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Regional Action Plan for County Cork and the River Blackwater



Cork County Council
Comhairle Contae Chorcaí



UCC
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
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List of Abbreviations

CCC	Cork County Council
UCC	University College Cork
ES	Ecosystem Services
FEGS	Final Ecosystem Goods and Services
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SPA	Special Protected Area
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
WFD	Water Framework Directive
BRIDE	Biodiversity Regeneration in a Dairying Environment project
LAWPRO	Local Authority Waters Programme
NPF	National Planning Framework
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies
CDP's	City/County Development Plans
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
SRA	Southern Regional Assembly
PPU	Planning Policy Unit
ORIS	Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

Part I – General information

Project: Delta Lady

Partner organisations concerned: Cork County Council and University College Cork

Other partner organisations involved (if relevant): All project consortium partners

Country: Ireland

NUTS2 region: Southern

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Part II – Project Background and Policy Context

The Action Plan aims to impact:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
	<input type="checkbox"/>	European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) programme
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other regional development policy instrument

Name of Policy Instrument(s) addressed: **Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region (RSES)(2020-2032) and the Cork County Development Plan (2022-2028)**

i) Project Background

Cork County Council (CCC) and University College Cork (UCC) are joint project partners in an EU INTERREG EUROPE co-funded project entitled *Delta Lady - Floating Cultures in River Deltas* (see project website link: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/deltalady/>).

The overall objective of the project is to improve the regional policy instruments that foster the capabilities of using ecosystem services (ES) in river delta regions to strengthen regional economies. In other words, improving the policy context to encourage the use of ecosystem services as a tool for regional economic development.

The project focuses on a number of river delta regions in Europe with an overall aim to improve regional policy instruments to both protect and utilise ES in these areas and to strengthen their regional economies. There are nine partners involved in the project from six different Delta regions in Europe (see mapped illustration in Figure 1 below) including partners from the Netherlands (Rijn Delta), Italy (Po Delta), Romania (Danube Delta), Spain (Albufera Delta), France (Rhône Delta) and the River Blackwater Delta in Ireland.

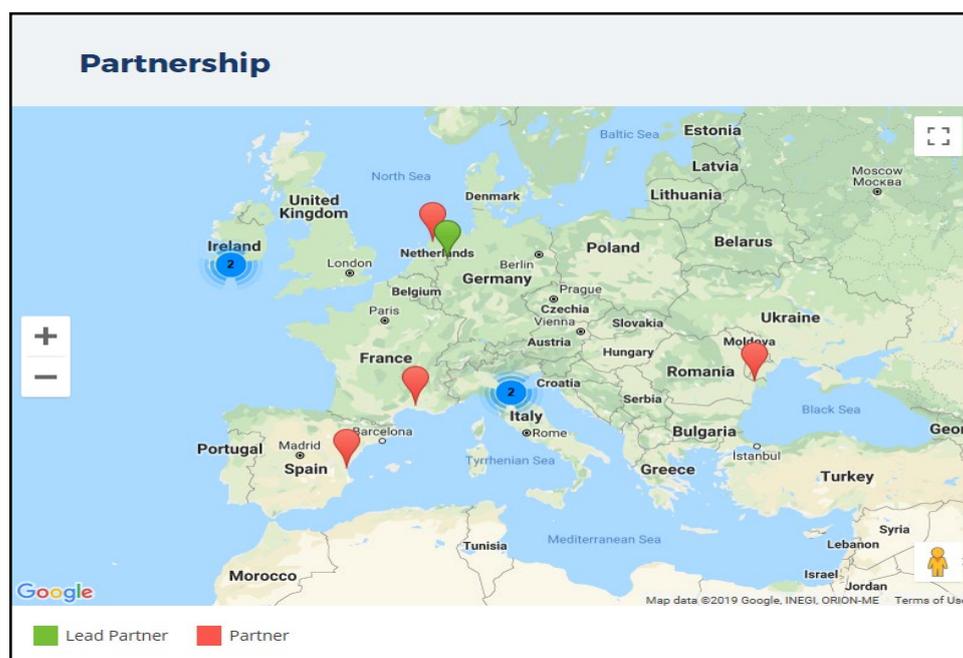


Figure 1: Mapped illustration of project consortium members

The project is part of an interregional shared learning process between project partners and associated stakeholders within the participating Delta regions. Phase 1 (June 2018 – May 2021) relates to interregional learning through shared experiences, knowledge transfer, stakeholder and institutional learning, publication of good practices and ultimately development of a Regional Action Plan for each region. Phase 2 (June 2021 – May 2023), relates to implementation of the project Regional Action Plans by the project partners.

This document constitutes CCC's/UCC's Regional Action Plan for County Cork and the River Blackwater catchment describing a series of proposed actions incorporating interregional learning from the Delta Lady project. The principal issue the action plan is aiming to address (as identified at project application stage) is the lack of recognition of ecosystem services as a concept within spatial/economic policy and decision-making frameworks at national/regional/local levels in Ireland.

