

D.T3.1.1

Regional Policy Agendas

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01 / 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: Poly4Eml, BIOPRO

Deliverable no.: D.3.1.1

Submission date: 31/01/2022

Dissemination level: Public

Version	Date	Content	Elaborated by	Reviewed by
1.0	13/12/2021	Regional policy agendas	Mateja Dermastia, Mateja Novak	BIOPRO
2.0	10/01/2022	Regional policy agendas	Mateja Dermastia, Mateja Novak (Poly4Eml), Katrin Stökle, Sergi Costa (BIOPRO)	BEC, MEEC
3.0	31/01/2022	Regional policy agendas	Mateja Dermastia, Mateja Novak (Poly4Eml), Katrin Stökle, Sergi Costa (BIOPRO)	

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1. Objective and approach

The objective of the task was to gain insights into the current strategies and measures, in form of funding programmes, that partner regions can use to define or support local/regional policy agendas. Furthermore, multi-level approaches (ranging from local to macro-regional) can be the basis for a common policy dialogue.

WPT3 leader Anteja/Poly4Eml provided a methodology for the mapping of current policy schemes, programmes, and stakeholders responsible for strategies and programmes relevant to the circular (bio)economy, participative governance and rural development. The mapping was done in relation to calls open from October 2021 till June 2022.

Two webinars for partners were conducted (31/8 and 2/9/2021) to introduce and clarify the methodology. Two meetings with the GoDanuBio Brain Trust (A.T3.2) were conducted to exchange views on regional efforts and identify transformative opportunities for circular bioeconomy. The first one was focused on how should be the most effective approach of the Joint Governance Strategy for the Danube Circular Bioeconomy (23/7/2021). In the second meeting results of analyses related to funding programmes were presented and discussed (19/11/2021).

Initially, Task 3 was designed on the assumption that circular bioeconomy schemes, and a consistent and stable governance behind existed across partner regions. Nonetheless the analysis of the data related with funding programmes, personal contacts and public bodies in charge drawn already some conclusions that must be considered for the effective implementation of Task 3.

2. Findings related to the regional policy agendas

While the [European Strategy for the Danube Region \(EUSDR\) is ambitious in terms of sustainability and the circular \(bio\)economy](#), there is a serious gap between what is planned on the macro-regional level and what is being delivered on the regional level. Only two regions (Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria; the latter is not part of GoDanuBio consortium) have a fully-fledged circular bioeconomy strategy in place, whilst the other Danube regions (and countries) do not have any of such strategies and related programmes. Nonetheless the cases of Bulgaria, Hungary and Serbia show already a trend: they are drafting strategies on circular economy that could partly fill the existing gap.

It is hard to understand how on the macro-regional level the circular (bio)economy can seriously be promoted if most of participating regions do not have strategies of this nature. If the core idea of a macro-regional approach is to facilitate cross-regional cooperation and bundling of critical mass in certain areas, this will struggle to succeed if parts of the macro-regional strategies are disconnected from what the partner regions focus on. In case the EUSDR shall be seriously implemented, this causes a temporary lack of cross-regional cooperation possibilities due to missing regional strategies and related programmes to be aligned in the field of the circular (bio)economy. Moreover, a recent study¹ draws that there is a there is still a lack of coherent bioeconomy strategies, especially in the CEE countries, where bioeconomy as a topic is often fragmented between different policies and these

¹ Koopmans and de Jong. „Study on Public Funding for Bio-Based Projects“ (2021), IDEA Consult
Project co-funded by the European Union Funds (ERDF and IPA)

policies lack coordination between themselves. That was already shown through deliverables DT1.1.2 and DT1.2.2.

Table 1. Topics covered by the funding programmes listed by the partners (foreseen from Oct. 2021 to June 2022)

	Bioeconomy	Circular Economy	Participative Governance	Economic Competitiveness and Innovation	Rural development
Baden-Württemberg	X	X	X	X	X
Bulgaria				X	X
Croatia		X		X	X
Czech Republic		X		X	X
Hungary		X			X
Republic of Serbia		X	X	X	X
Romania				X	X
Slovakia	X			X	X
Slovenia		X		X	X
Upper Austria		X		X	X

A closer look at current programmes across the partner regions shows a variety of schemes and funding programmes. All regions have funding programmes in the field of rural development, mostly in the framework of their Rural Development Programmes (Table 1). Also, economic competitiveness and innovation is of high interest. This is important for the field of circular (bio)economy since this topic is mostly related with innovation and can therefore be within the thematic scope. Only in some occasions, e.g. Baden-Württemberg and Serbia, programmes related to participative governance exist.

