

Looking back to how it all began...

The idea behind the RSC project first arose during the implementation of the INTERREG IIIC project Greening Regional Development Programmes (GRDP), which ran from July 2004 to October 2007. The GRDP project featured:

- the exchange of experiences and the sharing of examples of good practice regarding the integration of environmental sustainability into regional development programmes;
- the development of a methodology for carrying out this work;
- the participation of 17 partners as well as over 20 associated organisations.

In 2007, seven of the GRDP partners expressed an interest in continuing the successful cooperation. As climate change is a priority issue for the regions, they decided to create a partnership to promote the move towards a low-carbon economy in order to ensure economic, social and environmental well-being. The proposal was accepted and a total budget of EUR 2,099,980.64 was approved. Project activities were launched at a kick-off meeting held in the REC Conference Center in December 2008.

Signpost

Crisis and Opportunity: How Regions Can Respond to the Changing Climate

As work began on this newsletter, the mighty Danube flooded, turning the REC's beautiful garden into a lake. While lending our workplace a somewhat Venice-like feel, the flood is a powerful reminder of our vulnerability and of the destructive force of nature.

Scientists are providing evidence that our climate is changing more rapidly than expected. Recent natural disasters have been linked to climate change: extreme weather events are causing hunger and homelessness, plunging millions of people into humanitarian disasters. But nature is not the primary cause: the blame lies with businesses, governments and individuals, whose unsustainable production and consumption practices result in high levels of greenhouse gas emissions. The problem is exacerbated by a failure to act quickly to bring about significant change.



INUNDATED: The REC garden temporarily transformed into a boating lake

The Chinese symbol for "crisis" is made up of two elements: "danger" and "crucial moment". In the climate change discourse, the crucial moment, or opportunity, lies in the potential of eco-innovation and green industries to create jobs and boost economic transformation. It also refers to the chance to alter harmful, unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. Scientific and policy analyses support a change in direction, and the required investments, earlier rather than later. One of the most influential studies in recent years, the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (2006), looks at the issue from a cost-benefit perspective and concludes that the benefits of decisive, early action far outweigh the costs. The review also draws attention to the complex policy challenges involved in managing the transition to a low-carbon economy and in ensuring that societies are able to adapt.

Strong autonomy and policy discretion mean that European regions are well placed to work towards sustainable economic growth through policies, strategies and other concrete measures. Giving regions the methodological means to move towards low-carbon economies is a key focus of the RSC project. Co-funded by the INTERREG IVC programme, the RSC partnership brings together regions at different levels of preparedness to tackle climate change. Acknowledging the need for a collaborative approach, the partners are ready to learn from one another, to exchange experiences, and to share the results of their efforts during the three-year project. This first newsletter provides a snapshot of our endeavours since the project launch.

Venelina Varbova, RSC Project Coordinator



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INTERREG IVC

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Baseline assessment for identifying the characteristics of a climate confident region

The RSC project supports regions in their efforts to meet the challenge of climate change by investigating, capturing and sharing approaches, good practices and tools for the development of sustainable low-carbon economies.

The first step in the partners' cooperation will be to produce an overview of the baseline situation in the regions. The baseline assessment will identify what is meant by a "climate confident" region and why it is crucial to integrate climate change considerations into regional development programmes and other regional policies. Based on the results of the study, a set of criteria and indicators will be designed, showing the direction in which the regions should move in order to create climate confident regions. A macro-economic analysis will be carried out for three partner regions to explore ways in which regions can achieve an ideal, climate resilient position.

On the basis of a questionnaire, the project team started to collect information from all partners on basic energy data, approaches to integrating climate change issues in regional development programmes, and the content of regional adaptation strategies and measures. During the data collection, it became clear that the majority of partners face the challenge of a lack of available, comparable and credible information on their region's general energy profile. While this lack of regional knowledge on energy-related issues and the absence of climate change considerations in regional planning highlighted the importance of the project, it also meant that some partners had to make huge efforts to provide suitable data for analysis. The findings and conclusions of the analysis will be presented in September, during the next partnership meeting.