The Action Plan aims to address the lack of recognition of ecosystem services within a policy framework in Ireland by:

- demonstrating the policy change achieved to date through the project at regional level by measuring the territorial impact within the region i.e. level of recognition of ecosystem services in the region at local policy level through city/county development plans
- influencing recognition of ecosystem services at local level policy in Cork through active participation in the Cork County Development Plan review
- providing a local level exemplar in Youghal (at the mouth of the River Blackwater) of ecosystem services in action and how they can be used as a tool to achieve both environmental and economic objectives.

ii) Ecosystem Services (ES) Concept

Ecosystem Services (ES) is the key concept that underpins the Delta Lady project. Though the fundamental concept of ES is a simple one, there has been considerable theoretical and academic attention paid to developing and operationalizing ES to enable incorporation into practical management. As such, a brief overview of the theory is provided below as essential background information in understanding the logic of the project activities. For more detailed information on ES, the progression and development of ES concepts and some critiques see (O'Higgins et al 2020)¹

All human activity is fundamentally dependent on nature and its associated ecosystems. ES are defined as the "*the benefits obtained by humans from nature*" (MEA, 2005)². Ecosystem services provide a wide range of benefits to society and can be categorized into three main groups.

- 1) *Provisioning services* are products obtained directly from nature, for example these include food and fuel.
- 2) *Cultural services* are the intangible benefits humans receive from nature, for example the recreational benefits from active use (e.g. hiking, open water swimming), passive use (e.g.

¹ T. O'Higgins, M. Lago, & T. H. DeWitt (Eds.), Ecosystem-based management, ecosystem services and aquatic biodiversity: Theory, tools and applications (pp. 87–104). Amsterdam: Springer.

² MEA. [MEA] Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. 2005. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. Ecosystems and human well-being: current state and trends: findings of the Condition and Trends Working Group. Hassan R, Scholes R, Ash N, editors. [online] URL: <http://www.unep.org/>, last accessed at 14th January 2016]

viewing wildlife) as well the non-use values (e.g. existence values for specific aspects of the environment).

- 3) *Regulating services* are the benefits nature provides by the moderation of natural phenomena (e.g. regulation of water flows that prevent floods).

These benefits may be enjoyed directly as Final Ecosystem Goods and Services (FEGS) or indirectly as *supporting services*. One essential aspect in understanding ecosystem services is that in order to provide benefits ES must have a beneficiary. That is that some aspect of nature, an ecosystem component or ecosystem process may occur but if there is no human to benefit from it no ecosystem service is produced. In some cases where there is no direct link between an ecosystem component or process, the introduction of complementary capital can provide this link to unlock the service. For example, a forest without access trails may provide regulating services (in the form of Carbon sequestration) but may not provide cultural services because there is no human access. Construction of trails or pathways (complementary capital) can enable the production of cultural services by enabling human access.

While the concept of ES has been widely adopted in academic circles there has been relatively little success in mainstreaming ES for planning and policy making. One major difficulty with ES concepts is the lack of accessible language (Doran and O'Higgins, 2020)³. As a result, many different terms have been used to express ES concepts, these include "*Natural Capital*", "*natures benefits*", "*Nature based solutions*" and "*Blue /Green infrastructure*." All these phrases have similar meanings, they all recognize that the environment provides valuable benefits to humans and recognise the potential for nature to provide ecosystem services to replace traditional engineered, built infrastructure. It is these benefits that the Delta Lady project seeks to incorporate into regional and local policies, plans and actions.

³ Doran, D and O'Higgins, T. 020. Applications of a novel method ecosystem services assessment into local policy making in the River Blackwater Estuary, Ireland. Sustainability 12 (21) 9047.

