



Report on the
Platform Meeting

LIFE innovates Climate Action

Summary, key messages, and policy recommendations

8-9 November 2022

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Foreword

*As pointed out by Laura Storm, the keynote speaker, stress and mental illness are increasing in parallel with the industrial revolution's exponential race, along with the related threats posed by climate and environmental crises. This narrows the capacity to think outside the box and finding systemic solutions. A **holistic & regenerative approach is needed**, moving away from the linear schemes by **mimicking living systems** for their **diversity, resilience and circularity**.*

***Networking and interconnection of systems** are intrinsic to life, to all natural ecosystems, and we should use the same approach in our society and organisations, avoiding polarising environment and having strong values and compassionate leadership strenghtned by **feedback loops** from the underlying communities and through **cross-pollination of ideas and points of view**, learning to **listen deeply without judgement**.*

These messages enfold what is needed to implement the European Climate Pact in terms of stakeholder involvement, co-creation and ultimately, systemic innovation. Particularly in terms of LIFE Programme, several projects, both the so-called traditional projects as well as the larger, integrated projects, are promoting systemic innovation and integrated, participative, faster, smarter climate actions. The platform meeting 'LIFE innovates climate action' brought together these projects to discuss the lessons learned and the way forward. These lessons are relevant to any stakeholder committed with the Climate Pact, specially to the regional stakeholders involved in the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change.

1. Introduction

This report reflects and summarises the main lessons and takeaways of the LIFE programme platform meeting "LIFE innovates Climate Action", co-organized by LIFE Integrated Project Coast to Coast Climate Challenge (C2C CC) and the European Climate Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) with the support from NEEMO team.

The platform meeting was held on 08-09 November 2022 in Aarhus, Denmark, as a semi-hybrid event: while the project hosts were in a studio, the remaining participants and speakers were participating online. The participants were composed of approximately 10 person at the physical location, while 97 people registered to join the event online. The participants were mostly LIFE project managers, as well as national contact points, CINEA and DG CLIMA project officers and NEEMO technical experts.

The event's main thematic focus was placed on systemic innovation for climate change adaptation and mitigation. Section 1.1 of this report introduces this concept of systemic innovation and its importance for climate change politics. Section 1.3 presents the structure of the platform meeting, followed by a concise presentation of the event's main findings in section 2. Section 3 gives short summaries of the sessions of the platform meeting, including good practices for systemic innovation approaches and how they are implemented on the ground by selected, mainly, LIFE projects under the 30-year-old LIFE programme¹. Section 4 presents some concluding remarks. An Annex with a detailed agenda and the list of registered participants is attached to this report.

1.1 Systemic innovation and its importance for climate change adaptation and mitigation

What is systemic innovation?

Innovations can develop incrementally, within a given process or organisation, or they can be radical, profoundly changing or even disrupting existing procedures and structures.

"Innovation is new ideas to be translated into practice to create value. They constitute a break from previous practices and are central to create value in the core areas of organisations." - Catharina Juul Kristensen (Selmer & Bonven 2022, p.1)

While innovation is commonly associated with technological advancements, systemic innovation encompasses a more intricate concept. It encompasses the adoption of new technologies and their consequences, along with the introduction of fresh measures and policies within multilevel systems. Additionally, it involves the engagement of individuals in a process that promotes systemic thinking

¹ For more information on the LIFE programme please visit <https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en>, for the LIFE 30 celebrations visit <<https://www.lifeis30.eu/>< and for detailed information on the specific projects please visit <<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/search>>.

and action, as stated by Midgley and Lindhult (2021: 635). The primary focus is not limited to a specific technology or economic sector, but rather aims to comprehensively comprehend and transform our societal system. This transformation encompasses all relevant factors and stakeholders necessary for sustainable development and growth, drawing parallels to the European Green Deal (Systemiq 2020). Selmer et. al. (2022, p.1) describe systemic innovation as an approach and practice that results from co-creation within extensive partnerships, situated within the context of a quadruple helix. This helix unites the knowledge society, government, companies, and civil society, representing an ideal framework for fostering regional economic growth (refer to the figure below and EU CoR 2016). Moreover, the quadruple helix model is well-suited to drive and support integrative climate adaptation processes at a regional level. It places emphasis on participation, co-creative planning, and integrative implementation, ensuring shared ownership.

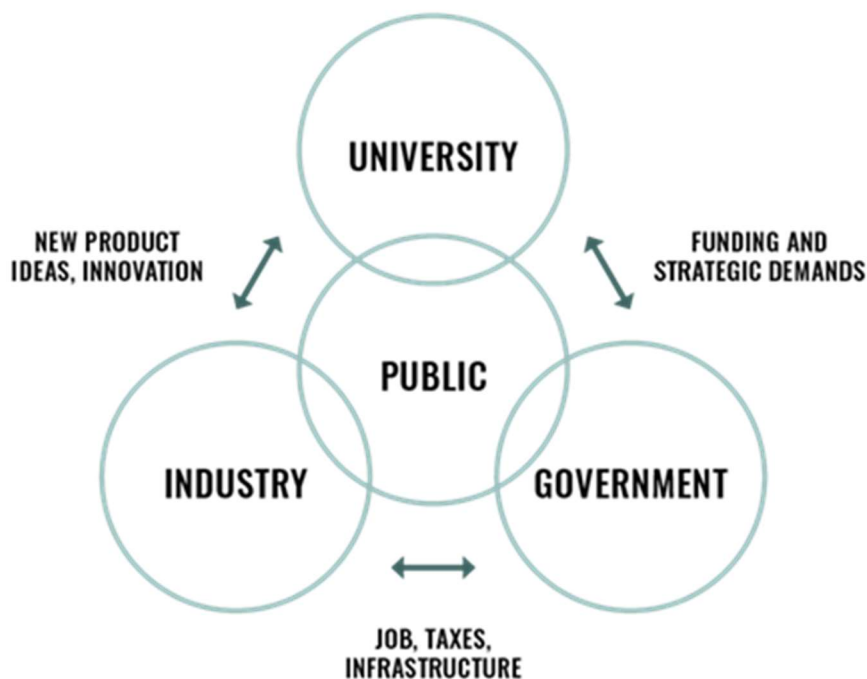


Figure: Quadruple helix layout (source: Climatorium 2022)

Why is systemic innovation needed in climate action?