Regarding the topics of bioeconomy and circular economy, it was observed that the regions are having either bioeconomy or circular economy, but no circular bioeconomy programmes. The exception is Baden-Württemberg where both topics are combined in the framework of some programmes. Some of the former ones are part of a broader society-wide strategy, others more discrete and focused on a specific sub-sector of policy action and intervention. In some cases, funding programmes do even focus on more than one issue which is relevant to the project, like the combination of two topics: in Romania, for example, there is a funding programme within the framework of the Rural Development Programme, in which young

farmers are supported in establishing a livelihood. This combines themes of rural development and demographic change, which is also one of the key topics in GoDanuBio. Similar findings were made for the combination of bioeconomy and participative governance or for bioeconomy and rural development (Baden-Württemberg in both cases).

The respective grants involved can vary from just a few thousand to several million euros, depending on the scheme, thematic focus, and country/region of delivery. For example, Serbia’s “Proof of Concept Innovation Fund” for supporting the circular economy awards €20,000 per grant, whilst Austria’s Research Promotion Agency (FFG) awards €70,000 per grant for projects in the circular economy. It should be noted that the higher grants are of course also due to the different economic and financial structures in the regions and countries, but this could also be explained by different topic prioritisation in different countries. The scope of the programmes is wide and is intended to support a broad topic range such as the bioeconomy, circular economy, rural development, agriculture, clustering, and participative governance. In terms of the objectives of these interventions, they intend to target specific aspects of climate mitigation, economic growth, technological modernization, or a mixture of these topics. For instance, applied research and development (R&D) can also apply in other objectives such as technology transfer or value chain development. Feasibility studies and governance are other objectives of these programmes.

Participating countries typically have a ministry to oversee the programmes, usually with a sub-department and/or single individual acting as a contact point. The programme owners of the funding programmes mentioned above are mostly Ministries of Agriculture, Ministries of Environment, Ministries of Science and Education, and Ministries of Economy. Awarded projects are mainly funded by the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF)². In another deliverable of this work package (D.T3.2.1), partners were asked to provide contact details for strategies, programme owners, and managing authorities in their regions. This information should be anticipated here, as it is an interesting observation that contact persons are known in almost all regions (Table 2), which should be important for an implementation of bioeconomisation in the future. These contacts can either be used to obtain further guidance, but they are also indispensable for e.g. organising stakeholder workshops and for other participative approaches.

In another order of things very few countries (e.g. Croatia and Hungary) have referred to the pre-allocated Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and The Just Transition Fund, but without providing qualitative information on how these funds will be invested.

Table 2. Overview on availability of contact persons for funding programmes, managing authorities and strategies in the GoDanuBio partner regions. Green = Personal contact available, blue = General contact point available

	Strategies	Funding Programmes	Managing Authorities
Baden-Württemberg			
Bulgaria			

² As of the date of publication it is still not clear which role may play the EU Next Generation Funds in this regard.

Croatia	B)	B)	A)
Czech Republic			
Hungary			
Republic of Serbia			
Romania			
Slovakia	B)	B)	C)
Slovenia			
Upper Austria			

A) Contacts are missing; B) Some contacts are missing in respective category; C) The managing authorities are the same as programme owners (at national level)

3. Identification of regional problems and some bottom-up initiatives to challenge them

From the inputs provided from participating regions/countries for DT3.1.1 and DT3.2.1 and presented in the section 2 we can conclude that there is currently a mismatch between the EUSDR and the reality on the ground at Member State level with regards to circular (bio)economy strategic approaches. There is the risk of the ambitious EUSDR failing to hit its targets and stimulate cross-border cooperation among the Danube region in the field of circular (bio)economy. There are in essence four main problems that have been identified from the inputs of the participating regions/countries.

- Firstly, the primary problem appears to be a lack of policies planned at governmental level being actualized and delivered at the ground level. This could be indicative of a lack of communication and dialogue between government and other stakeholders, e.g. clusters and research organisations. Population and civic society are also relevant for the bioeconomisation process, thus the first step for drafting and implementing policies in most of the mapped countries should be a broader multi-level governance approach.
- Secondly, there has been a tendency to over-compartmentalize initiatives, which means that there is a lack of joined up action and a lack of impact at a wider level.
- Thirdly, parts of the macro-regional strategies are disconnected from what the partner regions focus on. This causes a lack of cross-sectoral and cross-regional cooperation possibilities due to missing regional strategies and related programmes in the field of the circular (bio)economy.
- Fourth, another challenge may be that in some regions it is not known which institutions should be contacted for bioeconomisation at the political level. In the case of GoDanuBio's research (Table 2), it was shown that this problem does not exist in all cases.