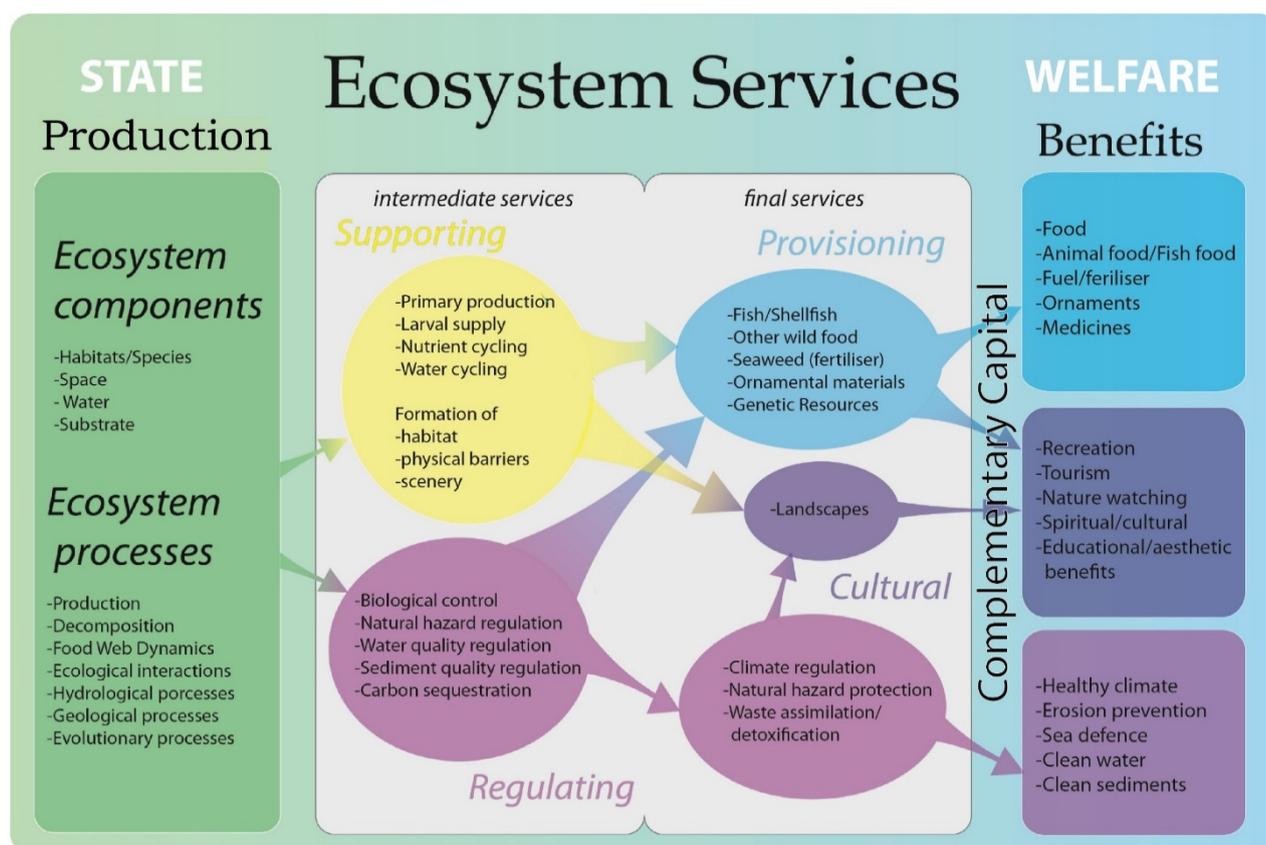


Figure 2: Diagram indicating the categories of Ecosystem services, Final services are those directly used to produce human benefits, which may require the addition of complimentary capital

Post Covid 19 there is a renewed emphasis on reconnecting with nature and local amenities following on from enforced local lockdowns. Specifically, the restriction of people’s movements has led to an upsurge in appreciation of recreational/cultural amenities within their localities and also an increased interest in reconnecting with nature as a pastime (e.g. biodiversity awareness). This has encouraged people to fully appreciate the value of nature or natural capital in their localities and is timely from a project perspective to promote the importance of ecosystem services from environmental, economic and wellbeing perspectives⁴.

The Delta Lady project aims to increase recognition of ecosystem services within policy frameworks and provide tangible examples of how ecosystem services can be an invaluable tool for promoting regional economic development within the participating Delta regions. This action plan aims to set out the roadmap for CCC/UCC in achieving the Delta Lady project objectives within the Cork region and River Blackwater catchment. It aims to achieve this by delivering tangible policy recognition of ecosystem services at regional and local levels in addition to providing an exemplar of ecosystem services in action at a local level scale.

⁴ Covid-19 and Sheer Wellbeing 2020. Access to and Use of Blue/Green Spaces in Ireland during a Pandemic. EPA 2020. [*FINAL SHEER Wellbeing Covid-19 and Blue Green spaces in Ireland report 11082020.pdf \(epa.ie\)](https://www.epa.ie/publications-and-reports/other-reports-and-publications/2020/FINAL_SHEER_Wellbeing_Covid-19_and_Blue_Green_spaces_in_Ireland_report_11082020.pdf). Last accessed: 18/03/21.

(iii) Project Scope: Profile of the River Blackwater Catchment

The focus of the project for CCC/UCC is on the River Blackwater catchment and the mouth of the river at Youghal. In particular the action plan seeks to identify new actions that use the Delta's ES to stimulate economic development and act as an exemplar for the region to inform regional and local policy beyond the lifetime of the project.

The River Blackwater catchment (see Figure 3) is located in the southwest of Ireland. The river, at approximately 169km long is one of the largest in Ireland and runs in a west-east direction through 6 counties (i.e., Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Cork & Waterford each with their own local authority). The greatest proportion of the catchment is located in County Cork. The catchment covers a relatively large area of ca. 3,310km², with a population of approximately 109,030 and population density of 33 people per km².



Figure 3: Location of the Blackwater Catchment.

The catchment marks the southern portion of what is commonly known as the Golden Vale, an area renowned for its agricultural productivity. Agriculture is the dominant land use within the catchment with dairy farming being the main economic activity. There is also a strong tradition of angling and salmon fishing in particular on the River Blackwater. Many of the salmon fisheries along the river are privately owned (and there is a high prevalence of historical country house plantations) and leased out during the fishing season. Some clusters of forestry are evident at the northern end of the catchment.