The recent global and regional climate developments have underscored the criticality and urgency of taking action. Regardless of the continent or region we examine, weather-related events and catastrophic occurrences that were once considered rare are now repeating themselves within short spans of decades or even years. These events encompass a wide range of phenomena, such as rapid flooding, heatwaves, prolonged droughts, intense rainfall, melting glaciers and permafrost, landslides,

“Business-, innovation- and investment-as-usual are not delivering a 1.5 degree world... The whole system needs to be fixed and all sectors have to be taken into account and co-developed.” Pernille Modvig, Climate-KIC.

hurricanes, and typhoons, among others. However, the existing approaches to address this problem often fall short in terms of their effectiveness compared to the risks associated with the climate change that affects us all. When considering the magnitude, quality, duration, and perhaps most alarming, the rapid pace of environmental changes that both the EU and the entire world will witness in the upcoming years, it becomes evident that isolated innovations and sector-specific solutions will not be sufficient.

Technological innovations as such are essential but will not be enough. Especially if even incremental (meaning staying in the current non-sustainable logic of development) "tech fixes" are not brought into wide use and do not manage to replace outdated processes, habits, and solutions. In contrast, a fundamental systemic change in our economies and societies is required. Our modern societal systems are characterized by interconnected and interdependent economic, political and social processes. All of these systems need to be transformed at the same time to reduce the use of fossil fuels where possible and adapt to the ongoing climate change where necessary. Instead of sectorial solutions, interdisciplinary and cross-sectorial strategies are required. Solution providers from all societal areas, private and public, profit and non-profit, should be involved. Furthermore, it is crucial to propelling these transformations in a way that does not discriminate against certain groups or countries. In order to gain widespread acceptance, innovative systemic sustainability concepts have to take into account the economic capacities of ordinary citizens, possibly relieving already deprived groups. New concepts and solutions need to be created and designed in a fashion that makes the necessary decarbonisation and adaptation processes faster, smarter, and more integrative. This implies the participation and contribution of all stakeholders from all sectors of our societies, including but not limited to those of the economic, the financial, the non-profit, and the political areas, as well as the common citizenry in each region of the member states.

“Changes need to be co-created, involving behavioural change of actors from policy, financing, etc. Inter-connected interventions that pinpoint and connect various systems at the same time are required.” Pernille Modvig, Climate-KIC.

1.2 Objectives of the platform meeting

The core objective of this Platform Meeting was to demonstrate how systemic innovation can facilitate climate change mitigation and adaptation, with a focus on regional approaches.

Looking at systemic innovation, mitigation, and adaption, especially the LIFE Integrated Projects offers relevant experiences and valuable lessons learned. Most of them have a regional focus, as does the EU Horizon Mission on Climate Adaptation². One of the meeting's objectives was to strengthen knowledge exchange on best practices and, as a result of this, reinforce the overall impact of the

² Further information on the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change please refer to https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/adaptation-climate-change-including-societal-transformation_en

participating initiatives and projects. Another one was to draw critical lessons learnt from the experiences of the actors on the ground, who trialed and tested their innovative ideas during their projects. Last but not least, the meeting aimed to gather feedback and provide policy input for relevant stakeholders at EU and regional level.

1.3 Structure of the Platform Meeting

The meeting was structured to highlight in the first day selected LIFE Integrated Projects that can feed their experience to the EU Mission on Adaptation (session 1) and to the EU Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities (session 2). The second day focused on how multi-level governance level (session 3) and how co-creation and public engagement (session 4) can support systemic innovation in climate action. The platform meeting was structured to bring not only LIFE project presentations and discussions, but also highlighted systemic innovation with keynotes and special presentations along the two days. DG CLIMA also introduced the EU Mission on Adaptation. Projects had the opportunity to discuss and network among themselves.

Day 1: LIFE innovates climate action on the regional level systemically

- Welcome
- Keynote speech
- Session 1: *Regional systemic innovation for adaptation: new alliances towards resilience.*
- Session 2: *Regional systemic innovation for mitigation: taking climate action to the next level*

Day 2: LIFE presents: Innovative ways to enhance governance and participation

- Welcome
- Keynote speech
- Session 3: *Enhancing local and multilevel governance with systemic innovation*
- Session 4: *Systemic innovation enhancing co-creation and participation*
- Conclusions and findings, closing of platform meeting

2. Key messages

Day 1:

- **Integration:** In order to address the climate challenges, we need a **holistic approach**, with "horizontal" integration between mitigation and adaptation and a "vertical" integration between the different administrative, sectoral and societal levels.
- **Co-creation and stakeholders' involvement** are at the basis of systemic innovation: creating synergies, establishing new alliances, sharing knowledge, promoting co-decision processes, enhancing the capacity of stakeholders, engaging stakeholders from different administration levels and with different perspectives (conflicting ideas could generate disruptive yet innovative solutions, successful in the long run).
- **Awareness raising and people engagement** are required for mobilizing society and allow for behavioral changes towards resilience and sustainable ways of living.
- **Mobilizing complementary funding**, also from private investors and banks, is fundamental for the widespread of innovative solutions and the acceleration of adaptation to climate change.
- **Community-driven solutions, representing a good business-case** is a crucial factor for success in implementing climate change innovation.
- A **common vision and strategy** are needed; stakeholders need long-term engagement and support through continuous dialogue, also aiming to generate feedback loops for improvement.
- The **triangle** links between **knowledge, regulations** and **citizens**, supported by the necessary funding, are considered the basis for success in the adaptation and mitigation efforts to tackle the climate change challenges.

