

The RSC project enters its final year

The three-year RSC project, co-funded by INTERREG IVC, is a partnership of 12 organisations from eight EU member states, promoting an EU-wide shift to climate-friendly economies.

As the project enters its final year, the main outputs are being finalised: a low-carbon indicators toolkit measuring the success of climate change mitigation policies; a discussion paper on integrating climate change issues into strategic environmental assessments; and an analysis of the carbon emissions-related aspects of three European regions' economies. The final project output, a methodological handbook, will assist other European regions aiming to achieve low-carbon status.

RSC partners: Cornwall Council

- Cornwall Development Company (UK)
- Commune of Wrocław (PL)
- University of Debrecen, Centre for Environmental Management and Policy (HU)
- LaMoRo Development Agency (IT)
- Liguria Region (IT)
- La Rioja Region (SP)
- Marche Region (IT)
- Malta Environment and Planning Authority
- Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works
- Burgenland Regional Management (AU)
- Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (HU)

Signpost

A relevant dream

“Existence is no more than the precarious attainment of relevance in an intensely mobile flux of past, present, and future”, wrote the American novelist Susan Sontag.

Our RSC project proved its relevance two years ago, when it was awarded funds to encourage regions on the path towards sustainable change. Much has been done since then: people have met to exchange ideas; ideas have evolved into concrete tools; a partnership has become a friendship; and the message of change has spread.

The project is now preparing for its final, crucial lap, at the end of which the seeds of change that have been sown will be reaped, or ... forgotten, as one forgets a dream within a dream.



SERGEI GOLOVKIN: formerly of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority

So the question remains: Is what we are doing still relevant? Can we continue to make a meaningful difference in the face of economic uncertainty, budget cuts, bad debts, carbon price crashes and austerity measures? Is a low-carbon future still relevant, when millions are protesting on the streets over job losses, wage freezes and the extension of retirement age?

The RSC project does not attempt to answer this question. Instead, it presents concrete tools and opportunities for those who choose to answer in the affirmative. Thus the project does maintain its relevance and sends out a strong message embedded in all its deliverables.

The macro-economic analysis carried out in three partner regions indicates that regions can build and are building a low-carbon climate-confident future, seizing economic opportunities along the way. Another RSC deliverable shows that regions are using traditional environmental assessment tools and developing new methods to integrate climate change into policies, plans, programmes and projects. And then there is the RSC flagship product — the Regional Climate Confidence Index (RCCI), which, like the proverbial mirror on the wall, displays the strengths on which we must build and the weaknesses that must be addressed.

But just as the human soul does not reside within a single organ, the project's value is not confined to its deliverables. This value permeates our partnership, revealing itself in inspiring ideas and discussions among colleagues who have become friends.

Having had the opportunity to contribute to the RSC initiative, I am now facing my own, personal change and must prove my relevance in a new challenge. But just as a part of the RSC experience will continue to live in me, I am confident that the fruits of our partnership will remain relevant long after the project is over.

Sergei Golovkin, Malta Environment and Planning Authority's RSC project manager until the end of November 2010

The views expressed in this guest editorial represent those of the author and not those of the RSC.





PICTURES FROM THE PARTNER REGIONS: Burgenland, Austria; the Eden Project, Cornwall, UK; Vacratot Botanical Gardens, Hungary

Measuring progress towards climate-friendly economic development

The Low-Carbon Indicators Toolkit was created by the RSC project to inspire and assist RSC and other European regions to review existing low-carbon indicators and develop new ones. Regular monitoring of indicators allows countries and regions to identify their strengths and weaknesses in regional climate change policy. Policy makers can then undertake informed institutional and policy measures, enhancing their capacity to mitigate climate change and improve the carbon performance of their economies.

The toolkit comprises two modules: a low-carbon indicators library and the RCCI.

The library contains resources on existing low-carbon indicator sets and sustainable development indicator sets that partially focus on climate change. In addition to background and methodological descriptions, it shows

how indicators can be used in local, regional or national settings. It also contains sets of indicators relevant for measuring climate-friendly economic development. Finally, users can find information on developing, measuring, reviewing, interpreting and monitoring low-carbon indicators. The library features a search engine and hyperlinks that enable easy access to additional information about indicators in which a region is interested.

The RCCI, developed to assess RSC regions' ability to manage climate change issues, can be used by other European regions to evaluate their capacity to move towards a low-carbon economy. As well as assessing regions' status and progress, the RCCI explains the results and scoring methodology. It includes five elements:

Questionnaire: a quantitative assessment of emissions and energy performance, and a qualitative assessment of policies, institutional capacity, sociopolitical awareness and financial means for climate change measures.

Results: The RCCI calculates a score, displayed in table and graphic format.