The entire main channel of the Blackwater is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC)(site code: 002170) under the EU Habitats Directive due to the presence of different protected habitats/species including Fresh Water Pearl Mussel and Atlantic Salmon in particular. There are also two Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the EU Birds Directive located at the Blackwater estuary and upstream at Blackwater Callows indicating its high conservation value for protected bird species.

The Blackwater estuary (see Figure 4 below) at the mouth of the river is situated adjacent to the historic town of Youghal and creates a natural boundary between the Counties of Cork and Waterford. The estuary is highly valued for the natural habitats and aerial, terrestrial and aquatic species that inhabit the area reflected in its designation as a Ramsar site, a Special Protected Area (SPA, site code: 004028) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). It incorporates well developed marsh grounds with intertidal flats exposed on both sides of the river channel at low tide. A notable feature of the estuary is its high ornithological importance as a wetland site for wintering waterfowl providing good quality feeding and roosting areas for a wide range of bird species including the internationally important population of Black-tailed Godwit.



Figure 4: The River Blackwater Estuary

In terms of water quality, based on a recent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assessment paper on the Munster Blackwater Catchment (2018)⁵, the catchment has 158 river water bodies of which 52 are at risk of not meeting Water Framework Directive (WFD) requirements. A number of Areas for Action (8) within the catchment have been identified during a Catchment assessment carried out as part of the River Basin Management Plan cycle (2018-2021). The significant pressure affecting the greatest number of river water bodies in the catchment is agriculture, followed by forestry, hydromorphological pressures, urban wastewater, other pressures (unknown and waste), industry, diffuse urban, mines and quarries, and domestic wastewater. In the Lower Blackwater Estuary, there is an increasing trend towards elevated nutrient loads with agriculture identified as the main pressure. However, measures to improve water quality in the catchment to address nutrient loading to the estuary have demonstrated positive effects⁶.

EPA (2018). ⁵ Munster Blackwater Catchment Assessment 2010-2015 (HA 18) Catchment Science and Management Unit. <https://catchments.ie>: Accessed 29/1/21

⁶ Ní Longphuirt, S., O'Boyle, S., & Stengel, D. B. (2015). Environmental response of an Irish estuary to changing land management practices. *Science of the Total Environment*, 521–522, 388–399.

In summary the primary natural characteristics and main environmental issues identified in the River Blackwater Catchment are:

- the relatively large scale of the catchment
- agriculture as the dominant land use
- dairy farming as the main economic activity in the Catchment
- strong tradition of angling and salmon fishing (historical private plantation fishing rights)
- some clusters of forestry at the northern end of the catchment
- environmental protections status – SAC and SPA designations
- high ornithological importance
- 8 identified Areas for Action in the catchment
- increasing trend of elevated nutrient loads with agriculture as the main pressure

It is proposed to devise project actions and activities which incorporate the natural characteristics and environmental issues identified in the River Blackwater catchment and estuary outlined above and combine these with ES concepts to promote measures which are adapted to the social and ecological conditions of the area.

In view of the predominant role of agriculture as a land use and economic activity in the catchment the project team have identified and promoted the BRIDE (Biodiversity Regeneration in a Dairying Environment) project (published as a Good Practice on Interreg's Policy Learning Platform: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/3978/the-bride-project-biodiversity-regeneration-in-a-dairying-environment/>) as an exemplar model with huge upscaling potential in the catchment (and other regions) for improving agricultural practices upstream which can make a significant contribution to water quality improvements downstream. This has the potential to significantly impact on the approach to the dominant land use/economic activity in the Catchment (i.e., means of addressing future Common Agricultural Policy environmental requirements) thus reducing the dominant pressure on water quality in the river catchment and its associated Delta downstream at Youghal. It is proposed to continue to collaborate with, support and promote this model as part of the Delta Lady project activities.

The bottom-up, integrated water management approaches of Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) are also considered good practice in the catchment, which may be transferable to other regions, see:

(<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/3977/local-authorities-water-programme-lawpro/>).

LAWPRO brings together local stakeholders and provides an integrated management structure whereby different interest groups with focuses on different ecosystem services can be included into community decision making and facilitate and encourage bottom-up environmental management.