Day 2

- **Support small communities and local authorities with specific information focused on the actual local context**
Smaller communities often suffer from a lack of knowledge and capacity to address adequately local climate change impacts and risks. Provide the local stakeholders with fact-based data and analytical instruments, providing the necessary details. Stakeholders, including administration and politicians, might have to be trained to use these tools or to interpret their results.
- **Create a dialogue between the different political-administrative levels**
The different levels of government do not work smoothly together in all EU member states. Sometimes, communication between the different levels is scarce. It is important to establish space for the mutual exchange of information and positions.

- **Define regions not only according to administrative borders, but also along functional needs**
 With a view to climate action, functional needs and requirements should guide stakeholders' composition, not just political boundaries.
- **Create innovative instruments to engage with stakeholders and decision-makers while building bridges between levels and disciplines**
 Organising cross-sectorial exchange and interdisciplinary co-operation is crucial for both the design and the actual implementation of long-lasting climate actions.
- **Integrate all stakeholders - including those who oppose the project – and facilitate direct communication**
 The basis is a thorough mapping of the stakeholders. Being well aware of the challenges of others helps avoiding misunderstandings and accepting compromises.
- **Make people understand their risks – and their benefits**
 Clearly work out the risks of a specific stakeholder, and then explain the benefits of the planned actions. The risk analysis should be fact-based, which again emphasised the importance of integrating actors from the sciences.
- **Create not only a common vision – create co-ownership**
 All projects reported on the importance of a common, shared vision. For the long-term success of the climate action, on top of that, a feeling of "ownership" by all participants is crucial.
- **Do not come with pre-designed solutions – let the stakeholders co-decide and co-design their own strategies and solutions**
 This will open up the space for intensive discussions, which are necessary for the participants to find out what compromises they can accept.
- **Create synergistic effects between various challenges –between mitigation – adaptation and beyond!**
 Seek to create synergies and combine response to climate change risks with other societal challenges.
- **Be open about costs**
 Investors will only engage in a project if the costs and economic risks are made transparent. Focus on small-scale, local and cost-effective solutions (such as nature-based solutions) may be preferable for certain cases, in order to avoid large financial risks.

3. Summary of the meeting

Sections 3.1 and 3.2 encompass the initial two sessions of the platform meeting. Each session featured presentations from three LIFE Integrated Projects, wherein they emphasized the systemic innovation aspects they strive to implement. These presentations were subsequently followed by a panel discussion.

In this report, sections 3.3 and 3.4 summarize the presentations and discussions that took place during the second day of the platform meeting. The organization of this day differed from the first, with both sections beginning with a special presentation. These were succeeded by a session comprising four pitch presentations by LIFE projects, as well as an extensive panel discussion. The goal was to encourage in-depth interaction and discourse between the panel members and attendees. The subsequent sections provide a summary of the key points and arguments that emerged during these discussions.

3.1 Regional systemic innovation for adaptation: new alliances towards resilience

EU LIFE IP C2C CC: systemic innovation

The LIFE IP Coast to Coast (LIFE15 IPC/DK/000006) project focuses on climate change adaptation and revolves around four themes related to the hydrological cycle: sea and fjords, rivers, groundwater, and rainwater. These themes are complemented by three cross-cutting areas: governance, tools, and systemic innovation. The primary objective of the C2C CC project is to establish climate-resilient cities within a climate-resilient region. This will be accomplished through the collaborative development of a long-term strategy with local stakeholders. The strategy aims to guide the targeted implementation of local climate change adaptation (CCA) plans, facilitate coordinated CCA analyses and activities, and identify and enhance the resources and adaptive capacities of citizens, municipalities, utilities, and companies operating in the water sector.



During its presentation, the project highlighted the challenges it encountered and how it successfully implemented systemic innovation to tackle them. The challenges encompassed the **absence of a comprehensive national regulatory and administrative framework, limited capacity** to address and adapt to the impacts of climate change, and **conflicts** arising from various EU policy initiatives.

To overcome these challenges, the project actively engaged with the European Union by contributing through open consultation processes. It also played a role in shaping the

modernization of the national policy framework by providing suggestions. Additionally, the project focused on developing relevant tools and innovations to address the identified challenges effectively.

At the local and regional level, the project emphasized the importance of **co-creation**. Key stakeholders and citizens were actively involved in the process, fostering the collaborative development of solutions. This approach enabled the holistic exploration of solutions or innovations, increased stakeholder ownership, and enhanced the potential for securing financial support for implementation.

In terms of policy, the project formulated the Principle Rules, which serve as a comprehensive set of guidelines for guiding future endeavors related to climate adaptation and the establishment of a national legal framework. These rules embody a holistic approach, prioritize nature-based solutions, encompass cross-cutting considerations, promote dynamism, and account for socio-economic factors. These principles are visually represented in the figure above.

