



Transition towards Blue and Green Economies in the Mediterranean

19-20 September 2019, Brussels

Conclusions & Recommendations

Green Growth Community Final Report

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GREEN GROWTH

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Transition towards blue and green economies in the Mediterranean

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Blue & Green Growth communities' joint event September 19-20, 2019 – Brussels

*European Committee of the Regions
AREA42*

Foreword

“Transition towards blue and green economies in the Mediterranean” marked Interreg Med Blue and Green Growth Communities’ three years anniversary, representing the end of their first implementation period and bridging to the upcoming one. After three years of reflections, technical analyses and pilots, multiple events and links with external key actors, both communities from Interreg Med’s innovation axis joined forces to reflect on key common issues and spaces for more collaboration towards innovative sustainable growth in the Mediterranean.

The 2-day event held in Brussels gathered more than 150 members from both communities, together with a wide diversity of institutional and private sector stakeholders from 27 countries, such as: European Institutions, academia, NGOs, Public Authorities and thematic communities of projects in order to exchange, strengthen the links for future cooperation and tackle the important topic of ensuring capitalization and transferring of results beyond projects implementation.

During its first day at the European Committee of the Regions, sessions addressing the role of territorial cooperation for sustainable development, as well as business innovation, access to finance, education to sustainability, and policy-making for bluer and greener economies, took place to reflect on regional smart specialization strategies and on how sustainability is fostered through Mediterranean clusters. The event counted with a wide variety of participants and involved key stakeholders from the European Institutions, the private and finance sectors, the academia, NGOs and thematic community projects for a common dialogue.

During its second day at AREA42, both communities presented the opportunity to address inherent issues in a more sectoral way linked to the blue economy on the one hand, and to the green economy on the other.

Interreg MED

Blue and Green Growth communities' joint event

Introduction

- **Sirpa Hertell**, Municipal Council of Espoo, Rapporteur “Sustainable Europe by 2030,” European Committee of the Regions, ENVE Commission
- **Christof Kienel**, Head of Unit, European Committee of the Regions, NAT Commission
- **Juan José Martínez Lozano**, Director General for EU Affairs, Región de Murcia
- **Elodie Nunes** and **Mercè Boy Roura**, Blue and Green Growth Communities

Just after the official opening of the event, Sirpa Hertell, Municipal Council of Espoo, Rapporteur “Sustainable Europe by 2030,” European Committee of the Regions, ENVE Commission, welcomed the participants pointing out that a **transition to a greener and bluer economy is the new frontier for 2030**, introducing the “**Green deal**” involving both blue and green economies as a priority for the European Commission. She also stressed the **crucial role of cities and regions in the ecologic transition, which starts indeed at the local level**.

The importance of common actions in the Mediterranean, involving all stakeholders and territories at all levels was stressed as well, added to the **need of collaboration between blue and green sectors**, as emphasized by Christof Kienel, Head of Unit, European Committee of the Regions, Natural Resources Commission.

Then, Juan José Martínez Lozano, Director General for EU Affairs for the Region of Murcia, gave a concrete example of the urgency of action through mentioning the challenges faced by the region and the adverse effects of climate change. He pressed for the **urgent need to act to reduce human impacts on exacerbating the effects of climate change**, while calling for the **provision of adequate funds to mitigate impacts on territories** suffering from climate deregulation effects.

The introductory part was closed by Elodie Nunes from the Intermediterranean Commission of the CPMR and Mercè Boy-Roura from the University of Vic/Central Catalonia, representing respectively the Blue and Green Growth Communities, who briefly introduced the background of these two days and welcomed the participants.

Session 1- Territorial cooperation: building bridges for a sustainable development

This session explored how territorial cooperation is a key element to foster a harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the Mediterranean as a whole. It addressed as well how the Interreg Med programme and thematic communities provide a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States, and let the door open for reflections regarding the upcoming programming period. Circular economy practices and blue & green business models were highlighted for that matter, in order to offer real case scenarios to nourish knowledge-based policy-making processes.

- **Christos Economou**, Head of Unit, Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission
- **George Kremlis**, Honorary Director, Directorate General for Environment, European Commission
- **Maria Groueva**, Blue and Green growth Project officer, Interreg Med
- **Roberto Sandrini**, PROteuS cluster

Maria Groueva, Blue and Green Growth Project officer, Interreg Med, opened the session with a brief introduction about the structure of the Interreg Med Programme, aiming at explaining how this specific framework facilitates the appropriation of tangible project results as well as the transfer of knowledge and practices within its communities. She added that the structure help fostering projects' impacts at territorial level while also reaching the policy-making one. At programme level, the Mediterranean is indeed seen as a whole basin (including the South), hence **the importance of involving and integrating experiences inherited from associated countries from the southern shore of the basin in the project activities.**

Roberto Sandrini, PROteuS cluster, highlighted the need to protect maritime and coastal areas and presented the objectives and experience of the PROteuS cluster. The contribution put a specific focus on the cluster's experience, achievements and aims (exchange of knowledge and benchmarking, approach of customers and markets, facilitation of technology exchange, identification of opportunities for internal trade, promotion of investments and funds, contribution to policies and action plans, etc.). The project's testimony demonstrated on the one hand the **importance of making data available, digitalizing and sharing information in order to better face integrated maritime surveillance-related issues.** On the other hand, it stressed this sector's potential for growth, focusing on the opportunities for SMEs and their need for adequate support. It was pointed out that there is a **need for a more transversal approach when considering the impact of activities carried out at sea, which has consequences in terms of safety, as well as for the economy and the environment.** In addition, the role of **research and technologies** in the sector seems to be crucial, as key tools **to help make informed-decisions and develop coherent related policies and regulations.**

In the context of Blue Economy in the Mediterranean, particular relevance was given by Christos Economou, Head of Unit, Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission to the sea basin **WestMed initiative**, which is bringing together policy-makers and a variety of different actors including clusters for a **structured dialogue with the aim of developing concrete actions and projects in specific priority fields.** Once more, another important point made is that research and innovation will increasingly play a fundamental role for Blue Economy in the future. The BlueMed Initiative funded by H2020 Programme was also mentioned, as a successful framework creating the conditions at policy level to bring the community together.