A further aim of the project is to promote and encourage the use of natural environmental assets and their associated ecosystem services at a local scale in Youghal located at the mouth of the River Blackwater. It aims to achieve this through the development of a Pollinator Plan for the town of Youghal and by providing complimentary capital to unlock cultural ecosystem services at the river estuary. In order to effectively embed ecosystem services as a concept that people are aware of it is anticipated that providing a local exemplar of ecosystem services in action is key to effectively communicating its importance. Specific actions to this effect are set out below in Part III of the action plan.

iv) Policy Context

Further details on the policy context and the way the action plan should contribute to improve the policy instrument

The policy framework in Ireland reflects a hierarchical structure whereby policies must be consistent and aligned in a top-down manner, from National to Regional and Local levels. At a national level the National Planning Framework (NPF)(2018), part of Project Ireland (2040), sets out the national strategic planning context with ten National Strategic Outcomes which inform policy and investment. At regional level there are recently adopted Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) for each of the three Regional Assemblies in Ireland (i.e Southern Regional Assembly, Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly and Northern & Western Regional Assembly). The RSES are 12year strategic regional policy framework documents that aim to support delivery of the NPF and to coordinate local level plans (i.e., City/County Development plans and Local Community and Economic Plans) within their regions. Local level policy is primarily encapsulated in City/County Development Plans (CDP's) which set out the overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of individual local authority areas. Local Community and Economic Plans (LECP's) feed into the process as high-level plans which identify strategic assets, high-level goals, sustainable objectives, priorities and actions at local community level. A summary illustration of the hierarchical planning policy context in Ireland is set out below.



Figure 5: Overview of the Irish Planning Policy context. Source RSES for the Southern Region 2020, p11.

At project application stage CCC/UCC recognized that the concept of ecosystem services was in the early stages of development in Ireland and had yet to be mainstreamed into spatial/economic policy and decision-making frameworks. In order to address this issue, through the Delta Lady project, a regional level primary target policy instrument was identified, specifically the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region of Ireland which falls under the remit of the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA). The RSES are an inaugural strategy document that set the regional policy framework and high-level goals for authorities within the region.

Part of the rationale for focusing on the RSES, as the primary policy instrument, related to the fact that it represents the first time that spatial planning and economic policies have been aligned within a single policy framework in Ireland. This correlates with the concept of ecosystem services which can be used to preserve natural assets while also stimulating economic growth tying together environmental and economic objectives.

At the outset the Regional Planning Team for the RSES for the Southern Region (and specifically the Regional Planning Officer) were identified as the key stakeholder to assist with delivery of the target policy instrument. Following extensive interaction and through ongoing engagement by the project team with the Regional Planning Officer a specific objective (i.e., RPO 110) and section on ecosystem services were included in the final version of the RSES for the Southern Region which were adopted in January 2020. The inclusion of this objective was a really positive development for the project as it secured formal recognition for ecosystem services for the first

time within a regional policy framework in Ireland. Furthermore, in line with the aforementioned hierarchical policy structure in Ireland, it sets out a requirement that all local level plans (i.e. City/County Development Plans) must be consistent with the policies and objectives set out at regional level in the RSES. This reflects the significant policy impact achieved through the Delta Lady project. By directly influencing regional policy through delivery of RPO 110 (which may not otherwise have taken place) it has also ensured a local level policy impact whereby all local authorities have to incorporate ecosystem services in their land use plans.

Following on from direction received from the Joint Secretariat in Phase 1, a specific policy action is included in this action plan to monitor the territorial impact of the main target policy instrument improvement change (i.e. the RSES for the Southern Region) which was achieved in Semester 4 of Phase 1. To this end, to enable assessment of the extent of filter down of regional policy on ES, metrics have been developed to assess the level of incorporation of the concept of ecosystem services at local policy level within City/County Development Plans in the region throughout Phase 2 of the project. These metrics will be assessed by the Delta Lady project team in Phase 2 and incorporated in the project reporting framework.

Building on the momentum of achieving the project primary target policy instrument change at regional level a second target policy instrument has been identified at local level, specifically the next Cork County Development Plan (2022-2028). This is directly linked to the primary policy instrument (i.e., RSES for the Southern Region) through the aforementioned hierarchical policy structure in that it is incumbent on all local authorities in the region to embed the regional policy objective on ecosystem services (i.e., RPO 110) within their land use plans. While Regional Assemblies set out regional objectives local authorities put these objectives into practice. It is considered that a true indicator of success is action on the ground and delivery at local level. To this end a specific action is proposed to participate in the review of the Cork County Development plan (2022-2028) to secure suitable recognition of ecosystem services within the plan at a local policy level.

Part III - Detail of the actions envisaged

Introduction to the actions

The project actions have been identified by applying lessons learned in Phase 1 and incorporating shared experiences with our project partners through interregional learning. Through participation in the Delta Lady project we have identified a number of actions to compliment improvement of the target policy instrument(s) which seeks to gain recognition for ecosystem services at a regional/local policy level(s). Policy related actions seek to measure the territorial impact of the target policy improvement achieved and to also influence a local level policy instrument. Local level actions are proposed to provide an exemplar in demonstrating the importance of ecosystem services and the role they can play in balancing environmental protection with economic development.

The project actions are set out in detail in the following pages.