*Broad partnerships and co-creation are preferable,
instead of traditional hierarchical approaches,
in creating sustainable, coherent, and holistic solutions.*

LIFE IP NADAPTA-CC: increasing resilience at regional level

LIFE IP NADAPTA (LIFE16 IPC/ES/000001) focuses on enhancing the resilience of Navarra region against the effects of climate change. It encompasses a wide range of focal areas, including climate change monitoring, water management, forestry, health, agriculture, livestock, infrastructure, and territorial planning.



Within the project, various local and regional solutions have been developed to address these challenges. Examples include the formulation of SECAPs (Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans), the establishment of early warning systems for floods and heatwaves, the identification of vulnerable areas prone to forest fires, the creation of digital tools for agricultural adaptation, and many more.

Throughout the project, extensive collaboration with relevant stakeholders has been fostered. The project aimed to inform and engage stakeholders, understand their specific needs, and **promote synergies** through networking. Over 50 training sessions and 140 networking events have been conducted to facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation.

The project operates at both national and local levels, striving to integrate climate change adaptation into sectoral policies and foster a culture of adaptation at the local level. Notably, the project has successfully formed new alliances, including groups of municipalities participating in the Covenant of Mayors initiative. Currently, 80% of the region's municipalities are actively involved in this initiative.

While technological innovations, such as the IT Tools developed by the project, play a crucial role, the project's systemic approach is essential for their meaningful impact. The LIFE IP NADAPTA project has provided the necessary **framework and resources for effective communication and collaboration** among all stakeholders, enabling a holistic approach. This comprehensive approach is the key value-added element that ensures the sustainability of the solutions developed, ultimately leading to a resilient region.

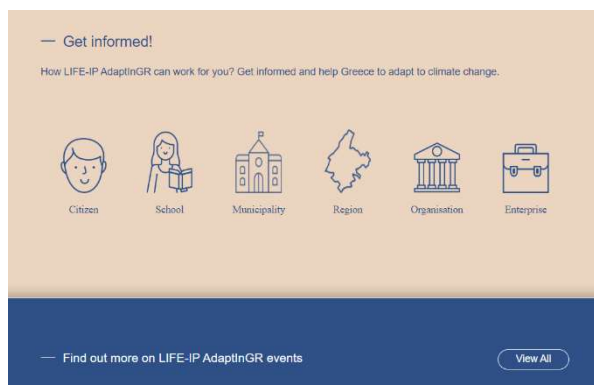
"We must work together, combine efforts, and share experiences to upscale".

LIFE IP AdaptIn: implementing national adaptation strategy

LIFE IP AdaptIn (LIFE17 IPC/GR/000013) project aims to enhance the implementation of the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (NAS) in Greece, focusing on the Regional Adaptation Action Plans (RAAPs). The project encompasses a diverse range of actions targeted at the five strategic priorities outlined in the NAS. These actions include demonstrative initiatives like 12 pilot projects, efforts to identify and address knowledge gaps, capacity building for key stakeholders, and the encouragement of a climate change adaptation culture.

The project partnership consists of entities from various levels of public administration, including the union of regions and the union of municipalities. This collaborative approach fosters an integrated and comprehensive implementation of policies at the national level.

Additionally, the project addresses fifteen sectors identified as vulnerable or priority areas concerning climate change impacts and adaptation. Sector-specific workshops are organized, accompanied by baseline analyses, to facilitate the co-development and assessment of adaptation priorities for each sector. This interactive process encourages stakeholders and experts from the respective sectors to openly share their experiences and expertise, serving as a valuable lesson learned by the project.



To enhance the adaptive capacity of the Greek society, the project conducts tailored training activities and capacity-building workshops catering to specific target groups such as schools, professionals, regional stakeholders, and policymakers. These activities are designed to address the unique needs and requirements of each group, ensuring effective knowledge transfer and skill development.

'We try to involve different stakeholders in the communication and training activities to promote the societal transformation required for adaptation to climate change at the national level '.

3.2 Regional systemic innovation for mitigation: taking climate action to the next level

LIFE-IP ZENAPA: synergies and cooperation

LIFE IP ZENAPA (LIFE15 IPC/DE/000005) aims to contribute to climate, nature, and species protection while demonstrating their compatibility through collaborative efforts. The project focuses on implementing national and European climate protection goals while considering biodiversity and bio-economic strategies.

The project's systemic innovation instruments are summarized in two axes. Firstly, the development of 12 climate project Master Plans for protected areas, which strategically consider climate protection, biodiversity, and potential for bioeconomy. Secondly, the creation of climate protection concepts at the village level (90 in total) encompassing energy potentials, renewable energy sources, energy savings, urban planning, transportation, nature conservation, green infrastructure, and digital technologies.



By combining climate change mitigation and nature protection, the project addresses various sectors and concepts at the village level. Pilot projects have been implemented on the ground as demonstrations of innovation. The project also engages stakeholders and replicates the concept to additional villages by providing support for funding and alleviating the burden on local administrations with limited capacity.

To engage local stakeholders and the public, the project conducts various communication activities, including workshops, conferences, and activities involving children, highlighting the connections between climate change and nature.

Capacity building, commitment to climate change, and favorable market conditions (e.g., high fossil fuel prices) are identified as key elements for achieving a systemic transition.

