event, Hungarian DETOCS partner, the **Central Danube Development Agency Nonprofit Ltd. (CDDA)**, reported the results of the DETOCS project so far to the stakeholders; this included the Eisenhower matrix analyses, updates from the Interregional Exchange of Experience Event in Malta, and presentations of local good practices.

The programme consisted of an introduction of a sustainable hotel, Irota EcoLodge – the first and only climate neutral resort in Hungary – as well a sustainable thermal bath, Zalakaros Spa. The final potential good practice presented was sustainable municipality, Tamási. Following these inspirational presentations, the future challenges and objectives of the DETOCS project were discussed.

The Netherlands

How can virtual tourism contribute to decarbonising the tourism industry in The Netherlands? This is the initial question for research on the wide range on initiatives of virtual tourism that have emerged the last few years, which is due to the technological possibilities that have been growing the last few years and will keep on growing. Virtual tourism has been around already for decades, but it received a massive boost as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides the general research on the different forms of virtual tourism, Dutch DETOCS partner, the **Municipality of Middelburg**, has looked into what kind of virtual tourism have been applied in the historic city of Middelburg and by whom.

What is virtual tourism actually? Virtual tourism can be described as exploring travel destinations, attractions and experiences through digital technologies – such as virtual reality, augmented reality, 360-degree videos and online platforms – without being physically present on location. Especially not being present on location is interesting for the issue of decarbonisation. Terms like Augmented Reality, Mixed Reality, Extended Reality, Virtual Reality, Immersive experiences, 3D projections, and "time-travelling" are frequently used within this realm and can be confusing. To start, essential to virtual tourism is both Augmented Reality (AR) as well as Virtual Reality (VR).

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Firstly, AR makes the invisible visible. With AR, reality becomes enriched with information and images; the “real world” doesn’t disappear, as it does with VR. To use VR for virtual tourism, one requires VR headsets to experience these virtual worlds and almost disappear into them.



Virtual tourism and tours create the opportunity for people all over the world to “visit” a place to experience the culture and surroundings without actually travelling there — for example, one can visit the “Kuiperspoort” of Middelburg in the 17th century (*pictured in the image to the left*). VR tourism is particularly relevant for people with mobility disabilities.

Further, virtual tourism can help in the decision-making process of whether one should travel to a certain place or not; this decision-making is a part of the customer journey, with the phases of awareness, consideration, purchase, retention and advocacy, in purchasing a tourism product. Virtual tourism can also contribute to the reduction of mass tourism. For these reasons, the Municipality of Middelburg is exploring virtual tourism as a potential good practice solution for sustainable tourism within the scope of the Interreg Europe DETOCS project.

Why DETOCS?

The Interreg Europe **DETOCS – DEcarbonising the TOURism Industry Post Covid-19 Support** project 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.



(Pictured above: Biking through Ptuj, Slovenia)

Elfi-Tech as Advisory Partner

In addition to the 12 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)

