

## EVENT 13: EVALUATION

### *PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION OF THE CO-GREEN COMMUNITY ACTIONS*

#### **Objectives and dates:**

The main objective of Event 13 is to understand the extent to which participants in the CO-GREEN community actions have changed their awareness and engagement regarding green measures and local policies. Additionally, through participatory evaluation initiatives, the engaged communities are expected to share their critical viewpoints and lessons learned, with the aim of shaping effective future pathways for green policies.

The participatory evaluation exercise was conducted over an extended project period, beginning in the summer of 2023 and concluding at the end of the project:

- In Poland: sessions in Górnó on 11/09 and 18/09/2024, in Wiązówna on 29/10/2024, and in Starachowice on 05/11/2024
- In Italy: sessions in Magione on 21/10/2024, in Cosenza on 08/11/2024, and in Cavalese on 16/10/2024
- In Croatia: sessions in Opatija and Rijeka on 13/07/2024 and 17/10/2024
- In Greece]: session in Karditsa on 14/10/2024

The project partners have used different techniques ranging from focus groups to world cafés, Open Space Technology sessions and hands-on visits.

In total, 183 participants have been engaged:

- Poland: 77 (60 women and 17 men)
- Italy: 63 (37 women, 24 men, 2 non-binary)
- Croatia: 23 (18 women and 5 men)
- Greece: 20 (16 women and 4 men)

## Description:

### **POLAND:**

In the 3 communities a detailed evaluation process was conducted:

**Górno:** on 11.09. 2024 the local evaluation workshop took place and on 18.09.2024 the integration workshop took. The participants who were involved in the project discussed what the project brought to their day today local activities (evaluation workshops) and what are recommendations for further actions (integration workshops). They pointed crucial elements for the project implementation, also in the context of future activities:

- Environmental problems have become increasingly apparent. In addition to the air pollution traditional to the area, problems of drought, river flooding have emerged. This reduces the quality of life, restricts activities, and has a direct impact on the health of residents or the economic situation (water levels in the surrounding lagoon).
- The activities in Górno were process-oriented, with a number of meetings taking place, especially for senior citizens and the very active Youth Council of the municipality. CUS played an important role in this, coordinating activities and providing knowledge or infrastructure.
- To a certain extent, the project also managed to involve entrepreneurs (here an important role for the municipality and the direct involvement of the mayor), and one company supported the implemented projects.
- The biggest problem was the lack of people of working age. The dominance of the municipality and the lack of activity of NGOs in Co-Green activities is also characteristic.
- Górno also shows how important the role of the green activist is. It is he or she who, through activity, presence in the community, and the ability to build direct relations, activates the community, but also acts as a link between institutions (e.g. local government) and the community. In Górno, personnel changes were a problem.
- The role of the organiser of local communities was, among others, to merge individual villages that make up the municipality.
- The evaluation shows how important the personality and communication skills of the green activator himself (and to some extent the OSŁowca) are. Górno has transformed 3 different types of people, more expressive, extroverted, having the tools and methodology for coaching activities, focused on building relationships between people, having good contact with institutions, and being able to frame the broader goals of the activities.
- The change in the activities themselves is interesting, the community (and subsequent OSŁs) took a long time to develop a plan of action. A safe option was chosen, building on the activities already in place (cleaning up the world).
- A total of 48 people + 20 supporters were involved in the activities.

- The evolution of the project also had its good points. OSŁowiec focused on community engagement, shifting resources to activities with residents.
- CO-GREEN fits into the activities of the municipality, it is one element. This is where the now classic problem comes in. Municipalities have a whole series of, unfortunately disconnected activities
- (even if they relate to the same issue). It seems that it is necessary to focus on continuity, on linking activities together (in the project, the area undergoing revitalisation processes was such an element).
- In the project itself, contacts with CAL, UMK and other CUS were very important for Górna. They allowed, for example, the efficient management of the project, making changes, implementing activities. Flexibility but also understanding is important here.
- According to the respondents, it is worth investing in better personal contact during the project. They could also learn more from each other.