Research, Industry, Government, and the Public work together, demonstrating systemic innovation on the ground, for climate mitigation and nature protection

LIFE IP BE REEL!: community-driven demonstration projects

Belgian homes consume 70% more energy than the European average, indicating a significant opportunity for energy conservation and greenhouse gas emission reduction. The LIFE IP BE-REEL project (LIFE16 IPC/BE/000005) aims to support Long-Term Renovation Strategies (LTRS) across Belgium and boost renovation rates in the Flemish and Wallonia regions. The LTRs involves planning for residential buildings to achieve EPC Label A by 2050, with a renovation rate exceeding 3% (currently at 1%), focusing on improving quality and compliance with relevant standards. This effort is estimated to require an investment exceeding 200 billion euros.

The project focuses on several subprojects, including new policy instruments, innovative business models, demonstration project implementation, capacity building, and communication. To assist local authorities on the policy front, a Roadmap for Local-LTRs development was created, integrating regional incentives into practical measures. The project supports both the public sector, property owners (the 'demand' side), and the construction sector (the 'supply' side) within the renovation process.

Collective renovation through solar panels

in Mechelen & Ghent



Project challenges include mobilizing citizens to invest in renovations, ensuring renovation quality, achieving energy efficiency targets, implementing long-term planning, and identifying necessary resources for both the demand and supply aspects of the renovation chain. Various measures have been implemented, such as financing schemes (e.g., long-term loans backed by regional authorities with guarantees and interest rate coverage, tax incentives), collective renovation programs, community-driven projects, energy poverty and vulnerable communities' solutions, capacity building (addressing insufficient expertise and workforce in Belgium's construction sector), demonstration projects and best practice showcases, Master Classes organization, development of building passports development, and more.

- ✓ collective renovation
- ✓ Vulnerable families
- ✓ Energy production & investment
- ✓ Insulation

Systemic innovation approach for Energy Efficiency in the Building Sector: showcasing community-driven demonstration projects, such as collective renovation, with the support of policy instruments (Local LTRs), financial incentives and capacity-building actions.

Zero Emission LIFE IP (LIFE Alps): involving stakeholders in innovation

The "Zero Emission Services for a Decarbonised Alpine Economy" integrated project, abbreviated as LIFEalps (LIFE17 IPC IT 000005), is rooted in the 2011 South Tyrol 2050 Climate Plan, which initially did not address the transport sector. LIFEalps played a key role in devising a Strategic Plan for promoting sustainable mobility in South Tyrol, leading to a revision of the Climate Plan in 2018.

LIFEalps aspires to make South Tyrol a leading Alpine region for zero-emission transportation. To achieve this, partners from various sectors in South Tyrol collaborate to create necessary infrastructure for hydrogen and electric mobility, launch pilot fleets on the roads, and establish zero-emission services (such as taxis, shuttles, and goods' transportation) for selected sectors (e.g., logistics, tourism, and public transit).

The project conducts multiple awareness campaigns, including:

- Zero Emission Ambassadors (ZEMA) for the tourism sector
- Encouraging the general public to use emission-free vehicles, public transport, or bicycles



LIFEalps has had a considerable impact on policy, through the creation of new regulations for hydrogen fuel use and the exploration of potential funding sources like the Italian National Plan of Recovery and Resilience (PNRR). In 2014, Bolzano saw the establishment of its first Hydrogen Station. The LIFEalps project aims to expand and scale up to the Brenner Corridor area by adding more hydrogen refueling stations and fast chargers for electric vehicles in order to reduce carbon emissions in a region burdened by heavy traffic. Replication in other regions is also pursued through networking and communication efforts.

Although the project is highly technical in nature, it serves as an excellent example of fostering systemic innovation by involving stakeholders from public administration, policymakers, business associations, tourism organizations, and local citizens in an effort to educate them and alleviate concerns stemming from its groundbreaking nature.

*Promoting innovations on carbon-free transport in a systemic way,
understanding the needs of all:
stakeholders and the public, for improved health and quality of life,
sustainable tourism, safe and economic fuels for freight transport, etc.*

3.3 Enhancing local and multilevel governance with systemic innovation

The LIFE projects grouped in this session were all selected for their innovative concepts and instruments to bring different levels and sectors of society together. Additionally, the Horizon 2020 project ARSINOE gave a special presentation. While multilevel governance concepts in the EU focus often on the administrative and political institutions, in this session it became very clear that scientific institutions, business, and civil societies organisations need to be integrated as well if climate action should be successful in the long run. Other points that stood out during the discussions were:

Support small communities and local authorities with specific information focused on the actual local context

Smaller communities often lack the knowledge and capacity to respond effectively to local climate change impacts and risks. The project LOCAL ADAPT created digital instruments gathering information on local risks with the required granularity. Project ADAPTCITY underscored the value of local climate maps, which were introduced to Polish municipalities for the first time. Even municipalities that were not initially involved in the LIFE project began utilizing these maps extensively. Additionally, public officials and engaged stakeholders received training and guidance on using these resources. It is important to allocate funds for this training during the early stages of a project.

Facilitate dialogue between the different political-administrative levels

In some EU member states, various levels of government do not collaborate seamlessly. Communication among these administrative tiers is occasionally inadequate. To address this, project PLANUP organized round table meetings, bringing together representatives from national, municipal, and civil society organizations across several member states. Initiating and sustaining such exchanges can be time-consuming and require significant persuasion. However, it is crucial to create a space for mutual information sharing and position alignment.

These interactions allow higher levels of government to gain valuable insights for informed policymaking, while lower levels can advocate for appropriate regulatory frameworks, ongoing support, and - as highlighted by PLANUP and URBANCLIMA - adequate funding instruments. LOCALADAPT showcased a best practice example in this area, introducing "adaptation officers" to assist smaller municipalities in climate adaptation planning. These officers eventually secured permanent positions at the federal state level in both Germany and Austria.