From a more environmental perspective, George Kremlis, Honorary Director, Directorate General for Environment, European Commission underlined that, being the Mediterranean one of the most affected ecosystems by climate change, **the collaboration between the two communities, as two interrelated components, appears to be essential for a common action towards sustainable growth.** Mediterranean natural resources are significantly under pressure and the need to develop

actions able to ease the adaptation, in particular in insular territories, is a priority. EU policies, from agriculture to fisheries-related ones, have to be green and blue at the same time. In this context, **circular economy** represents a real priority for the EU and it **should be a core issue at global level** in order to jointly reflect on food production and consumption (among other aspects), the ban of plastics, the use of biomass, incentives to sort/separate waste and its processing into materials, and the role of education in the process. Finally, the relevance of the involvement of SMEs, as drivers for innovation (e.g. digital economy, artificial intelligence) and thus, for success in this field, was reiterated.

During the open debate with the audience, some further interesting points arose, in view of the upcoming programming period. In particular, **the lack of integration of funding instruments to support a sustainable bluer and greener growth seems to be one of the main barriers to be tackled.** To ensure efficient and more coherent actions in that sense, a structured integrated framework is necessary. To some extent, the WestMed Initiative is moving towards this goal, setting up the ground for a coherent strategy in the Mediterranean as a whole.

Food for thoughts – Recommendations

- ❖ A new approach for sustainable growth should consider that most challenges related to Blue and Green Growths are shared.
- ❖ Going through a transition phase, the European Commission has set the “EU Green deal” as 1st priority by 2030, involving both blue and green economies.
- ❖ The role of resilient regions and municipalities is key in the ecological transition since it occurs primarily at that level: they cannot be left behind.
- ❖ Circular economy must be reinforced by closing the loop (materials and energy) through the adoption of reduction/recycling/re-use patterns. Research and innovation are key towards this shift.
- ❖ SMEs must be supported and further involved in territorial cooperation programmes and projects, since they represent the backbone of EU economy and can be the drivers of low carbon practices: they can have a leading role in circular economy, maritime surveillance, and many other relevant sectors. Institutions and SMEs must hence be convinced that a "green" and "blue" approaches are a source of opportunities
- ❖ It is important that SMEs be aware of their financial capacity and needs.
- ❖ Successful projects and best practices should create opportunities and solutions in and for the market, while continuing to influence the policy-making process.
- ❖ The bridges built by the Interreg MED Programme, connecting a variety of partners and countries (900 partners from 13 countries) exchanging knowledge, methodologies and tools, should be further reinforced, with a special focus on the potential involvement of countries, partners and institutions from the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Working synergies with other programmes dealing with the countries located out of Interreg Med's area should be truly and reciprocally sought and part of the respective programmes' objectives.

Session 2- Fostering business innovation and access to finance

This session focused on the latest blue and green economy development and innovation opportunities for clusters and SMEs. Panelists presented how public finance, regulations and policies play an important role in attracting and mobilizing private investment into Blue and Green Economies. Moreover, panelists proposed recommendations on how to accelerate Blue and Green Growth happening at national and regional levels.

- **Mario Nava**, Director-General, Directorate General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, European Commission
- **Roberta de Palma**, Chief Technical Advisor, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
- **Federica Todde**, Representative of the FinMED project
- **Georgia Veldeki**, Hellenic Center for Marine Research, PELAGOS cluster

Georgia Veldeki, Hellenic Center for Marine Research, PELAGOS cluster, presented the Blue Energy Cluster platform, a good practice promoting a network of clusters—composed of 7 national hubs as a matching platform to connect regional and local authorities with SMEs, enterprises and NGOs in order to promote innovation and new business ideas. **Networking is crucial for SMES that can create alliances and move towards more collaborative systems for sustainability in economic, financial and environmental terms.** She also pointed out that **the lack of financial resources and limited extraversion are what usually hinder SMEs in their development.** PELAGOS therefore proposed solutions by ensuring a closer link for SMEs with investors, regional authorities, and local communities (through capacity building, seminars, technology transfer to soft skills, and boosting communication, etc.).

Federica Todde, representative of the FinMED project, presented the ways the project has been working to **reinforce the innovation capacities of SMEs through a facilitated access to dedicated funding and a stronger link with public administrations.** Through the project's surveys, access to traditional funding for SMEs did not seem to be such an issue. Nonetheless, SMEs' knowledge about **funding instruments** is not necessarily good enough to allow them the exploration of means rather than traditional ones to get funding. Consequently, the project has been working to help Mediterranean SMEs auto-evaluate their own capacities in terms of financial needs, since they usually do not have the internal human resources to cover that part of assessments. On the end of public administrations, the project has been exploring the good practices in terms of managing funding instrument capable to answer to SMEs needs.

Mario Nava, Director General for Horizontal policy, European Commission Directorate for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, informed on the works of the EU to support greener and bluer investments. New Directives now target investors directly to have finance and sustainability meet more often instead. Indeed, it appears that **public finances are not enough. In Europe, about €300 billion of additional investments for green and environmental purposes are needed in general on a year basis.** Nonetheless and so far, only €40-45 billion are spent by public authorities, which is not enough. As for **financial regulation**, it does not work on taxes *per se* but

rather **on the principle of incentives or nudging**, i.e. supporting investments for someone/a firm for that person/firm to answer to what society wants.