**Wiązowna:** A local evaluation workshop and an integration workshop were held on 29 October 2024. Participants involved in the project discussed what the project has brought to their daily local activities (evaluation workshop) and recommendations for future activities (integration workshop). They identified key elements for the implementation of the project and for future activities:

- Environmental care requires educational and promotional activities. Workshops held in the community on the use of plants and natural remedies in first aid kits, in the kitchen and for cleaning showed that the residents were very interested in this topic. There is a need to continue such activities and education on recycling, proper waste separation, learning how to compost or using natural remedies in the home and garden instead of chemicals.
- The young people said that environmental awareness is learned at home, but there is a need for concrete knowledge and to break down stereotypes.
- The activities in Wiązowna focused on the process of building cooperation between representatives of different groups, seniors, youth, leaders and activists around a green transformation. Many meetings were held, especially for seniors and young people. CUS played an important role in coordinating activities and providing knowledge and infrastructure.
- Another challenge is that, although this is a rural community, many residents work and study in Warsaw. As a result, residents tend to focus on their own homes and gardens, taking care of the immediate area rather than the 'communal' areas. On the other hand, less rubbish is collected during the community clean-up campaign than in the past, and there are fewer fly-tipping incidents.
- The challenge was to spread the project activities evenly and to involve different groups, such as young people who were very busy with school and school work. Their presence required adults to be active, to take them to a meeting, to drive them home. Similarly, the senior citizens' group, which was very present at the beginning of the project, lost its motivation to attend meetings and workshops over time.

- For the future, more attention should be paid to preparing and involving young people. However, the young people attended all the meetings and were involved in developing the idea for the workshops and documenting them on camera. A film workshop was also organised to teach the young people how to organise the work and what a film should contain to document and promote the event in the local community. However, when it came to making films of the workshops, it was difficult to confront the lack of skills in planning, scriptwriting, working with adults and organising their own work. This is a lesson for the future. The biggest problem was the lack of people of working age and entrepreneurs. The dominance of the municipality and minimal NGO activity in Co-Green activities is also characteristic.
- The community in Wiązowna is spread over a rather large area, where public transport is lacking. This also shows the importance of the role of the green activist, who reaches out to individual villages and activates the community through his or her activity and ability to build direct relationships, but also acts as a link between institutions (e.g. local government, school, retirement home) and the community.
- The most important thing, however, is that the project took place and provided some impetus to start a discussion about climate change, green transition and appropriate responses at the level of the municipality and individual residents. The issues are very broad and relevant to the challenges of today's society.
- The community took a long time to come up with an action plan.
- A safe option was chosen, relying on an external expert to run the workshop, with the residents as the audience. The expert proved to be a very charismatic and well-prepared person, which contributed to the success of the activities.
- CO-GREEN is part of the community's activities, it is one of the elements. And this is where the now classic problem arises. Municipalities have a whole range of activities that are unfortunately not connected (even if they are related to the same topic).
- There seems to be a need for continuity, for involving different groups of residents in the activities, e.g. housewives' associations, fire brigades, entrepreneurs.
- In the project itself, contacts with CAL, UMK and other CUS were very important for Wiązowna. Among other things, they enabled efficient project management, introduction of changes, exchange of experiences and practices.
- According to the respondents, it is worthwhile to invest more resources in this type of activities and to implement them in a continuous and systematic way.

**Starachowice:** A local evaluation workshop and an integration workshop were held on 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2024. Participants involved in the project discussed what the project has brought to their daily local activities (evaluation workshop) and recommendations for future activities (integration workshop). They identified key elements for the implementation of the project and for future activities:

- The project had two areas of activity. In the first, an eco-story was produced by the senior citizens together with the children. A book in which the texts were written by senior citizens and illustrated by schoolchildren. In discussing this process, participants pointed to the involvement of the school and the linking of previously uncooperative areas of the city.
- The lack of presence of people of working age was raised. Most activities are based on the activity of the oldest and youngest people. Involving other age groups remains a challenge.
- The role of the local leader, someone who recognises the urban environment well and has experience working with the community, was highlighted. At the same time, attention was given to the role of the deputy who would ultimately lead the activities.
- The role of the activator was to bring communities together, to provide the infrastructure for action, to mediate between residents and the city. Ideas, on the other hand, were generated by the community itself.
- The community gardens located next to the social housing were also an important area of project activities. In doing so, it was possible to involve some residents in organising, tidying up and working around the blocks. Here, the direct presence and face-to-face contact between social workers and citizens is an important element.