Seek formalisation of the exchange formats.

It was emphasized that convening stakeholders at a round table represents a notable achievement; however, ensuring long-term success necessitates establishing these formats as permanent and institutionalizing them as formally and officially as possible. URBANCLIMA and ADAPTCITY both underscored the significance of regional and national municipality associations in this regard. These associations can serve a vital function in disseminating innovative exchange formats beyond a project's geographical scope and facilitating their continuation after the original project period concludes. Almost all projects referenced the crucial role that the EU Covenant of Mayors plays in promoting successful climate action at the city and municipal levels.

Define regions not only according to administrative borders, but also along functional requirements

Within the European Union, the regional level encompasses a diverse range of administrative and political entities. It is widely acknowledged that this level is crucial for driving policies and often

provides supplementary funding. ARSINOE, for instance, exclusively focuses on regional initiatives, an approach that will persist through various activities. In terms of climate action, many participants highlighted the importance of functional requirements in determining a project's stakeholder composition, rather than solely relying on political boundaries. This may involve transcending the borders of politically-defined regions, such as when flood risks along rivers straddle federal state boundaries. As a result, stakeholder mapping becomes more complex, needing targeted discussions and, in some cases, further scaling down.

Projects like URBANCLIMA, which concentrates on the Basque region, have developed specialized maps exclusively for coastal areas. Similarly, LOCALADAPT has created information tools tailored to specific areas within their target federal states. Moreover, the regional level is uniquely positioned to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which serve as vital job providers and economic pillars in many European regions. In the ADAPTCITY project, for example, the primary focus was on the city of Warsaw. However, as the project progressed, multiple district-level working groups emerged, bringing together district authorities, local businesses, and other stakeholders to discuss climate action solutions.

Create innovative instruments to engage with stakeholders and decision-makers while building bridges between levels and disciplines

It was addressed how to get stakeholders concretely engaged with climate action. Project LOCALADAPT created two successful contests where local communities were able to win a grant to implement local adaptation measures. ARSINOE made a strong point with their "bazar for climate action solutions", where the solution providers from the scientific and R&D sector present their innovations, and stakeholders can shop for what best fits their needs and local context. PLANUP reported about the good experiences made by integrating not just the local political and administrative stakeholders into their multilevel round tables but also local civil society groups right from the start. And both ADAPTCITY and URBANCLIMA emphasised how important the participation of the scientific community was for creating climate action plans and their successful implementation. Organising cross-sectorial exchange and interdisciplinary co-operation were crucial for both the designing and the actual implementation of the project's objectives.

3.4 Enhancing co-creation and participation with systemic innovation

The fourth and final session of the platform meeting focused on projects that integrated organised civil society actors, that being businesses or research institutions and also ordinary citizens in innovative and creative ways. The discussion of this session oscillated between two main questions: What innovative concepts help to get really all stakeholders engaged, including those who are, for their own reasons ignorant or even opposed to adaptation actions? And which innovative instruments or recommendations can secure that the climate action initiated and implemented by the project is carried on after the project's lifetime? The right answers to these questions were not easily pinned down. It became clear that creating blueprints of such social innovations is rather difficult and transferability is often limited. It was mentioned several times throughout the session that each

country or even region has its own discussion and negotiation culture. However, the following points turned out to be seen as crucial for successful participatory processes:

Integrate all stakeholders - including those who oppose the project – and facilitate direct communication

It was strongly recommended to create participatory formats in which all stakeholders are integrated. Ideally, this includes those not-known at the beginning. The foundation for this is a thorough mapping of the stakeholders. It may be more beneficial to spend additional time during the early phases of a project rather than encountering obstacles from stakeholders who were not initially involved. The CLIMATE ROAD project suggests mapping the value chain of the project's innovation, which allows all participants to comprehend their role and the interests of others involved. The NEW HYTS project highlights the importance of ensuring all participants are familiar with each other's challenges to prevent misunderstandings and facilitate compromise.

Further, NEW HYTS reported a good example of effective public-private co-operation. They established effective and fast communication channels between the regional authorities and the business stakeholders. The direct line helped to overcome misunderstandings and find solutions quickly. Problems like a missing form in a permit application that might otherwise stall implementation for a considerable period of time can be solved easily if the project partners agree on such communication channels.

Make people understand their risks – and their benefits

Not all stakeholders immediately grasp the climate change risks they face. Various factors contribute to this, including a lack of information, sheer ignorance, or even a complete rejection of anthropogenic climate change due to personal beliefs. It is crucial for projects to be prepared to address these challenges effectively. A highly effective approach in this context involves thoroughly identifying the individual risks associated with each stakeholder and subsequently explaining the advantages of the planned actions. An exemplary initiative, Project CLIMATFORCEELIFE, focuses on forest adaptation in Eastern European member states and has developed communication strategies that prioritize this approach. It is worth noting that some stakeholders within the forestry sector tend to be more conservative and may not readily embrace disruptive innovations or systemic changes. Therefore, conducting a risk analysis based strictly on factual evidence becomes essential, underscoring the significance of involving scientific actors in the process.