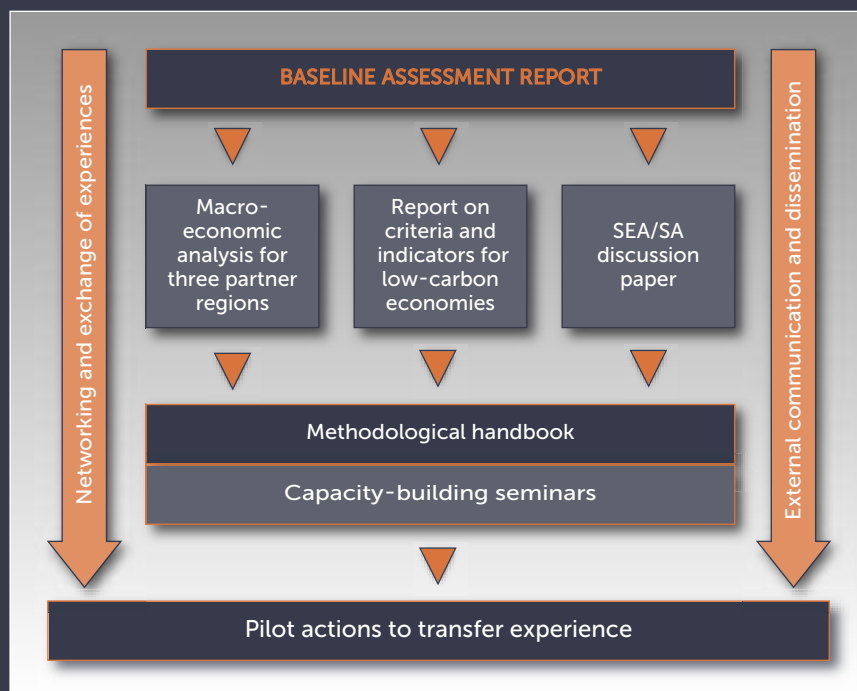
The aim of the baseline report is to create carbon profiles of the partner regions by presenting those aspects of each region's economy, policy and political and social dynamics that have the biggest impact on that region's carbon "performance". The report will explore the most important climate confidence issues such as GHG emissions; energy consumption; share of renewables; policy frameworks; institutional capacity; social and political awareness and readiness; and financial instruments. As the baseline work is intended to feed into subsequent project activities and outputs, the assessment report will also map good practices for further investigation.



PARTNERS FOR CHANGE: (Clockwise from top left) Project kick-off meeting at the REC; the Cornish coast; agriculture in Le Marche; Bulgarian birdlife; Cornwall's Fal estuary; discussions at the kick-off meeting; Delabole wind turbines; solar panels in Liguria and Cornwall.

"The region of La Rioja is striving to reduce its carbon emissions, and has developed a low carbon and emission mitigation plan and related policies, including a Regional Strategy against Climate Change (2007-2013). The region is eager to work with other regions in Europe to learn how they are working on these issues and to share experiences and ideas, and develop new methods."

Regional Authority of La Rioja, Spain





What lies behind Regions for Sustainable Change?

Regions for Sustainable Change (RSC) is a three-year partnership of 12 organisations from Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Malta, Spain and the UK. Through networking and cooperation, the partnership will serve as a model for other regions, promoting a Europe-wide shift to climate-friendly economies.

What are the aims of the RSC project?

The overall objective is to develop the regions' potential to stimulate mitigation and adaptation to climate change and to promote sustainable socioeconomic development. The project will help the regions to achieve this goal by analysing current regional practices and by providing innovative tools and guidance to combat climate change on a regional level. The capacities of regional authorities will be built by the exchange of good practices and experience on climate change risks and options for mitigation and adaptation.

What are the expected outputs of the RSC project?

The RSC project will promote the integration of climate change issues in regional policies by producing the following major outputs:

- A baseline report on the situation in the partner regions.
- A report on criteria and indicators for low-carbon regions.
- A macro-economic analysis of three partner regions, identifying

the structural changes required to achieve low-carbon status.

- An SEA/sustainability assessment discussion paper on integrating climate change into the analysis.
- Capacity-building seminars.
- A methodological handbook on integrating climate change into regional development programmes.
- Pilot actions to transfer the "low-carbon region" development model.

ABOUT THE REGIONS

The surveyed regions are diverse in terms of population, size and economy. By far the largest is Piedmont, Italy, with over 4 million inhabitants. Several regions have between 1.5 and 3 million inhabitants — Lower Silesia (Poland), Central Hungary and the North Great Plain (Hungary), South West Bulgaria and the Liguria and Le Marche regions in Italy. Others have just over 500,000 inhabitants (Cornwall, UK) or fewer (Malta; La Rioja, Spain; and Burgenland, Austria).

Most of the regions in the partnership are service-oriented economies rather than major national urban areas or economic centres. Notable exceptions are Central Hungary and South West Bulgaria, although these are capital centre regions surveyed by national-level partners.



“As a small island economy, Malta is very vulnerable to the effects of climate change. As a member of the EU and a signatory to international agreements on climate, Malta also has significant commitments to reduce GHG emissions. My agency has a vested interest in ensuring that Malta remains resilient to the effects of climate change and fulfils its international commitments. We have worked very well with our partners in the previous GRDP project, and for this reason we have joined the RSC initiative, which builds upon the strengths of a well-established partnership to further advance climate change objectives within the broader regional agenda.”

Mr. Martin Seychell
Director of Environment Protection
Malta Environment and Planning Authority

Glossary

Adaptation – the adjustment of ecological, social and economic systems in response to the current or expected impacts of climate change and in order to moderate or offset possible damage and exploit beneficial opportunities.

Mitigation – human intervention to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and to enhance sinks aimed at reducing the impacts of climate change.

Low-carbon economy – features low energy consumption, low pollution and low emissions. The fundamental aim is to achieve high energy efficiency, to use clean/renewable energy and to pursue green GDP via technological innovation.

Low-carbon region (LCR) – a region with minimal GHG emissions as a result of integrating all aspects of the economy around technologies and practices with low emissions. LCRs include communities, buildings, transportation and technologies that use or generate energies and materials efficiently, and that dispose of or recycle their waste in order to minimise GHG emissions.

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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.

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