Understanding the results:

The implications of high/low scores for each issue are explained.

Improving the results: Policy actions and case studies show how other regions have achieved good scores in the RCCI.

Scoring methodology: Explains the methodology for calculating scores.

A test version of the toolkit was presented in Ancona in November 2010, and the official launch is planned for March 2011.

Dora Almassy



EXCHANGE OF VIEWS: Participants at the capacity-building workshop in Ancona

Improving regional authorities' skills

The RSC project's second capacity-building workshop aimed to help regional authorities, policy makers and evaluators to better understand the role of indicators in assessing the success of their regions' climate change/low-carbon/energy policies. The event, hosted by Marche region, took place on November 3-4, 2010 in Ancona, Italy.

Participants were shown existing indicator sets and exchanged ideas on improving their monitoring processes. The EC gave an update on recent policy developments and participants learned

about the experiences of Hungary and Piedmont and Marche regions in monitoring climate change objectives in regional policies. Examples from outside the RSC, such as the French footprinting tool NECATER, were also presented. West Midlands Regional Observatory (UK) presented the opportunities created by a low-carbon economy, and an index of economic wellbeing was also highlighted.

The event focused on the RSC's online low-carbon indicators toolkit, developed to help European regions evaluate their capacities to manage climate change

"The EU Presidency of Hungary, starting on January 1, 2011, will make every effort to combat climate change and strengthen energy safety and energy efficiency as top priorities. Participation in the RSC project is fully in line with these aims. At the same time, utilising its experience and results represents a valuable contribution by the region to the implementation of the presidency's goals."

Conclusion of RSC stakeholder meeting, October 7, 2010, University of Debrecen, Hungary

"The RSC project will provide valuable insight for Cornwall Development Company, particularly in relation to the economic analysis of the carbon-related emissions of three regional economies. The study will provide a valuable evidence base allowing the prioritisation of actions based on their cost-effectiveness and will be used to guide decision making and to ensure that the low-carbon initiatives supported are those that can achieve the best outcomes for the region."

Stuart Farmer, Cornwall Development Company, UK

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adaptation and mitigation in their territory and economy. With a facilitator, partners explored the toolkit modules and gave their opinions on its structure and content. The Bulgarian application of the RCCI was presented and the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability demonstrated their own methods for measuring the success of climate/energy policies. The AER peer review is an energy audit that monitors the quality of regional energy policies; while ICLEI has developed guidance on GHG emissions, allowing a comparison of regional data.

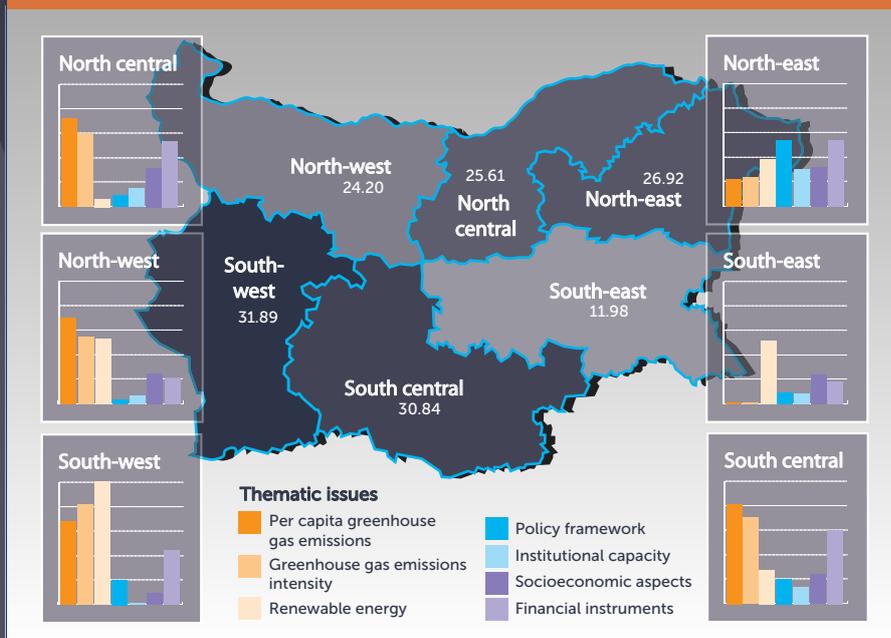
Venelina Varbova

The RCCI in Bulgarian monitoring

The Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (BMRDPW) implemented a pilot action focusing on the integration of the RCCI into the monitoring of regional development plans in Bulgaria. The task, coordinated by the BMRDPW and implemented by a team of external consultants, started with an analysis of the applicability and limitations of the original RCCI, taking into consideration the characteristics of the regional planning system in Bulgaria (at NUTS 2 level). After consultations with Bulgarian regional authorities, the Ministry of Environment and Waters, the BMRDPW and other relevant stakeholders, an adapted methodology for applying the index in Bulgaria was developed. The final report, presented at

a stakeholder meeting in November 2010, includes the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the pilot action. (The final report is available in English on the project website.) The seven original key issues of the RCCI remained unchanged in the adapted version, but the quantitative indicators for the first three issues were modified to make them compatible with the data available in the country. Following the adaptation of the calculation methodology, the quantitative data needed to enrich the information on the seven components were collected. Finally, the six NUTS 2 regions in Bulgaria were scored for the seven issues using the adapted methodology, and the results for each region were analysed.