Incentives and changes need to be performed on both the demand and supply sides. On the one hand, on the demand side, companies need to be aware of new markets and increase their knowledge and awareness on sustainability. On the other hand, on the supply side, financial companies, tend to follow the “no risk = no return, lots of risks = lots of return” mantra, to which the Mediterranean area could perfectly respond. In this sense, changes would work at two levels:

by developing **high-level principles that guide financing decisions** (the supply side). A recent example are the **Sustainable blue economy finance principles** (14 of them linked to SGD 14), through which investors commit to apply these principles across different portfolios beyond the number of investors present on a project. Financers then engage in protecting and maintaining activities, commit to take long term risks, transparency, inclusion and cooperative approaches. These principles are an excellent initiative but are not enough.

the European Commission has created regulation (**EU taxonomy**) that accompanies investments in **Environment, Social and Governmental (ESG) issues throughout all phases of investments** (pre-investments phase, weighing opportunities; investment phase, where money goes to invest where one’s intentions are; and evaluation phase, checking how the investment went and see what it brought back, including its effect on sustainability). These 3 areas must work as rules for the investors, and so far, two of them have been adopted by the European Parliament, while the last one is still under discussion.

Roberta de Palma, Chief Technical Advisor, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), explained the works with developing and in-transition countries towards greener and bluer economies. **Resource efficiency, digitalization for industries and circular economy are key elements in this process and are very much interrelated.** They should be marketed as opportunities for business, for SMEs to gain a return on investment and therefore be supportive of sustainable actions to be further developed. If this were to happen, the need for policies and public finance would be lesser. **SMEs are nonetheless facing two barriers: access to finance and to knowledge, and this is where public finance and policies are still useful and needed.**

Identifying projects to invest in is also a challenge, for both SMEs and investors. Technical assistance is needed and important, which is why some kind of package conjugated with the financial sector’s expertise could be an option to help tackle this issue. The paradox of ensuring that small projects that do not seem to have a high return on investment – but still support sustainability and help tackle the climate crisis – be funded, was highlighted too. Indeed, not all projects can always be funded and **greenwashing represents a risk of wasting precious financial resources and scatter efforts.** Greenwashing can be avoided through standardization, which is where the EU taxonomy can act. Even if currently too generic, **legislation could be further molded in the future, allied to the already available options of crowdfunding, EUCA (European Venture Capital fund), or the EUSEF (European Social Entrepreneurship fund).** Green bonds, for which issuers commit to reinvest their receipts in green activities are also good practices to support sustainable finance. **Blue bonds** also exist, notably on local and regional scale projects.

Regarding FinTech, the substance of finance would remain the same, i.e. involving actors who lend money, those who participate and those who edge. **FinTech expands the channels through which finance is brought to people and impacts more on the distribution rather than the production of finance.** Distribution in a market economy is crucial, as linked to the costs of investment. Nowadays, investments cost much more because of the distribution channel than the production one.

Food for thoughts – Recommendations

- ❖ Clusters are key networking engines stimulating synergies to support SMEs into getting funding, as they serve to reduce the gap between market actors and EU funding/financial tools.
- ❖ Pilot projects are important for developing innovative solutions, offering real-case business scenarios.
- ❖ To secure funding, innovative sustainable projects should present a set of extra features rendering them competitive to attract investors and ensure their long-term impacts.
- ❖ Investors must be aware that if environmental impacts are neglected, all economic activities are jeopardized. If i.e. oceans die, no investment can be successful in any coastal-marine area.
- ❖ Standardized financial rules and taxonomy at EU level should be promoted to secure a better environment to attract market and finance actors into sustainability. Green bonds, Blue bonds, and the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles are tools that should be used to that end.
- ❖ Reduced and eased bureaucracy is a key driver for SMEs to access finance (new financial instruments from e.g. FinTech) and safeguard their cash-flow.

Session 3- Education and awareness raising to and for sustainability

Education to and for Sustainability is a learning and changing process relevant to society, communities and all organizations. The session aimed to engage the community and build awareness and knowledge on a way to address sustainability issues within educational schemes, with the aim to empower participants in thinking critically, innovate and provide solutions towards more sustainable systemic changes and patterns of living from earlier stages.

- **Burcu Tuncer**, Team Leader, Networking and Partnerships, Regional Activity Center for Sustainable Consumption and Production
- **Simone Bastianoni**, Professor, University of Siena, MAESTRALE project
- **Tonito Solinas**, Project manager, University of Sassari, RE-LIVEWASTE project
- **Adelaide Charlier**, Youth for Climate / Fridays4Future

Tonito Solinas, Project manager, University of Sassari kicked off the session with the presentation of RE-LIVEWASTE's experience. This project aims at reducing the environmental impact of intensive agriculture and livestock farming, as two key sectors of the Mediterranean economies. Operating in four countries sharing a common interest in food quality, the project has developed innovative

solutions that can turn livestock waste into resources, by generating valuable by-products on local market: it involves and supports local stakeholders, protecting traditions, while respecting the environment. **Sharing ideas, good practices and results for a sustainable growth in the Mediterranean area was crucial** in this process. Furthermore, **education represents a primary part of the project strategy and spreading the narrative of the results among a young public has been one of its main goals, since the work cannot be done only in the lab.** This exercise has targeted both children and young pupils, as well as university students: specific courses have been developed and launched at University level to train professionals in the field, with a **focus on environmental issues from different perspectives (e.g. land management in cooperation with local institutions, energy consumption reduction, etc.).**

Simone Bastianoni, Professor, University of Siena, presented on his end the MAESTRALE project, insisting as well on the importance of education and awareness-raising as key elements for an effective transition towards a bluer and greener future. **Teaching sustainability seems indeed a quite difficult task, since it is not considered as a subject *per se* in high school and university, due to its trans-disciplinary character.** Somehow, this is limiting one's ability to communicate this concept. However, in the framework of MAESTRALE, sustainability started to be taught as part of a programme already at primary level school, by means of concrete examples. With the aim of raising awareness on the potential of Blue Energy, the good practice of "Blue Energy Labs" promoted by the project was also presented, focusing on the **fundamental involvement of citizens and society in the implementation of feasibility studies** related to the application of Blue Energy technologies.