#### **ITALY:**

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Several evaluation meetings, workshops, and seminars with experts were held as part of the CO-GREEN project, aimed at exploring community development, environmental sustainability, and green space protection. These sessions primarily focused on sharing experiences, skills, and tools to implement sustainable and inclusive projects within the territory.

In detail, workshops and world cafés (as participatory and democratic sessions) were organized:

- Comunità Magione on 21/10/2024
- Comunità Panebianco on 08/11/2024
- Comunità Cavalese on 16/10/2024

During the evaluation meetings, participants reviewed the results achieved so far and discussed strategies to enhance the effectiveness of ongoing interventions. These sessions enabled a thorough analysis of the impact of initiatives in areas like **social inclusion, solidarity economy, and community empowerment**. Progress was also discussed towards fostering **inclusive community leadership**, emphasizing participatory approaches and the co-creation of innovative solutions that meet local needs.

The workshops, facilitated by experts, covered specific topics such as **urban regeneration** and **sustainable urban planning**, with case studies and best practices from various contexts. Particular attention was given to **bio-architecture** and **community energy**

**transition**, exploring solutions that promote low-impact buildings and neighborhoods. Participants also delved into practical approaches for **carbon footprint reduction** and the **responsible use of natural resources**, engaging in hands-on exercises and simulations that made the learning process both practical and immediate.

The seminars with experts focused on long-term visions and perspectives, tackling subjects such as **local climate adaptation** and **regenerative economy**. Experts highlighted the benefits of an approach that integrates **biodiversity** and **green technologies** to protect local ecosystems and advance the concept of **cities as living ecosystems**. Discussions also included **environmental education** and the role of communities in **managing common goods**, underscoring the importance of developing cross-functional skills that enable communities to tackle climate change challenges collaboratively and with awareness.

These sessions were valuable growth opportunities for participants, who gained insights and innovative perspectives. Active participation fostered the exchange of ideas and encouraged reflections on how to improve community quality of life by adopting sustainable and responsible practices. The organizers compiled a summary of the main keywords and ideas that emerged, which will serve as a foundation for future actions and for strengthening the collaborative network between organizations, experts, and citizens.

## **CROATIA:**

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In Croatia, the Evaluation process articulated in two important onsite events, namely the Local Evaluation Workshop and the Integration Workshop; in addition, the online Survey ensured that the engaged participants could assess the overall methodology.

As regards the **Local Evaluation Workshop**, it was organised as an outdoor event *on the beach*, on 13/07/2024. We engaged many citizens who already had taken part in the Citizens' Laboratories (CO-GREEN's Event 11). One of the logics behind event design, based on the conclusions of the previous Citizens laboratories, was to foster and motivate participation while tackling the overall goal of the activity itself - gathering qualitative data through citizen's feedback. The areas of intervention mapped by implemented Citizens laboratories in our community were related to:

a. Youth participation in "green" transition, their empowerment and support for implementation of local "green" initiatives towards positive changes and participation in shaping their community,

b. Small scale local "green" initiatives connected with climate change.

- Participants: 18 local citizens
- Contents addressed: Evaluated citizens' feedback from prior "green" transition activities, focusing on youth involvement, local green initiatives, pollution sources, and public access to community spaces.

- **Main outcomes:** Participants highlighted local industrial and citizen-driven pollution, strong concern for climate change, and the importance of keeping beaches accessible. Additionally, there was consensus on fostering sustainable development independent of foreign capital.
- **Recommendations:** Emphasize community-driven environmental initiatives, maintaining public space accessibility, and support for sustainable development focused on local resilience.

In conclusion, the local evaluation workshop provided an invaluable forum for citizens to voice their concerns and share their perspectives on urgent environmental issues. Through innovative, zero-waste activities, the event succeeded in both engaging youth and fostering community involvement, highlighting that sustainable development is a shared priority. The feedback clearly revealed a deep-rooted concern over industrial and citizen-driven pollution, alongside a strong desire to keep public beaches and public spaces accessible and untouched by private interests. Equally, the citizens emphasised that sustainable growth should prioritise local resilience over foreign capital. This workshop affirmed the community's commitment to proactive, sustainable change, marking a positive step toward an environmentally-conscious future.