Create not only a common vision – create a common purpose and co-ownership

The basis for a common vision and purpose is transparency about the project's processes, the measures, and the targets. The participants need to understand what the project is about and what their role will be. Project MICACC emphasised that this vision needs to integrate the specific interests of all participating stakeholders. Getting there might sometimes imply long discussions, but they are necessary. Project CLIMATE SMART CHEFS conducted a survey among its participants to find out what

they know about their possible impact on climate change. Such tools allow the stakeholders to reflect on their own positions and inform about their needs and interests.

Considering the long-term success of the climate action initiated by their projects, the speakers agreed that a feeling of "ownership" by all participants is a crucial point. A superb example was presented by project MICACC. As part of their participatory water management project, water catchments in the form of ponds were built in participating municipalities, and tree seedlings were placed around the ponds. Ordinary citizens still take care of them, watering them during hot periods, because they feel responsible for "their" trees around "their" ponds (sense of ownership of the solution).

Do not come with pre-designed solutions – let the stakeholders co-decide and co-design their own strategies and solutions

Top-down strategies may not consistently yield success, particularly in the long term, as was frequently emphasized in the session. Project leaders as well as participating political decision-makers should see their role rather as moderators than as solution providers. This will open up the space for intensive discussions which are necessary for the involved stakeholders to find out their needs and what compromises they can accept. One of the most illustrating examples was from project CLIMATE SMART CHEFS – there, co-creation is at the heart of every project step; meaning the chefs themselves were creating their climate-friendly recipes and menus. The project uses a metaphor for this recommendation: 'good local climate action should be "cooked up" by the stakeholders themselves'.

Create synergies between various challenges – not only between mitigation and adaptation

At the city and municipal level, numerous issues within our intricate society become evident. The recommendations included striving to establish synergies by integrating climate change risks with other societal challenges, and attempting to connect everyday issues with environmentally sustainable solutions. Project CLIMATE SMART CHEFS combines the climate friendly menus and recipes with healthy nutrition that is, at best, also produced without making ethical and economic compromises. Climate action is thus connected with health, water conservation, forest protection, and ethical issues concerning industrial animal production or global delivery chains. The CLIMAFORCEELIFE project exemplifies an effective approach to improving climate change resilience in forests. This initiative combines mitigation and adaptation strategies by utilizing forests as business investments, ecological reserves, water retention areas, cold air zones, biomass sources, and recreational spaces for people. By integrating these diverse ecological services with climate action, the project ensures a dynamic and successful process.

Be honest about costs

At the end of the day, climate action will only be accepted, and measures be sustained if they are affordable in the long run. The food of the restaurants and chefs of CLIMATE SMART CHEFS, the wood products from the forest owners of CLIMAFORCEELIFE, or the energy provided by the CLIMATE ROAD will only be accepted and bought by customers if the price is right. Investors will only engage in a project if the costs and economic risks are made transparent. Local authorities often refuse to take

financial risks as well, as CLIMATE ROAD pointed out. Especially in times of global uncertainties, local participation can only be secured if tested cost-benefit analyses can be provided with an accurate estimation of costs. To this end, the whole value chain needs to be taken into account. This also allows for the identification of hidden risks that would otherwise become apparent only later in the project period, when it might be too late or too expensive to react accordingly.

Project MICACC recommended focusing on small-scale, local, and cost-effective nature-based solutions where possible to avoid significant financial risks in the first place.

4. Concluding remarks

The European Union has been actively working on climate change adaptation and mitigation through various policies, initiatives and funding programmes, including the Climate Law, the EU Mission on Climate Change Adaptation, and LIFE funding programme. These efforts aim to enhance resilience, provide financial support to regions, and foster systemic innovation on the ground. The platform meeting collected experiences from the regions and cities covered by the LIFE projects discussing the challenges and collecting best practices. Particularly the LIFE integrated projects address challenges, create synergies, raise awareness, implement demonstration pilots, and mobilize complementary funding – all of this very relevant to the implementation climate action plans at local and regional levels.

A key aspect of these efforts is learning from nature and adopting a systemic innovation perspective. This approach involves networking and exchanging experiences and promoting synergies. However, challenges persist at the regional level due to variations in size and competences across the EU. It can be difficult for actors implementing climate change measures to navigate varying competences and responsibilities, as well as to address conflicts in EU regulations or national laws. Educating and integrating local politicians, fostering long-term engagement, and promoting a holistic approach can help address these issues.

To ensure the success of these initiatives, it is crucial to involve all stakeholders, establish a common vision and strategy, and encourage long-term networking. This includes integrating and supporting key actors such as unions and associations of local and regional entities. Moreover, horizontal integration between mitigation and adaptation efforts and vertical integration between different levels of governance are necessary. Continuous dialogue, a focus on individuals, and adherence to agreed-upon rules are all essential elements for fostering cooperation and driving lasting change.

LIFE projects support EU policies with systemic innovations

Numerous LIFE projects create systemic innovation themselves and support the dissemination of the related concepts and methods. Providing such knowledge and experiences, the LIFE programme supports directly EU policy initiatives, such as the EU GREEN DEAL and the European Climate Pact. The projects informed especially the implementation of the EU adaptation strategy and contributed with good examples of how to make Climate Adaptation smarter, faster, and more systemic. The platform meeting also showcased the state of the art of what LIFE projects have achieved with innovative initiatives.

Furthermore, with the focus on systemic innovation that highlighted the inclusion of all stakeholders and the importance of societal transformation, the platform meeting supported the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change as well as to the Mission Climate Neutral and Smart Cities of the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022 (EU Commission 2022). The knowledge provided by the projects on this platform meeting directly contributed to these Missions' aims of preparing regions and cities to deal better with climate disruptions, to accelerate the transformation, and to scale up actionable solutions based on "demonstrations of resilience" across Europe.