The following open debate with the audience pointed out that there are **many different ways of teaching Blue Economy – in particular in the South – and it is indeed challenging to "standardize" the concept. Blue economy should rather be "territorialised" and adapted to local contexts.**

The session's discussion continued with the inspiring speech of Adélaïde Charlier representing the Youth for Climate (Fridays4Future) movement in Belgium, created following the call to school strike from the Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg. The weekly students' march was mainly motivated by the perception of a **huge gap among the climate emergency as declared by scientists and the rather passive attitude of politicians and policy-makers to address the issue.** The protest eventually gained a great visibility and raised awareness on climate change, clearly showing the power of EU youth mobilization on that matter. In its empowering perspective, Youth for Climate/Fridays4Future aims at making lifestyle's change the core issue in education: in this sense, it was stressed that **education should focus on the need to take action immediately today even if the effects of climate changes seem far, simply because they mostly happen in other areas of the planet.** Targeting politicians at EU level – who are slowly acknowledging the urgency of the situation – is also a priority of the movement. This process has already started with some **concrete actions (e.g. "no guarantee, no vote" initiative, based on the idea that if the EC does not commit to some environmental standards, the EP will not vote on its policy proposals).** However, it is important to further develop this kind of actions and keep the pressure on politicians in the times to come.

The presentation of the "Switchers" initiative by Burcu Turner, Team Leader, Networking and Partnerships, Regional Activity Center for Sustainable Consumption and Production, closed the session. The concept of "Switchers" is based on the idea that, **besides the usual way of putting the burden of sustainability on consumers, it is in parallel extremely important to reflect on how to**

foster green and circular business models for a broader systemic change, involving multiple stakeholders. The so called “Switchers” and the community of “Switchers” thereof (350 success stories collected in the platform) act as enablers and should drive this process. In this sense, the Switchers’ Support Programme helps and connects stakeholders to scale-up social and eco-innovations in the Mediterranean. The Programme envisages diverse strategies and looks at the whole spectrum of available tools – including technical assistance, network development, access to finance and market, enabling policies, business model development, mentoring and coaching. In particular, the green business methodologies and tools developed contributed to the incubation of green businesses, reaching also the South of the Mediterranean. In the discussion, it was pointed out that sometimes education is not enough if it is not accompanied by a shift in behavior in our day to day thinking. Such a shift is indeed crucial to inspire and work to change the values’ system. In addition, access to finance and networking, matchmaking between green start-ups and financial actors – thus an appropriate regulatory framework – are also key to support the transition towards a more sustainable growth.

Session 4- Development of policy recommendations for a green & blue economy in the Mediterranean

The last session of the day opened the debate on the strategic policy framework for securing a sustainable future for the Mediterranean region, consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals. It also included a presentation from the two Blue and Green Growth thematic communities of the work carried out to develop relevant policies – and recommendations – involving research, analyses, consultation and syntheses of information. Moreover, the reflection addressed the issue of land-sea interactions and the potential merging between blue and green economies. The need for trans-boundary and cross-sectorial cooperation for policy change through co-creation and co-responsibility was encouraged, for the elaboration of effective policy recommendations.

- **Sieglinde Gruber**, Head of Unit Marine Resources, Directorate-General for Research & Innovation, European Commission
- **Alessandra Sensi**, Head of Sector Water and Environment, Union for the Mediterranean
- **Rudi Panjtar**, Representative for PANORAMED on Innovation, Jožef Stefan Institute
- **Emmeline Allieux**, Director, Région Sud
- **Stefano Valentini**, ART-ER, MISTRAL and REINWASTE projects

Emmeline Allieux, Director, Région Sud, opened this session focusing on the development of policy recommendations for green & blue economies in particular in response to climate change, one of the main issues deeply concerning the Mediterranean and in particular both thematic communities. Indeed, the direct effects of climate change appear to be more and more visible in the area, and it has become a priority in a number of regional strategies. A key recommendation for efficiently address this matter, is to **strengthen cooperation for an improved adaptation to climate change, between the European and the regional levels** - the European Commission being the promoter of such a cooperation, **allowing territories to play an active and positive role**. A true Europe-region partnership and the necessary support for local communities should result into the **creation of**

territorial task forces for climate change adaptation, encouraging the exchange of good initiatives and practices in the field.

Stefano Valentini, ART-ER, representing two projects (MISTRAL and REINWASTE) from the two communities, strongly related one to the other. He highlighted that the sustainable challenges faced by Blue Growth and Green Growth communities are often the same. In parallel, the innovation potential for a more sustainable economic – both blue and green – growth of the Mediterranean area is also very high. Yet, it could and should be much more exploited. Moreover, the **interaction among projects of the two communities** can be very fruitful: for instance, **a lower production of plastics in the land will consequently have an impact on the reduction of plastic**. In that sense, a **holistic approach is needed to better explore how to develop efficient innovation policies**. As an example, the so-called **RIS3** (Research and innovation strategies for smart specialization) are a powerful instrument to clearly identify strengths and weaknesses of regions, but also territorialize the use of funds into efficient actions.