As regards the **Local Integration Workshop**, it was organized as a world café session in Opatija on 17/10/2024 to discuss the results that emerged from the previously held local activities and how they can be the foundation of future steps and potential collaborations in the framework of “green” transition in the local community. Workshop gathered 5 participants mapped as key stakeholders in the local community interested in the challenges connected to the Green Deal. World cafe methodology served as a space to share lessons learnt, to map most relevant and urgent future local initiatives connected to the Green Deal as well as support the effectiveness of future local initiatives.

- **Participants:** 5 key stakeholders in the local community
- **Contents addressed:** Used World Café methodology to discuss lessons from past activities and strategies for future local "green" initiatives, particularly involving the Green Network of the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (ZMPGŽ).
- **Main outcomes:** Recognized the Green Network's impact on collaboration across sectors, specifically its support for initiatives like "Save Kvarner's Beaches" and "Pensioners for Climate," which highlight the community's collective power in sustainable change.
- **Recommendations:** Strengthen formal support for grassroots environmental projects, foster collaboration, and emphasize local initiatives in strategic environmental planning.

In conclusion, the local integration workshop served as a valuable platform for stakeholders to assess the impact of previous activities and to build a roadmap for future green transition efforts in the community. By bringing together key players through the world café methodology, the workshop facilitated meaningful dialogue, idea-sharing and

strategic planning to address urgent environmental issues within the Green Deal framework. The Green Network of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (ZMPGŽ) was highlighted as a pivotal result of the CO-GREEN project, proving instrumental in strengthening community collaboration and engagement. Initiatives like "Pensioners for Climate" and the strategic support to initiative "Save Kvarner's Beaches!" underscore the power of collective action and showcase the potential of the Green Network to drive sustainable change by empowering citizens and fostering partnerships that protect both the environment and the community's quality of life. Finally, the **online Survey** was launched during the summer of 2024, as a complementary exercise to collect participants' opinions on the overall CO-GREEN project's activities, specifically of its impact, inclusivity, accessibility, and collaborative efforts across various sectors. In total, 16 respondents (community members) provided their feedback. In general, we collected positive response regarding CO-GREEN's effectiveness and engagement, with a noted interest in clearer communication about event outcomes, increased inclusivity, and stronger cross-sector collaboration. Recommendations were also shared, highlighting the need to improve post-event communication, expand outreach to underrepresented groups, create online engagement forums, and establish ongoing educational resources to bolster community involvement.

These events demonstrate strong community support for environmental initiatives and highlight areas for enhancing engagement, inclusivity, and sustained collaboration.

#### **GREECE:**

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In Greece, the Co-Green project's **evaluation workshop** was organised on 14/10/2024. It brought together 15 participants who engaged in a productive discussion on the project's impacts, challenges, and potential for lasting influence within the community. Participants rated the project's effects and benefits highly, noting its success in advancing sustainable practices and fostering collaboration among the Green Activators. The project provided substantial benefits, including greater awareness and practical insights into sustainable development for Green Activators, trainers, and the wider community. Feedback indicated a strong alignment with community needs, though some participants noted that broader local involvement could have further enhanced its impact. Participants also highlighted positive outcomes such as intergenerational training, improved relationships with local NGOs, and new skills in public participation, with an emphasis on participatory processes where everyone becomes a proactive contributor rather than just a follower. They agreed on the project's potential to leave a lasting legacy through established networks and practices, recommending that similar projects prioritize early stakeholder engagement, clear communication, and continued support for local initiatives

The planned **integration workshop** was organised as a focus group on 14/10/2024, bringing together 5 trainers involved in the Co-Green project. This session provided valuable insights into the specific challenges hindering Karditsa's progress toward a green



transition. During the session, the trainers agreed that the project successfully highlighted key issues that require attention. They noted a general lack of engagement with local citizens, which has limited community support for sustainable initiatives. Additionally, while the municipality has expressed interest in green initiatives, there appears to be insufficient backing to fully support local actions and long-term projects. The trainers also pointed out that the university, a key institution for fostering knowledge and innovation, has not been as open to collaborating with the local community as would be beneficial. This disconnect limits opportunities for knowledge-sharing that could promote sustainable practices and green awareness. Furthermore, most NGOs in the area are not actively utilizing participatory processes, which hinders their ability to effectively involve citizens in the decision-making process. The trainers emphasized that the scarcity of active citizen initiatives to apply pressure on local government has also been a significant barrier, resulting in slower progress on implementing green transition measures. This discussion underscored the need for stronger, community-wide engagement strategies to drive Karditsa's sustainable development goals.



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