The LIFE C2C CC Integrated Project (IP) has been active in the Central Denmark Region, which was among the first European regions to sign the Mission Charter on Adaptation to Climate Change. It was noticed that several regions applying for the Missions are also LIFE IP beneficiaries. Moreover, during the platform meeting, further networking among different projects was established, specially in case of LIFE IPs.

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Annex 1. Agenda

Day 1: LIFE innovates climate action on the regional level systemically

09:00	Opening	Rolf Johnsen , Head of the Department of Regional Development, Central Denmark Region
09:05	Policy updates on Adaptation policies and introduction to the EU Mission on Adaptation	Johannes Klumpers , Head of Secretariat for the Climate Adaptation Mission, DG Clima, EU Commission
09:20	Keynote <i>A regenerative response to solving global challenges</i>	Laura Storm , awarded Worldchanger, nominated “Young Global Leader”, Founder of Regenerators
09:50	Session 1: Regional systemic innovation for adaptation: new alliances towards resilience	Rolf Johnsen , Head of the Department of Regional Development, Central Denmark Region
09:55	LIFE IP C2C CC - Coast to coast climate challenge	Dorthe Selmer , Project Coordinator
10:05	LIFE-IP NAdapta-CC - Towards an integrated, coherent and inclusive implementation of Climate Change Adaptation policy in a region: Navarre	Joël Dozzi , Technical Project Coordinator
10:15	LIFE IP AdaptInGR - Boosting the implementation of adaptation policy across Greece	Eleni Karali , Adaptation Expert
10:25	Panel discussion	
10:55	Break & group picture	
11:25	Session 2: Regional systemic innovation for mitigation: taking climate action to the next level	Bernd Decker, Head of Sector LIFE Climate Action, CINEA
11:35	LIFE IP ZENAPA - Zero Emission Nature Protection Areas	Jacob Bussmann , Project Manager EU Fundraising
11:45	LIFE IP BE REEL! - Belgium Renovates for Energy Efficient Living	Eddy Deruwe , Project Coordinator, Flemish Energy and Climate Agency (VEKA)

11:55	Zero Emission LIFE IP - Zero Emissions Services for a Decarbonised Alpine Economy	Daniel Boni , Project and Fleetmanagement
12:05	Panel Discussion	
12:45	Takeaways of the day and concluding remarks	Bernd Decker, Head of Sector LIFE Climate Action, CINEA Rolf Johnsen , Head of the Department of Regional Development, Central Denmark Region

Day 2: LIFE presents: Innovative ways to enhance governance and participation

09:00	Welcome back What did we get out of yesterday?	Bernd Decker , Head of Sector LIFE Climate Action, CINEA
09:10	Keynote <i>Systemic innovation in Climate KIC</i>	Pernille Modvig , Designer and Producer, Climate KIC
09:25	Session 3: Enhancing local and multi-level governance with systemic innovation	Anna Bonven, Academic Project Staff, Coast to Coast Climate Challenge
09:30	Special presentation H2020 Climate Resilience Regions Through Systemic Solutions and Innovations - ARSINOE	Chrysi LASPIDOU, Project Coordinator
09:45	Pitch presentations LOCAL ADAPT - Integration of climate change adaptation into the work of local authorities LIFE PlanUp - A multi-stakeholder platform for inclusive and ambitious 2030 climate plans	Majana Heidenreich , Scientific Officer Miriam Vicente Marcos , Project and Membership Manager Wojciech Szymalski , Project Coordinator

	<p>LIFE_ADAPTCITY_PL - Preparation of a strategy of adaptation to climate change with use of city climate mapping and public participation</p> <p>LIFE-IP URBAN KLIMA 2050 - Systemic implementation of the CC action in the Basque Country for increased urban resilience as full territory enabler</p>	<p>Inigo Urrutikoetxea, Project Coordinator and Climate Action Technician at IHOBE</p>
10:05	Plenary discussion	
10:45	Break & group picture	
11:10	<p>Session 4: Enhancing co-creation and participation with systemic innovation</p>	<p>Christina Marouli, Associated Professor, Founder and ex-Director, Centre of Excellence for Sustainability at the American College of Greece; Technical Monitoring Expert at NEEMO</p>
11:15	<p>Special presentation Climate Road, a subproject of the LIFE IP C2C CC</p>	<p>Søren Erbs Poulsen, Head of Programme, Docent, from VIA University College</p>
11:30	<p>Pitch presentations</p> <p>LIFE New Hyts - reNEWable green Hydrogen for Transport</p> <p>LIFE-MICACC - Municipalities as integrators and coordinators in adaptation to climate change</p> <p>LIFE CLIMATE SMART CHEFS - Empowering chefs for a climate-smart, sustainable and healthy food system in the EU</p> <p>CLIMAFORCEELIFE - Climate-Smart Forest Management for Central and Eastern Europe</p>	<p>Daniel Bakker, Expert at KWR Water BV</p> <p>Zsuzsanna Herzig, Project Coordinator and Head of Secretariat - Ministry of Interior of Hungary</p> <p>Marta Antonelli, Project Coordinator, Fondazione Barilla</p> <p>Lukas Bilek, Monitoring Coordinator, Czech University of Life Sciences</p>
11:50	Plenary discussion	
12:35	Closing remarks	
12:50	Farewell remarks	
		<p>Christian Strasser, Head of Unit, LIFE Energy + LIFE Climate</p> <p>Dorthe Selmer, Project Coordinator of LIFE IP Coast to Coast Climate Challenge</p>

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