Rudi Panjtar, representative for PANORAMED on Innovation, Jožef Stefan Institute, presented Interreg MED's PANORAMED governance platform and its aim to **strengthen multilateral cooperation frameworks in the Mediterranean region**. After launching a call for strategic projects focusing on Maritime Surveillance and Maritime & Coastal Tourism, he explained that PANORAMED is currently working on this third topic of interest.

Indeed, **innovation represents a great opportunity for growth in the Mediterranean: there is a huge potential in emerging blue and green technologies** (e.g. robotics, robotization of fishing farms and of deep fisheries, etc.) for the creation of new profiles and jobs.

Sieglinde Gruber, Head of Unit Marine Resources, Directorate-General for Research & Innovation, European Commission, pointed out that policy-makers at all level share a **responsibility to take action in order to make sustainability a core issue in the EU and especially in the Mediterranean**. This sea has the highest concentration of microplastics in the world and the economic loss related to this kind of pollution is huge for tourism, energy, fisheries and many other economic sectors. To address responsibly this and similar issues, the European Commission recently launched a new **strategy on Blue Bio-economy**, which was jointly developed by various Directorates General (MARE, ENV, GROW, AGRI, RTD) and **combines blue and green growth elements**. In parallel, the European Commission intends to fund sustainable investments, including specific investments in skills development and vocational training. The whole of which bearing in mind the more global framework of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the Paris Agreement.

Alessandra Sensi, Head of Sector Water and Environment, Union for the Mediterranean, closed the session with a focus on the positive example of the Union of the Mediterranean, which has been working on Blue Economy since 2014 and is currently supporting a number of relevant initiatives (WestMed, BLUEMED, PANORAMED, Bologna Charter, etc.) extremely related to the topics of blue and green economies. In particular, the UfM's efforts to create **synergies with territorial cooperation initiatives in the Mediterranean** have led to successful projects such as MedCoast4BG and CoEvolve4BG, built on the experience of an Interreg MED project (Co-Evolve). While being a challenge, **the involvement of countries from the southern shore of the Mediterranean to tackle**

common issues related to sustainable development seems to be crucial for a balanced governance of the area.

Sparkshow

Journalists and pitching for innovative Interreg MED projects

Inspired by “TEDx” and “The Voice”, Sparkshow offered the opportunity for Interreg Med projects partners to pitch their project before an audience and a panel of journalists sitting behind buzzers and ready to show their interest. This format allowed putting to the forth positive impact projects dynamically and to network with journalists seeking good stories for their readers.

Therefore, it was a real opportunity for Interreg Med projects from the Blue and Green Growth communities to get media coverage. This type of show was appreciated for its innovative aspect: a hub for impactful projects and an optimism fix.

During the event, 6 selected projects (Green Growth Community: CAMARG, RE-LIVE WASTE, GRASPINNO and Blue Growth Community: MAESTRALE, AQUAWIND, PROTEUS) had the opportunity to pitch their project (3 minutes) in front of a panel of 6 journalists (Stuart Reigeluth, Ivo Andre Alho, Mat Miglietta, Antonin Marsac, Bea Rios and Guylaine Germain were the 6 journalists of Sparknews who buzzed for the most inspiring pitches). When the journalists were interested by the pitch, they pressed the buzzer and had the opportunity to be the first to ask about the innovative project that had been presented. Then the journalists asked questions, explained why they were interested in the project and gave advice to the nominee in order to cover the story. Selected projects received a personalized pitch training beforehand.

Food for thoughts – Recommendations

- ❖ To ensure a successful, effective and durable “European Green Deal”, the connection with and among territories is fundamental, as are the connections and interactions between land and sea. Initiatives at regional and local levels (e.g. against plastics pollution creating huge losses for tourism, aquaculture...) must therefore be reinforced.
- ❖ It is crucial to further strengthen the link between green and blue growth and their respective communities.
- ❖ Co-creation and co-responsibility dynamics should be observed for effective policy making.
- ❖ Innovation and science are key for advancing towards a more sustainable development of the Mediterranean. These concepts need to be understood through a holistic approach, where the concept of innovation is technological, disruptive, social, etc.
- ❖ Research and innovation strategies for regional Smart Specialization Strategies (RIS3) are a tool to be fully exploited to facilitate trans-boundary cooperation and connection of blue and green economies.
- ❖ Avoid the funded projects “valley of death” is key. To that end, horizontal approaches and durable solutions’ models are good and efficient practices to ensure a true impact of projects on the territories.

Green Growth community bridging event

This event brought out the outputs of the Interreg Med Green Growth community and its 14 projects on the recommendations towards the transition to a green and circular economy in the Mediterranean region. The work performed in the Thematic Working Groups and the results of the policy outcomes were discussed with the projects of the community and relevant stakeholders.

The event was also expected to boost synergies between projects of the community, external stakeholders and EU policy-makers leading to broader and effective networks. Moreover, it facilitated opportunities for the implementation of sustainable development practices in the basin, while maximizing the transnational replicability and capitalization potential of results.

Background: The Interreg Med Green Growth community is a network of 14 projects, working on the territory, promoting a sustainable development in the Mediterranean area based on the sound management of natural resources and by fostering innovation through an integrated and territorially based cooperation approach. The thematic community supports the projects in their communication and capitalization efforts thus increasing their impact at policy level and ensuring potential transfer of their results to other interested countries of the Mediterranean region.

