

# **D.T4.2.2**

## **Feedback reports on Co-Creation workshops**

### **Project region**



ERDF PP17 KSR Košice self-governing Region  
ERDF PP7 Bioeconomy Cluster/ 2022

### Project Information

Project Title: GoDanuBio - 'Participative Ecosystems for fostering the revitalization of rural-urban cooperation through governing Danube Circular Bioeconomy'

Project code: DTP3-471-4.1

Lead partner: BIOPRO Baden-Württemberg GmbH

Start of the project: 01/07/2020

Duration: 30 months

<http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/godanubio>

### Deliverable Information

Author/-s: ERDF PP17 – KSR

Deliverable no.: D.T4.2.2.

Submission date: 08/2022

Dissemination level: Public

Version	Date	Content	Elaborated by	Reviewed by
0.1	22/03/2022	Template for feedback reports on Co-Creation workshops	Biz-up	BIOPRO
0.2	20/07/2022	Feedback reports on Co-Creation workshops_KSR		
0.3	09.08.2022	Review	KSR	Biz-up

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## 1. General information about the co-creation workshop

Date of the workshop	22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2022
Topic of the workshop	How to support the functioning of Water Councils using the methodology of participative governance in the field of the Landscape Recovery Programme
Format of the workshop	physical
Region/Adress	Region Gemer; Organic agriculture Agros, Gemerská Panica 316, Gemerská Panica 980 46, Slovakia
Project partner(s) involved	Košice self-governing Region
Guiding question/theme of the workshop	How do foster trust in the participatory approach to decision-making in local government
Number of participants	12
Type of participants (Target groups) <sup>1</sup> and name of institutions	<p><b>Local public authority:</b> Municipality offices:  Jablonov nad Turňou  Čierna Lehota  Gemerská panica  Slavošovce  Gočovo  Rožňava</p> <p><b>Regional public authority:</b>  Košice self-governing Region</p> <p><b>interest groups including NGOs:</b>  Agency for Regional Development Support Košice NGO.,  Action senior NGO.,  Gemerské regional association of owners of non-state forests,  Slavošovce Forests Cooperative  LBL environmental association</p> <p><b>SME:</b> Organic agriculture Agros s.r.o., Gemerská Panica,  Dušan Ondrejčík Zabušé s.r.o.,</p>

<sup>1</sup> Please group the target groups according to the ones listed in page 42 of the Application Form

Cooperation with experts (i.e. speakers, external moderators, politician...)	Michal Kravčík – People and Water NGO, KSR parliament member Jaroslav Tešliar – Head of Agency for regional support Košice NGO., Tünde Erényi - Regional Development Department Košice self-governing Region
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## 2. Objective of the workshop

The guiding objective of the first co-creation workshop organized by KSR was to find out how to support the functioning of Water Councils using the methodology of participative governance in the field of the Landscape Recovery Programme process implementation. The concept of three co-creation workshops organized by the Košice Region was focused on supporting the initiative of the existing Water Councils initiative, which follows the strategic document of the Košice Region: Landscape Recovery Programme.

The Landscape Recovery Program reflects the regional need to address landscape damages in urban and rural areas here in Košice Region. Water Councils have the potential to tackle the regional challenges from the position of an advisory body to the regional authorities - therefore the concept of co-creation workshops focuses on their activities.

The co-creation workshop series was divided into three separate workshops with the same guiding objective, presented in different regions within the Košice Region. The aim was to find out the current situation in the implementation of the Landscape Recovery Programme with regard to its participative character.

The co-creation workshops were aimed at fulfilling the individual objectives – how to:

- support the functioning of Water Councils using the methodology of participative governance
- establish the Informal Platform of Water Councils as an advisory body to local government
- dive deep into the local and regional ecosystems and identify regional needs, particularly in rural areas; following the concept of the Landscape Recovery Programme
- how to support green and blue infrastructure, and water retention in the landscape of Košice Region in specific rural and urban areas
- how to identify the essential tools for the implementation of strategic objectives in the Košice Region?
- what are the legislative constraints on the implementation of actions aimed at the restoration of damaged landscapes?

Main goal of organized workshops was to strengthen local connections across stakeholders from municipalities, communities, farmers, foresters, environmentalists and activists. To strengthen their cooperation and trust in the participatory process. The second step will be to seek linkages with regional and state authorities and strengthen their cooperation with



each other in the case of the implementation of the Landscape Recovery Programme of the Košice Region.

The second step was to verify the level of participatory governance from the perspective of the Water councils of the Košice Region. Water councils by their nature meet the criteria of participatory governance and bring together participants in the interest of building and developing a cooperative decision-making tool for regional authorities, following the themes of the Landscape Recovery Programme.