RCCI scores for Bulgaria



Where did the RSC project appear in 2010?

May 21	Sixth European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns
June 11-12	Regional Studies Association's workshop "Ecological Regional Development"
October 5-8	Open days 2010, <i>Regional Review</i> magazine
November 17	Climate Strategies' Conference "Climate Mitigation and Energy Security in CEE Member States", Budapest, Hungary
November 26	Regional Studies Association's annual conference "Regions and Environment"



DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS: Malta aims to construct climate-proof policies

Climate proofing Maltese land-use planning

In the context of the RSC, the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) recently reviewed Maltese land-use planning structures and processes and developed recommendations for improving the system by taking greater account of climate change. All aspects of land-use planning were considered, including organisational aspects, planning policy, development control, and environmental impact assessment. The review focused on the potential of the planning system to promote better control of GHG emissions; and on adaptation potential.

Recommendations ranged from training and capacity building, to policy changes or modifications to current decision-making processes. The study exposed the limitations of traditional strategic

environmental assessment (SEA), which may not be sufficient to “climate proof” plans and programmes. A combination of assessment methodologies may be required — SEA to assess impacts on climatic factors; and a so-called climate change lens to ensure that the policies would perform in a changing climate. A sample climate change lens, essentially a checklist for climate proofing policies, was designed and key indicators for the integration of climate change objectives into the planning system were proposed.

The recommendations were discussed with key stakeholders in the land-use planning process and are now being considered by the MEPA and the Maltese Government in the context of environmental reform.

Sergei Golovkin

Economic and ecological benefits of Wroclaw’s forestation programme

Within the RSC project, the potential role of the Poviat Programme of Forest Cover Intensification for the City of Wroclaw was analysed in terms of reducing CO₂ concentrations in the air.

The afforestation project will result in the city gaining around 620 ha of forest, and in the proportion of forest cover rising from 7.8 to 9.9 percent. Based on the current amount of CO₂ deactivated annually by forest biomass in Wroclaw, the study estimated an increase of 16.5 percent as a result of the afforestation efforts. The annual average amount of CO₂ absorbed by forests in Wroclaw is currently around 10,590.91Mg.

The study identified various possibilities for acquiring funding for afforestation and tree stand quality improvement projects, from both EU instruments and programmes (with national contribution) and national earmarked funds. However, the analysis indicated that, under current legal conditions, the possibility of trade in absorption units exists only under the greenhouse gas management system. As there is currently a lack of precise provisions establishing and regulating the management system of absorption units, it is in practice impossible to use such instruments as an additional source of acquiring profits related to afforestation work and forest management in Wroclaw.

Glossary

NUTS: The Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics, developed and regulated by the European Union, is a geocode standard for referencing the subdivisions of countries for statistical purposes and is instrumental in the delivery of EU Structural Funds. NUTS-2 refers to the sub-national/regional level.

Environmental/sustainability indicators:

A parameter, or a value derived from parameters, that points to, provides information about and/or describes the state of the environment, and has a significance extending beyond that directly associated with any given parametric value. The term may encompass indicators of environmental pressures, conditions and responses. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

RCCL: Regional Climate Confidence Index

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www.rscproject.org

Contacts:
Venelina Varbova
vvarbova@rec.org

Dora Almassy
dalmassy@rec.org
(36-26) 504-000

To subscribe to the newsletter, please send a message to:
info@rscproject.org

In order to enhance the impact of the project and to make use of other work of this kind, the RSC partners would be happy to get in touch with other similar initiatives, individual regions with good practice in the field, as well as companies and/or organisations carrying out research on the topic.

Editors: **Dora Almassy** • **Venelina Varbova** • **Sergei Golovkin**

Contributors: **Cornwall Council** • **Cornwall Development Company** • **CEMP, University of Debrecen** • **Commune of Wroclaw** • **Malta Environment and Planning Authority** • **Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works**

Design and layout: **Krisztina Andre** • **Tricia Barna** • **Sylvia Magyar**

Copyediting and proofreading: **Rachel Hideg**

Photographs: **Venelina Varbova** • **RSC partners**

Publisher: **The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe**

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