Session 1- Recommendations for a green & circular Economy

EU supporting the transition to a green and circular economy

- **Avelino Gonzalez-Gonzalez**, senior policy and project officer, DG Research & Innovation - C.1 Circular Economy & Bio-based Systems

Insights into the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform

- **Maria Nikolopoulou**, member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

Green Growth community contributions to EU circular economy developments and policy outcomes

- **Mercè Boy-Roura**, UVic/UCC, Green Growth community
- **Mathias Brummer**, WE&B, Green Growth community expert
- **Martina Vallerotonda**, CUEIM, Green Growth community partner
- **Ioannis Mardikis**, Dynamic Vision, Green Growth community

"Greece: A Growth Strategy for the Future" – a good example of capitalisation of project results

- **Iro Vergadi**, Official of the General Directorate of Public Procurement, General Secretariat of Commerce and Consumer Protection, Ministry of Development and Investments of Greece, GRASPINNO project

The first session of the 2nd day was dedicated to recommendations for a green and circular economy. An introductory part displayed the important role of EU for the transition towards a Green and Circular Economy, thanks to the financial support provided by multiannual programmes like Horizon 2020 on Research and Innovation, but also by setting out actions to be realized at EU level.

In this sense, Avelino Gonzalez-Gonzalez, Senior policy and project officer, DG Research & Innovation - C.1 Circular Economy & Bio-based Systems, opened the session presenting the action plan developed by the Commission to support transition to Green Economy and pointing out the intention of European Commission - DG Research & Innovation to enlarge the intervention area in the field of Circular Economy to go beyond EU borders.

As discussed, the EU action plan for the circular economy aims to maintain the value of products and materials for as long as possible. It considers the whole cycle of production and the Circular Economy Package, and gives a legislative framework for the transformation of the current economic system (EU strategy for plastics in the Circular Economy, the Communication on options to address the interface between chemical, product and waste legislation; the monitoring framework on progress towards a circular economy), signing important steps to enable the transition. These are only a few of the policy instruments currently developed at European Union level for a green, sustainable and zero emission economy and there is still a great attention to related issues as recently represented by the European Commission president-elect, Ursula von der Leyen with the announcement of the intention to build up a “green new deal” making EU the world’s first climate-neutral continent. However, it was highlighted that all actions are only possible with a greater collaboration of all EU countries having to convert the EU policy efforts into national and regional strategies.

Next, Maria Nikolopoulou, member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), shared her experience within the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, the EU tool, which facilitates policy dialogue among stakeholders and disseminates activities, information, and good practices on circular economy. This space can be an instrument to generate “network of networks” also thanks to the possibility to dialogue with some other databases and/or already active similar platforms. Synergies among projects and collaborations are thus implemented and the process of knowledge sharing make it possible the development of innovative solutions.

The session proceeded with Mercè Boy-Roura, UVic/UCC, Green Growth community lead partner presenting the Interreg MED Green Growth Community, which represents one of the 8 thematic Communities of Interreg MED programme and whose purpose is to face the main challenges in the MED area related to the topic of “Green Growth”. The Community involves 165 partners and 14 Countries and counts 14 modular projects dealing with 5 main thematic areas: Agrofood, Eco-Innovation, Smart City, Waste Management, Green Growth Finance. The session was the occasion to point out the Green Growth Community contribution to EU circular economy developments and to identify synergies with the Blue Growth Community in order to activate wider collaborations for a greener and bluer economy.

White papers, policy and legal recommendations of the Green Growth Community were presented by Mathias Brummer, WE&B, Green Growth community expert, Martina Vallerotonda, CUEIM, Green Growth community partner and Ioannis Mardikis, Dynamic Vision, Green Growth community respectively, as outcomes deriving from the work of 4 Thematic Working Groups created as a tool for collaboration and communication within the 14 modular projects, to aid in the quality, efficiency, scalability and replicability of the projects' results. All possible synergies are very important for implementing the Capitalization process, gathering the "capital" and generating new knowledge for future policies and programmes. Moreover, to extend the Community network and to implement the Capitalization principle, the Green Growth Community has developed a new Platform (the Green Growth Capitalization Platform) open to any stakeholder already involved and new to the Community and stressing the attention on results and replicability of experiences.

Iro Vergadi, Official of the General Directorate of Public Procurement, General Secretariat of Commerce and Consumer Protection, Ministry of Development and Investments of Greece, GRASPINNO project, closed the session presenting Graspino as a good example for capitalization. The project aims to increase transnational activities of innovative clusters and networks of key sectors of MED area.

Food for thoughts – Recommendations

- ❖ The financial support provided by multiannual programmes like Horizon 2020 on Research and Innovation and actions to be realized at EU level, are key to the transition towards a Green and Circular Economy
- ❖ All actions are only possible with a greater collaboration of all EU countries which have to convert the EU policy efforts into national and regional strategies.
- ❖ Synergies among projects and collaborations can be implemented through the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform. This space facilitates policy dialogue among stakeholders and disseminates activities, information and good practices on circular economy.
- ❖ White papers, policy and legal recommendations are the Green Growth Community's policy outcomes deriving from the work of 4 Thematic Working Groups.
- ❖ The Green Growth Capitalization Platform has been developed, stressing the attention on results and replicability of experiences.

Session 2- Roundtable: what can we do to stimulate the transition towards a circular economy?

1st round of interviews: “What can the circular economy do for small and medium enterprises?”

- **Golboo Pourabdollahian**, STIIMA-CNR, GREENOMED project
- **Juliette Chauveau**, ANIA, PEFMED project
- **Dimitris Kokosioulis**, Dynamic Vision, SYNGGI project

2nd round of interviews: “What can the regional public administration do to boost the circular economy and the green growth in the territory?”

- **Rosana García**, AGAPA, REINWASTE project
- **Davide Scapinelli**, ART-ER-Attractiveness Research Territory, Sustainable Territorial Development, Emilia Romagna

3rd round of interviews: “Which are the policies at the national level that should be adopted to stimulate the transition towards a circular economy?”