Action 1: Monitor the Territorial Impacts of Ecosystem Services policy change in the region through the RSES for the Southern Region (2020 – 2032)(RPO 110)	
Relevance to the project	<p>The delivery of the identified target policy instrument in Semester 4 of Phase 1 of the project through recognition of ecosystem services was a great early win in delivering the main policy objective of the project identified at application stage. It represents the first time that ecosystem services have been mainstreamed in any Irish policy framework.</p> <p>As directed by the Joint Secretariat in Phase 1 it is now proposed to monitor the territorial impact of this policy change in the Southern Region by adopting project metrics to assess the filter down of this regional policy objective at local policy level through County/City Development plans in the region.</p>
Links to interregional learning	<p>The interregional learning from the Delta project that contributed to this action includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Event – at the 4th Interregional Learning Event the Italian partners put forward a proposal to influence regional policy by submitting a policy brief to regional government on how to use ecosystem services in territorial planning (i.e. policy influence through information provision) • Good Practice – Contract de Delta Camargue published by the French partners sets out the importance of a common governance model to deliver a coordinated response to water management

Nature of the action	<p>The Delta Lady project team in Cork will apply monitoring metrics in Phase 2 of the project to measure the filter down of the regional policy objective on ecosystem services (RPO 110) within the region. Specifically, the extent of adoption of ecosystem services within all 10 City/County Development Plans in the region and report accordingly within the Delta Lady project reporting framework.</p> <p>Monitoring Metrics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - number of inclusions of ecosystem services concepts within the plan - specific objectives related to ecosystem services - reference to Good Practices on ecosystem services in the region
Stakeholders Involved	Cork County Council, University College Cork and the Southern Regional Assembly.
Timeframe	The timeframe for implementation of this action is throughout Phase 2 of the project (i.e., June 2021 - 2023).
Indicative Costs	Staff costs associated with the Delta Lady project team of approximately €10,000 in applying monitoring metrics of policy impact in the region.
Indicative Funding Sources	Cork County Council and UCC internal staff budget.
Expected Impacts	By demonstrating the incorporation and recognition of the concept of ecosystem services within regional and local level policy frameworks, the importance of the concept as a tool for balancing environmental and economic objectives will be further highlighted. This could potentially lead to further adoption and expansion of the concept within policy frameworks at wider spatial scales both nationally and within other European regions.

Action 2: Secure recognition of ecosystem services at local policy level through engagement and participation in the Cork County Development Plan (2022-2028) review.	
Relevance to the project	<p>At project application stage it was acknowledged that ecosystem services as a concept had yet to be mainstreamed into Irish policy. To address this policy deficit a regional level policy was identified as the main target policy instrument for the project, namely the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region (2020 – 2032).</p> <p>As the project developed, applying learnings gained it was recognised that there was an opportunity to influence a second policy instrument at local level i.e., the Cork County Development Plan (2022-2028). This is directly linked to the primary regional level target policy instrument and ultimately will further enhance the policy framework for ecosystem services in Ireland.</p>
Links to interregional learning	<p>The interregional learning from the Delta project that contributed to this action includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning event – at the 5th Interregional Learning event the Italian partners highlighted an objective to incorporate ecosystem services into the Po Delta Territorial Plan (i.e. adoption of a local policy instrument recognizing the concept) • Learning Event – at the 4th Interregional Learning Event the Italian partners put forward a proposal to influence regional policy by submitting a policy brief to regional government on how to use ecosystem services in territorial planning (i.e., influencing a regional policy instrument through recognition of ecosystem services)
Nature of the action	Engage with Cork County Council’s Planning Policy Unit (PPU) at all stages and participate in the next Cork County Development Plan (2022-2028) review process to also secure recognition of ecosystem service at local policy level.
Stakeholders Involved	Cork County Council and University College Cork.

Timeframe	The timeframe for implementation of this action aligns with the statutory timeframes set out for the review of the Cork County Development Plan (2022 – 2028). Ultimately, the new County Development Plan is due for formal adoption in June 2022.
Indicative Costs	Staff costs associated with the Delta Lady project team and internal Planning Policy Unit of approximately €10,000 relating to local policy development on ecosystem services.
Indicative Funding Sources	Cork County Council and UCC internal staff budget.
Expected Impacts	<p>Recognition of ecosystem services at local level within the Cork County Development Plan as a filter down from regional policy (i.e. primary target policy instrument and objective RPO 110) will further enhance the policy framework for ecosystem services in Ireland.</p> <p>Furthermore, the incorporation of an Ecosystem Services approach within the CCDP as a decision-making tool for plans and projects can provide an exemplar model to adopting RPO 110 which may be replicable for other land use plans across the region.</p>

Action 3: Formulate and deliver a Pollinator Plan for Youghal and associated local initiatives.