### **3. Initial situation of your region**

The initial situation was the alarming state of the urban and rural areas of Košice Region in terms of land degradation, land desiccation, soil infertility and other socio-economic conditions.

In 2018, the Council of the Košice self-governing Region approved the Landscape Recovery Programme. Under the Restoration Plan, 6 Water Councils were established, based on participatory character, to implement measures for the restoration of damaged landscapes.

The Landscape Recovery Programme aims to change the approach to managing forest and agricultural landscapes as well as urban landscapes and to enable the development of water retention measures so that a substantial proportion of rainwater can be retained in the landscape. By implementing these measures, KSR, in cooperation with its partners, aims to contribute to restoring biodiversity processes, increasing soil fertility, increasing water supply, and improving the climate.

In February 2019, the Action Plan of the Landscape Recovery Programme of the Košice Region for 2019 was approved.

The aim of the Landscape Recovery Action Plan of the Košice Region is to create, activate and systematically prepare conditions for the comprehensive implementation of the Landscape Recovery Programme in the coming years. Thus, the goal of systematic and Integrated Landscape Restoration of the Košice Region through the executive body of the informal platform of Water Councils was defined.

The expected impact of the activities under the Action Plan was: Increased interest in landscape care by local government and urban and rural residents. Improved preparedness of residents to face the adverse impacts of climate change. Increased motivation of local governments to address issues from their municipalities with innovative revitalization measures.

The three co-creation workshops aimed to map the current status of the implemented activities and to increase the motivation of the members of the Water Councils to be more active in the region. The second objective was to identify the barriers that hinder the process of implementing measures for the recovery of damaged landscapes within the Košice Region. The third objective was to identify stakeholders to be involved in the process besides Water councils' initiative.

The pressure on the local government is huge, given the constantly deteriorating state of the landscape of the Košice Region - especially in rural areas, which are a source of food due to the significant agricultural nature of these areas.

The most important long-term goal of the organized co-creation workshops is to avoid dealing with the problems of damaged landscapes through a sector-oriented approach.

#### **4. Methods used within the workshop**

The training was conducted online using the methodology of the open space conference, focused on the topic of participatory governance methodology in the public administration system. The workshop was designed to bring to the fore the topic of participatory management, its basic definition, definition of terms, in order to ensure a smooth course and understanding of the topic as a whole. The main aim of the workshop was to discuss possible solutions on how participatory governance could be used to improve the functioning of Water councils.

The method of the first co-creation workshop was discussion, which was expertly guided by environmentalists and regional development experts.

The first co-creation workshop took place in Gemerská Panica, the headquarters of the Agros - agricultural company. The meeting was attended by members of water councils: mayors of towns and villages, forest managers, water managers and local activists.

In the introductorythe strategy of the Landscape Recovery Programme was presented in comparison with the activities already implemented in Gemer Region.

The most important objective of the first workshop was to map how the participatory management process of the members of the water councils works in the territory of Gemer Region, one of the least developed regions of the Košice Region. Participants confronted the actual implementation of the activities versus the plan and identified the barriers that hinder the implementation of the participatory process.

The questions to ask:

- Why is active stakeholder participation necessary
- Who do you want to target? Which stakeholders are necessary to reach
- How to foster trust in the participatory approach to decision-making in local government
- How are you going to deliver your message?

#### **5. Lessons learned for next upcoming workshops**

The lessons learned will be assessed and considered for the next workshop round.

It's not about how much content we can fit in a day. It's about creating a space for attendees to AHA! They have to hit a (mental) wall themselves to open themselves up to being more active. Just criticizing more is not enough. We haven't created enough space for most people to reach that point. Or rather, we have hit a wave of distrust that local governments can make decisions for themselves and inspire those in charge.

In the next rounds of co-creation workshops, we have therefore decided to put as much emphasis as possible on reminding participants of the importance of solving problems in the region through a participative governance.

## **6. What did the local or/and regional administration and the citizens expect from the process of participative governance?**

The Košice Self-Governing Region strengthens the participatory process from the position of regional authority through a funding scheme, which was established in May 2022. The applicants may become: municipalities, cities, local action groups, civil associations or non-profit organizations etc. Applicants can apply for funds in any area of regional development as follows: culture, education, human rights, health, environment or social. The aim is to improve the quality of life of people in the Košice Region.

The main objective of KSR funding scheme is to create a participatory budget - one of the tools of participatory governance. The second model of the implementation of participatory governance is the previously mentioned Water Councils, which were based on this principle.