- **Maria Nikolopoulou**, EESC
- **George Kremlis**, Honorary Director DG Environment

For the second session, a round table was organized where participants had the possibility to discuss about actions to develop and stimulate the transition towards a circular economy.

The first round of interviews focused on benefits for SMEs from closing material loops and improving resource efficiency.

Golboo Pourabdollahian, STIIMA-CNR, GREENOMED project stressed out the opportunity of a high reduction in costs deriving by the SMEs’ transition to Circular Economy Practices while Dimitris Kokosioulis, Dynamic Vision, Green Growth Community partner, underlined the importance of changing our mindsets and improvement of services, to achieve these savings. Juliette Chauveau, ANIA, PEFMED project, addressed future actions to be taken by SMEs to adapt the PEF methodology to SMEs.

SMEs are adaptive to legislation and market changes so as the EU available incentives can lead their business model and innovation path. In this context, clusters, associations and communities play an important role as well, because they can efficiently translate policy strategies into innovative solutions to overcome technological, cultural and social barriers. Even if some difficulties such as different local frameworks, needs, etc., in driving the transition emerged, the sharing of knowledge and best practices with networking tools like platforms will help to overcome these issues at different levels.

During the second and third round of interviews, the attention focused on the promotion of circular economy at regional and national level.

On the second round, Rosana García, AGAPA, REINWASTE project and Davide Scapinelli, ART-ER-Attractiveness Research Territory, Sustainable Territorial Development, Emilia Romagna Emilia-Romagna shared their perspectives on what can be done by the regional public administration to boost circular economy and the green growth in the territory. On the third round, Maria Nikolopoulou, EESC and George Kremlis, Honorary Director, EC, discussed about policies that should be adopted at the national level to stimulate the transition towards a circular economy.

Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3) can be implemented by setting out priorities and enhancing best practices and/or pilot activities. The regional and national levels should invest more in education of young people, capacity building, capitalization of best practices, participative and quadruple helix approach with the involvement of multi-stakeholders' community. Moreover, public funding is often not designed to support risky SME initiatives, either in the form of projects or investments. Work is still to be done in the field of regional public funding schemes. The final key message launched at the end of the sessions was centered on the interpretation of "circular economy transition" meaning. There must be a wider involvement of society in its quadruple helix levels (government, industry, academia, and civil participants) for tackling the complex current societal and economic challenges. This will enable to convert the traditional approach based on the concept of "work in" this framework into a new one inspired by the more concrete idea "to live as" a circular society.

Food for thoughts – Recommendations

- ❖ SMEs are adaptive to legislation and EU incentives can lead business models towards circular economy. In this context, clusters, associations and communities play an important role as well.
- ❖ Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3) can be implemented by setting out priorities and enhancing best practices and/or pilot activities.
- ❖ Regional and national levels should invest more in education, capacity building and capitalization of best practices
- ❖ A wider participatory and 4 helix approach could convert the traditional concept of "working in" a circular framework into a new one inspired by the more concrete idea of "living as" a circular society.

Annex: Blue Growth community bridging event

This event brought out the outputs of the Interreg Med Blue Growth community and its 6 projects addressing recommendations towards the transition to a sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean region. The work performed throughout the last years, including the finalized projects deliverables for policy outcomes were discussed with actors of the Blue Growth Community.

In this second day, the work performed throughout the last years, including the finalized projects' deliverables for policy outcomes, was discussed with actors of the Blue Growth Community. The goal was to boost potential synergies between all actors of the community to ensure the sustainability of its projects results, as to facilitate their transfer and bridge them to the Community's second implementation phase. These dynamics aim at fostering both capitalization and mainstreaming processes.

Session 1- Recommendations for a sustainable blue Economy

This session was dedicated specific contributions by modular projects as well as other relevant related project experiences. This complemented the final presentation of the Blue Growth Community Policy Paper outline.

Presenting the Blue Growth Community Policy paper outline

- **Eva Papaioannou**, T-ELIKA, Blue Growth Community Policy paper expert
- **Elena Garcia Garcia**, Centro Tecnológico Naval y del Mar, Región de Murcia. QuietMED project
- **Giovanni Bernardi**, University of Udine, iBLUE Project
- **Fernando Gaspar**, Dinâmica XXI, 4helix+ Project

The first panel's presentation regarded the experience of 4helix+ project, with a focus on some specific suggestions and recommendations. 4helix+ aims at supporting creative innovation for blue sector enterprises and cluster growth in MED regions. The need to clearly focus on regional needs and challenges (e.g. need for harmonization of rules) was highlighted, as a lesson learnt from the project's implementation. Moreover, in order **to stimulate innovation, it seems crucial to foster cross-fertilization between Blue Growth sectors. Cooperation needs to be encouraged creating networking, between regions, countries, sectors, research institutions and SMEs.** In terms of challenges specifically related to the project, it was highlighted that sometimes transnational voucher schemes can be very difficult to implement, since coordinating and synchronizing different Mediterranean regions is complex; the **rules** are quite different in each region as well as the beneficiaries across regions, and **would deserved to be more harmonized.**

The second project contributing to the panel discussion was iBLUE, aiming at re-launching the yachting sector and creating a Mediterranean transnational sectorial network. The importance to **support data collection and availability of the yacht industry in the basin to better shape new**

public policies was highlighted. In this sense, a **holistic approach and good balance between economic development, ecological sustainability and social needs must be found**. Furthermore, similarly to what was previously mentioned, the main barrier to be tackled to further strengthen the sector development seems to be the **lack of homogeneity of the regulatory frameworks** among different European countries. Lastly, it was recommended to **re-use and merge project results** (platform, databases, tools), as well as to further **support the follow-up of successful projects through common cooperation frameworks**.