Relevance to the project	<p>Fostering pollinators and associated related initiatives encourages biodiversity, enhancement of natural ecosystems and general awareness of environmental issues (including ecosystem services).</p> <p>This action aims to provide a practical example of ecosystem services policy in action at a local scale. This demonstrates how the policy influenced by the project set at the regional level is implemented at a local level. This will highlight the impact of regional policy making at a local scale.</p> <p>During Phase 1 of the project CCC and UCC facilitated and assisted with the distribution of public and high-level surveys (as part of a postgraduate thesis and subsequent published academic paper) to ascertain perceptions of ecosystem services focusing on three sites in Youghal under consideration as part of the project. One of the principal findings emanating from the surveys/research was that pollination ranked as most important ecosystem service in the local public survey. On review of these findings, it was determined that the development of a Pollinator Plan for Youghal</p>
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	incorporating associated local level initiatives has great potential for building both public and local authority staff awareness of the importance of ecosystem services.
Links to interregional learning	<p>The interregional learning from the Delta project that contributed to this action includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Event – at the 4th Interregional Learning Event the Italian partners outlined a public survey model for informing findings on valorizing ecosystem services as a concept • Learning Event – at the 3rd Interregional event the Dutch stakeholder presentation on Silence of the Bees project highlighted the importance of pollination in promoting public awareness and creating sustainable ecosystems
Nature of the action	Assist with the formulation and delivery of a Pollinator Plan for Youghal and associated local initiatives.
Stakeholders Involved	Cork County Council and University College Cork.
Timeframe	The timeframe for implementation of this action is the delivery of a pollinator plan for Youghal in Phase 2 of the project (i.e. post June 2021).
Indicative Costs	<p>Cork County Council and UCC internal staff costs associated with organisational staff including the Delta Lady project team of approximately €18,000 to prepare a Pollinator Plan for Youghal.</p> <p>Also, potential costs associated with initiative implementation (e.g., native wildflower planting) through the internal Municipal District Office budget and grant funding under the Municipal Districts Community Fund scheme 2021/2022.</p>
Indicative Funding Sources	Cork County Council and UCC internal staff budget, the National Biodiversity Action Plan (2017-2021) and the Municipal Districts Community Fund scheme 2021/2022/2023.
Expected Impacts	<p>An enhanced appreciation of the importance of pollination and by extension ecosystem services among local authority staff and the general public in Youghal. This in turn could potentially act as an exemplar for increased visual presence and appreciation of the value of ecosystem services with potential for replication to other towns within the County. There is also potential for replication at wider regional/national levels and to other European regions.</p> <p>Furthermore, by promoting the importance of pollinators the project action plan will help with securing funding (internal/external) for the</p>

	<p>implementation of initiatives identified in the Youghal Pollinator Plan. It will also help to mobilize local community groups by providing a supporting framework for funding pollinator projects/initiatives under the Community Fund Scheme.</p> <p>Delivery of the Pollinator plan will help to influence both the primary and secondary policy instruments by demonstrating the value in promoting ecosystem services at a local scale.</p>
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Action 4: Deliver complimentary infrastructure supporting the use and preservation of ecosystem services on a local site in Youghal.

<p>Relevance to the project</p>	<p>Complimentary infrastructure which improves access to natural assets and encourages the use of cultural ecosystem services in Youghal.</p> <p>This action aims to provide a practical example of ecosystem services policy in action at a local level. This will help to demonstrate the benefits of regional/local policy change achieved through the project.</p> <p>In designing their project action plans each of the participating project partners have identified the main types of ecosystem services in their delta regions. In the context of the Cork region an opportunity for further development of cultural ecosystem services at the mouth of the River Blackwater in Youghal has been identified. Aiming to build on the momentum of Youghal being awarded the Ironman event and the imminent delivery of the Midleton-Youghal Greenway the project team feel there are opportunities to increase appreciation and use of cultural ecosystem services through recreation and eco-tourism opportunities. To this end three sites in Youghal (at the mouth of the Blackwater) have been actively considered as possible suitable areas to deliver some form of complimentary infrastructure to increase the appreciation and use of natural assets and their associated ecosystem services.</p> <p>As part of the site assessment process extensive research of relevant issues for consideration on each of the sites was undertaken including site characterisations, flood risk assessment, land ownership, environmental protection issues, etc. The findings of a postgraduate thesis and published academic paper which looked at each of the sites (incorporating results of local public & high-level surveys) also informed the preferred site selection. The survey engagement model has helped inform decision making at a local scale on the proposed development sites in Youghal under consideration as part of the project.</p>
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	<p>The Slob bank has been chosen as the site with most potential for cultivating the use of cultural ecosystem services having regard to existing natural assets, land ownership and local awareness/use of the site.</p> <p>Delivery of complimentary infrastructure (subject to funding acquisition) to increase the appreciation and use of ecosystem services can potentially act as a local level exemplar with wider transferability potential to the region.</p>
Links to interregional learning	<p>The interregional learning from the Delta project that contributed to this action include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3rd Interregional Learning event in Valencia hosted by Spanish Partners demonstrating the value of providing complimentary infrastructure (e.g., bird watching towers) to enhance use and appreciation of natural assets within the Albufera park • Good Practice – Tancat de la Pipa published by the Spanish partners demonstrates how public land can be transformed combining ecotourism with environmental conservation • 4th Interregional Learning event – Italian partners approach of utilising the findings of public surveys to operationalise the concept of ecosystem services • 5th Interregional Online Learning Event – Romanian partners provided examples of sustainable tourism activities in the Danube Delta • Good Practice – Jurilotca. Romanian partners recreational and eco-tourism model demonstrates the complimentary aspect to tourism offerings
Nature of the action	Deliver complimentary infrastructure (formalized walkway/bird watching facilities/signage) on the Slob Bank site to increase the appreciation and use of ecosystem services.
Stakeholders Involved	Cork County Council and University College Cork.
Timeframe	The projected timeframe for implementation of this action is Q4 2022.
Indicative Costs	<p>Cork County Council and UCC internal staff costs associated with organisational staff including the Delta Lady project team of approximately €25,000 in respect of application preparation (including landscape consultant appointment) and overseeing implementation.</p> <p>Capital infrastructure costs informed by project application costs. Proposed Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) (2022) Measure 2 application (20k – 200k).</p>