The Water Councils were founded on the principle of cooperation of different stakeholders to restore the damaged landscape within Košice Region.

This mission can only succeed thanks to good relations between the parties involved. Members of the water councils meet regularly - guided by the principle of subsidiarity which is the principle according to which decision-making and accountability regarding public affairs also take place in the Water Councils should take place at the lowest level. Applying this principle means spreading responsibilities and delivering effective solutions.

Applying the principle of participatory governance Water Councils followed these steps:

- ✓ Establishment of an action team
- ✓ connecting people
- ✓ Prioritizing, setting a schedule of activities
- ✓ Evaluation system and monitoring
- ✓ Implementation of activities

### **7 principles of functioning Water Councils**

1. The principle of diversity
2. The principle of cultural and social integrity
3. The principle of tolerance
4. The principle of emancipation
5. The principle of solidarity
6. Principle of Acceptable Mistakes
7. Principle of subsidiarity

Water Councils bring their members together to form an advisory body to local government. Regular meetings result in an action plan. The activities of the 2022 Action Plan were defining as follows:



- ✓ Establishing an institutional framework for implementation of the Landscape Recovery Programme KSR
- ✓ Analysis of adaptation measures
- ✓ Raising awareness and motivation of stakeholders on the need to revitalise the landscape
- ✓ Integrated landscape restoration

During the ongoing workshop discussions, we focused on reinforcing the above principles. It was clear that there was a need to strengthen trust in the participatory process and to renew the cooperation between the partners involved.

The participants of the first workshop expected new impulses that would strengthen their position in the decision-making process within the Košice Region - in the implementation of the Landscape Recovery Programme measures. This approach was involved in the organization of all three co-creation workshops.

During the organization of the first workshop, we noticed that the participants lacked theoretical knowledge about the participatory process. We focused on the theoretical background of the topic in the next two workshops. During the organization of the first workshop, we noticed that the participants lacked theoretical knowledge about the participatory process.

The Košice self-governing Region, as the host of the meetings, is expected to map the results of the work of the Water Councils - an informal initiative based on the principle of participatory governance. It is in the interest of the Košice self-governing Region to solve the problems of the damaged landscape. To do this, it needs an executive body, the Water Councils, which best reflects the situation and needs of the regions.

Previous care of the landscape to solve problems sectorally-based brings serious risks in water protection (water scarcity, deterioration of, water quality, increasing flood frequency), environmental (loss of biodiversity), food (decline in production potential of soils), social (poverty, migration waves) and climate risks.

Professional capacity building is needed to turn around the sectoral approach to dealing with the restoration of damaged landscapes. KSR expected workshop participants to define the space for collaboration, identify partners necessary to engage in the process, and identify barriers to participatory management.

In the case of the three co-creation workshops that were organized within the 6 regions of the Košice Region, there was a need to organize 4<sup>th</sup> workshop to bring together all the members and stakeholders involved in the guiding objective of the Landscape Recovery Program in one place.

To support the main idea of professional capacity building, we invited representatives of government and decision-making bodies to the workshop.

After the three co-creation workshops, series of five small workshops were held in the regions that participated in the co-creation workshops (May 2022).

At these meetings, the planning of the agenda for the 4<sup>th</sup> workshop started. According to the ongoing discussions, a list of relevant stakeholders was selected.

## **7. Outcome of the co-creation workshops**

During the implementation of the first workshop, we noticed not only a lack of theoretical knowledge about participatory governance but also a lack of trust in this process in the environment of Slovak legislation.

A positive effect of the first workshop was the willingness to involve new members in the non-formal association of Water Councils. The meeting was also attended by non-invited guests, important local activists in the field of agriculture, and forestry, and representatives of municipalities in the Spiš region. In the region, word spread about the possibility to join Water Councils and being involved in the steps to recover damaged landscapes.

A discussion was opened focusing on how to join forces together and identify the barriers that hinder the implementation of the Landscape Recovery Programme. The workshop brought together people from the field of agriculture, and farming and representatives of towns and villages of the Spiš region. Representatives of the Košice Self-Governing Region were present and could be directly confronted with the problems of the region. We see this as a very significant fact. Despite the initial mistrust of the possibility of participating in participatory governance, the participants were open to further cooperation.

At the meeting, several plans have proposed that need to be addressed in the Spiš region. Farmers from the agricultural cooperative Agros s.r.o. offered cooperation and transfer of their experience in the field of Pilot Projects for the implementation of revitalization measures to less experienced actors in the region. This activity will aim to collect relevant data and information with the involvement of the public and to create a database.