As for the QuietMED project, it worked to produce recommendations for national authorities on how to better implement EU regulations in relation to the issue of sustainability and underwater noise (e.g. Marine Strategy Framework Directive) and assess their effects. A second phase of the project has just started this year, in view of reaching the expected thresholds and involving the other shore of the Mediterranean as well. **Given the technical complexity of the issue, a common framework must be provided, and macro-regional dialogue and cooperation for sharing data (which are still lacking) must be supported**.

The last contribution to the panel discussion was a brief summary of the main policy recommendations that will feed the Community policy paper, based on the work carried out in the three years of thematic Community project, aiming at capitalizing on the knowledge generated by its 6 modular projects. In particular, it was suggested that – although the policy paper is mainly addressed to policy-makers – it would be helpful to develop an action plan for investors. Similarly, **more attention should be given to financial issues, blue skills and education**.

Session 2 - Fostering transfer, capitalization & mainstreaming of strategic projects results

This session focused on specific examples related to the path towards transferring & capitalizing beyond projects and programme areas.

Towards transferring & capitalizing beyond projects and programme areas

- **Matteo Bocci**, WestMed Assistance Mechanism
- **Elen Lemaître-Curri**, Director, Plan Bleu
- **Eleni Hatziyanni**, Region of Crete
- **Samir Grimes**, Professor, École Nationale Supérieure des Sciences de la Mer et de l'Aménagement du Littoral, Algeria

The panel opened with the experience of the Region of Crete, which is currently participating in a number of Blue Growth-related projects and is also associated to the Blue Growth Community. In this context, the MISTRAL project was presented as a very successful example of transferring and capitalizing knowledge, focusing on regional smart specialization strategies. Among others, the Region of Crete is also participating in the BLUEISLANDS project, which is based on pilot actions and it has been very deeply involved in PANORAMED activities, i.e. the identification of gaps in sustainable tourism and maritime surveillance in the Mediterranean. The involvement of the region in a variety of projects is based on an important process of transferring and capitalizing the

knowledge acquired that can be relevant at different levels. Likewise, such involvement reveals to be useful to **mainstream projects results into local and regional policies**.

Reflecting on capitalizing and mainstreaming results, the session continued with an introduction to the activities carried out by Plan Bleu – as one the Regional Activity Centers of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). **Among the main challenges to be addressed in next few years in the Mediterranean, coastal demography, youth unemployment, environmental issues could be considered as the most serious ones, for which strong guidance and support will be needed by policy-makers.** Plan Bleu is in charge of advising them as well as documenting and assessing experiences and best practices to be replicated in its fields of expertise. In its mission, it strongly supports the Barcelona Convention on the protection of the Mediterranean Sea, works in a number of blue economy case studies, specific cross-cutting topics, and a report on the state of the environment addressed to various stakeholders, etc. Its actions are instrumental in the framework of cooperation projects to ensure a strong **basis of knowledge to be linked with other participating actors such as regional authorities or the private sector**, again for mainstreaming purposes.

The panel then focused on the case of Blue Economy projects in Algeria and their process of mainstreaming into the country's national strategy. Even though Interreg Med does not include partners from the Southern shore of the basin, this experience was still enlightening as it highlighted how EU regional programmes boosting Blue Economy are deeply and positively impacting the national level in Algeria.

Blue Economy is perhaps still a complex concept in this country, but it represents indeed a great opportunity for reducing the dependency on a fossil fuels-based economy. For this reason, a national strategy for Blue Economy (2030) was developed, establishing a national committee, where all the main maritime sectors are represented, being maritime and coastal capital the bases of this economy. In this sense, it was recognized that **funding should be improved to boost these sectors, while an inclusive and participatory process through local consultations of relevant stakeholders was launched to better define the national strategy.** This experience helped to identify a number of elements to develop successful projects, such as:

- Using clusters and SMEs as drivers by developing technology and blue economy;
- Demonstrating the benefits by showing results;
- Networking;
- Funding efficiency;

Identifying project ideas (in line with sustainable activities) through incubators & accelerators. Lastly, the session reflected on the WestMed initiative, as an example of how to support an effective implementation of a framework for action. The initiative works through **national hubs** and one of **its main challenges so far has been bringing together countries from the North and South of the Mediterranean** (countries from the 5+5 dialogue), which **funding structures are considerably different**. Nevertheless, the WestMed Assistance Mechanism has been already able to identify a list of priority projects to be supported and funded, that are in line with the initiative's priorities and aim at mainstreaming their results into similar initiatives and on the territories of the participating parties.

Food for thoughts – Recommendations

- ❖ Innovation needs a holistic approach and can be fostered by enhancing cross-fertilization between Blue Growth sectors.
- ❖ Sustainability of maritime economies should be ensured, considering environmental impacts and challenges.
- ❖ National legislations, regulatory frameworks, (tax) rules should be harmonized to facilitate the development of emerging sectors and the efficiency of traditional ones.
- ❖ The challenges related to data collection and monitoring should be addressed.
- ❖ Cooperation frameworks must be created and further strengthened
- ❖ Sustainability and the proper follow-up of successful projects could be ensured through common cooperation frameworks, but also by sharing experiences between the different Mediterranean shores, and ensuring the durability of R&D funding.
- ❖ The transfer, capitalization and mainstreaming of projects' results could be fostered through the development of common user-friendly web platforms, databases, stakeholders-targeted toolsets (replicable set of tools), by disseminating results through clusters and networks, capitalizing across communities, funding programmes, and actors, and by mainstreaming results in public policies, funding strategies, private sector voluntary instruments, training programmes, and regional smart specialization strategies.