Indicative Funding Sources	Cork County Council and UCC internal staff costs. Prospective grant funding application under Measure 2 of the ORIS Scheme (2022) funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development.
Expected Impacts	Increased use and an enhanced appreciation of the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services by promoting development of a recreational walkway and complimentary bird watching facilities adjacent to the mouth of the River Blackwater. This will leave a tangible example how complimentary capital can enhance cultural ecosystem services at the Blackwater estuary and leave a positive project legacy.

Implementation of the Action Plan

The Delta Lady project has been very successful in Phase 1 in raising awareness of the importance of the concept of ecosystem services in Cork and the wider Southern region. This has been achieved through the formulation of a highly engaged, multi-agency Regional Stakeholder Group (see Appendix 2) and dissemination of the project among inter-related groups/bodies in the Cork region. The project team would like to acknowledge the very constructive and positive input from stakeholders to the project and assistance provided in developing this Regional Action Plan.

This plan aims to build upon the momentum gained in Phase 1 to follow through on identified project actions in Phase 2. The successful delivery of this action plan will require committed resourcing and funding to ensure effective implementation. The Delta Lady project has the potential to deliver a very significant impact the area of ecosystem services in Ireland. This can be achieved by securing recognition for ecosystem services for the first time at both regional and local policy levels. It is also proposed to provide a local level exemplar at the mouth of the River Blackwater in Youghal demonstrating how supporting ecosystem services can both preserve natural assets and encourage economic development.

The actions proposed in this action plan have been formulated in conjunction with relevant supporting organisations represented on the project Regional Stakeholder Group and this will be key to its successful delivery.

Part IV – Endorsement of the Action Plan

Appendix 1: Letter of Support from the Managing Authority (Southern Regional Assembly)

 European Union European Regional Development Fund		Sharing solutions for better regional policies	
<p><i>Letter of endorsement from the relevant organisation responsible for policy</i></p>			
<p><i>For Structural Funds programmes (i.e. Investment for Growth and Jobs and European Territorial Cooperation programmes), the relevant organisation responsible for policy may differ from country to country. Detailed references are provided on the 'In my country' pages on the programme website www.interregeurope.eu</i></p>			
Project acronym	Delta Lady		
Project title	Floating Cultures in River Deltas		
Name of the organisation (original) including department (if relevant)	Southern Regional Assembly		
Name of the organisation (English) including department (if relevant)	Southern Regional Assembly		
Name of the policy instrument addressed (original)	Regional Planning Guidelines (to be replaced by the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region		
Name of the policy instrument addressed (English)	Regional Planning Guidelines (to be replaced by the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region		
Name of partner(s) concerned in the application form (English)	Cork County Council		
<p>We hereby confirm:</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ that we are aware of and agree with the Action Plan prepared in connection with the above-mentioned project, ▪ that we will continue to engage with the stakeholder group, ▪ that we will pursue the implementation of the action plan through our policy instrument. 			
Name of signatory	David Kelly		
Position of signatory	Director		
Date	27.10.2021		
Signature and institution stamp (if exists)			

Appendix 2: Delta Lady Project RSG Group

Delta Lady Project – Regional Stakeholder Group		
Name	Organisation	Role
Catherine Seale	LAWPRO	Community Water Officer
Fergus Ó Súilleabháin	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Regional Inspector
Aileen Murray	Youghal Socio-Economic Group	Manager
Helen Mulcahy	Youghal Municipal District Office	Senior Staff Officer
Bryan Riney	Southern Regional Assembly	Regional Planning Officer
Frank O'Flynn	CCC Environment Department	Senior Executive Scientist
Elaine Walsh	CCC Planning Policy Unit	Senior Executive Planner
Andrew Gillespie	Inland Fisheries Ireland	Senior Fisheries Environmental Officer
Dr. Sorcha Ui Longphuirt	Environmental Protection Agency	Marine Scientist
Eimear Connery	Teagasc	ASSAP Advisor
Mark Twomey	The Forestry Service, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Forestry Inspector
Delta Lady Project Team		
John Lalor	Cork County Council – EU Projects Office	Project Manager
Darragh O'Suilleabháin	Cork County Council – EU Projects Office	Project Manager
Dr. Tim O'Higgins	University College Cork – MaREI Institute	Research Fellow