## **8. Innovation potential for your region**

A Landscape Recovery Programme that aims to change the approach to forest management and agricultural land so that a substantial proportion of rainwater can be retained in the landscape. One of the steps to improve our environment is, for example building water retention measures. These would ten years increase the water supply so that the Košice region will not be in the future to be dependent on water shortages in the future, but on the contrary, increase its reserves. Implementing The aim is to increase groundwater reserves by approximately

600 million cubic meters. Create 60 million cubic meters' cubic meters of water retention measures that will rain and then return it to the soil and groundwater. The Košice self-governing Region continues the implementation of the Landscape Recovery Programme, which focuses on the adoption of water conservation measures or a change in the approach to land management. On Thursday, 9 June, the Košice Region organized a 4<sup>th</sup> co-creation workshop - Forum on Landscape Recovery at the Congress Hotel Roca. Speakers were interesting guests from state and public administration, civil associations, and environmental activists.

The 4<sup>th</sup> workshop will present the outcomes as well as the actions that need to be taken to improve the environment. It will also benefit from insights into how the restoration of the damaged landscape of the Košice Region can contribute to a neutral carbon footprint.

We anticipate that, in parallel with the start of the program implementation, there will be a partnership with research, which will monitor the feasibility of the above quantification of the objectives with possible correction. By implementing of the Landscape Recovery Programme will also make a significant contribution to the employment of harder-to-employ citizens who are not finding employment in the current labor market. It can be expected that the creation of these new jobs will make it possible to employ more than 10 000 inhabitants of the Košice Region.

However, the first step towards the big targets was the organization of the 4th co-creation workshop with the active participation of the State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Slovakia.

During the implementation of the workshops, the idea arose to approach the state authority - the Ministry of Agriculture, and introduce them to the concept of Water Councils and their activities.

## 9. Strengths and weaknesses of the process of participative governance

Strengths and benefits of the participatory process in the regions, identified during the 4 co-creation workshops:

- ✓ Better and more effective communication between stakeholders (exchange of information, networking, elimination of tensions, and consensus building),
- ✓ a better formulation of actions based on the suggestions received from the participants
- ✓ increased mutual trust between stakeholders
- ✓ improving the potential for cooperation in the future

KSR did not identify problems with the involvement of different stakeholders in the process of finding a solution - they were open to it. In Slovakia, the participatory governance process is still a new experience for the municipalities thus there is a need to build trust in this governance process. Which we also see as a weakness of the participatory process in the intentions of the Košice self-governing Region.

## 10. Do you plan to use the process of participative governance also in future?

Within the Landscape Recovery Programme, activities aimed at improving the functionality of participatory governance will be mainly concentrated in this area. Further steps will be focused on support the functioning of Water Councils using the methodology of participative governance.



As a representative of the regional authority, we are committed to engaging policymakers to further use participatory governance. Therefore, we have focused on identifying the strengths and weaknesses of this process in co-creation workshops. The main weakness was identified as the centralized approach in local governments, which hinders the use of participatory governance in the regions.

Next steps:

- ✓ Map the key stakeholders of the Landscape Recovery Programme, building new capacities in field of participative governance
- ✓ Strengthening the decision-making powers of territorial self-government
- ✓ Publication of the outcomes of the panel discussions
- ✓ Declaration of the co-creation workshop participants – Draft available online, ready for comments

## **11. Identified opportunities for rural development in your region**

Opportunities to address demographic changes within the Košice Region (in the context of the Landscape Recovery Programme):

- ✓ Landscape Recovery as a key task for ensuring environmental, food, social and climate security, in any part of Slovakia
- ✓ development of local agriculture
- ✓ adaptation of water retention measures, retention of rainwater in the landscape, promotion of small-scale water cycle (This is one of the main reasons that agricultural production is becoming more and more costly in terms of the need to maintain soil fertility)
- ✓ job opportunities in agriculture, which are in significant shortage, especially in the rural areas of the Košice Region
- ✓ The workshops brought about new collaborations between the different stakeholders

The 4<sup>th</sup> workshop organized by Košice self-governing Region aimed to create a space for an open discussion focused on the barriers that complicate the implementation of the Landscape Recovery Programme in the framework of the Košice Region: (legislation, centralization of the system, funding, etc.) The discussion took place between representatives of the regional authority and a representative of the state administration - the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic. Workshop was a great opportunity to present examples of good practice within the field of the Landscape Recovery Programme. The main objective of the organized workshop was to dive deep into the plans of the Water Councils of Košice Region within the Landscape Recovery Program 2021-2030 of individual regions included topics for comprehensive solutions for the WEF (water, energy, food) approach, like climate change effects on water supply; soil fertility; extreme heat and the occurrence of natural disasters.

## Annexes