The emergence of some of these problems, also based on the regional specificities and different backgrounds in the Danube macro- region, has been noticed before. In this sense and since 2018 some bioeconomy related initiatives have been disclosed in some regions of

the Danube macro-region (Figure 1). These initiatives were supported via the Horizon 2020 projects “Power4BIO”³ and “BE-Rural”⁴ or the “BIOREGIO” Interreg project⁵. Most of these initiatives did not end up in a regional strategy or policy agenda with a concrete action plan; indeed, they might be affected by a lack of funding once the project finished, but they are good to be mentioned as good practices in this regard. For the seven exemplary regions named in Figure 1, various ways of spreading the bioeconomy were sought and found through the mainly regional and local initiatives. In the course of this, it was confirmed what is listed above: there are still numerous region-specific challenges to overcome. Nevertheless, it is important for the implementation of new projects and ideas that these problems have already been dealt with in the past. In the Power4BIO project, the implementation of existing bioeconomy strategies was planned and can be further developed in the future by using the Bioeconomy Strategy Accelerator Toolkit arranged by the project consortium⁶. For regions like Nitra (Slovakia), Lviv (Ukraine), South Bohemia (Czech Republic) and Southern Great Plain (Hungary), in which there is no strategy yet and the bioeconomy maturity is still low, strategy and policy drafts and side processes were developed. Solutions for many of the regional challenges were also found, which can serve as guidelines for action. Although it is still difficult to transfer macro-regional approaches to individual regions, such bottom-up initiatives show that in many cases a Plan B already exists. In order to take regional specificities into account, participatory approaches were considered useful in all projects and regions. Stakeholders were brought together through numerous workshops and forums and networked, for example, through steering groups. This usually provided a basis for the further development of guidelines and drafts, as local and regional administration could often be included in these processes.

In Stara Zagora (Bulgaria) and Covasna (Romania), the challenge was that bottom-up approaches are difficult due to a central government. In these cases, in both regions involved, the route via clusters was chosen⁷, so that they could deliver the recommendations further to the institutions responsible. Recommendations from the participating regions in the mentioned projects also referred to non-existing supporting strategies or policies. In this case, reference was often made to the existing Smart Specialisation Strategies, which exist in almost all regions.

³ <https://power4bio.eu/>, last accessed 21/12/2021

⁴ <https://be-rural.eu/>, last accessed 21/12/2021

⁵ <https://www.interregeurope.eu/bioregio/>, last accessed 21/12/2021

⁶ https://power4bio.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/POWER4BIO_BSAT_Deliverable_2.5_FV_Update.pdf

⁷ https://be-rural.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/BE-Rural_D5.3_Regional_strategies_roadmaps.pdf, last accessed 21/12/2021



Figure 1. Circular bioeconomy Initiatives under Horizon2020 and Interreg Europe in some of the Danube regions⁸

4. Conclusions and impact on the implementation of WP T3

The findings of this deliverable draw some important conclusions that will impact the further implementation of Task 3. The main conclusion is that, excepting the case of Baden-Württemberg, no specific regional agendas and dedicated actions are currently in place in the mapped regions. Nonetheless, some guidelines for action can be retrieved and continued (if dully funded) from bottom-up initiatives, as indicated in Section 3. Moreover, the analysis of funding programmes was conducted in the second part of 2021, when most of the partner regions were still in the programming phase related to the period 2021-2027. Thus, D.T3.1.1. can only be comprehensively completed in 2022 when it is expected that the majority of funding programmes related to the circular (bio)economy, participative governance and rural development will be announced or updated. It is also expected that the [EU Next Generation Funds](#) (mainly the Recovery and Resilience Facility) will be also rolled out during 2022. Another conclusion is that the governance infrastructure necessary to support the circular (bio)economy in most of the participating regions/countries is scattered and disconnected from EUSDR, as it has been already reported previously.

The GoDanuBio Brain Trust (D.T3.2.4), as main counselling board of GoDanuBio project, has suggested using a multi-level transnational dialogue (between EC, the EUSRD and the regions) to overcome hurdles that prevent exploring the full circular (bio)economy potential of the Danube macro-region. The first step was elaborating the Danube Region White Paper “Cross-Border Collaboration in the Danube Region with a focus on the circular (bio)economy”. The White Paper (document and presentation) was elaborated in October 2021, discussed with the Brain Trust on 19/11/2021, and presented at the GoDanuBio monthly meeting on 24/11/2021. The Brain Trust suggested using this document as an input for transnational dialogue (D.T3.2.3) to be implemented during 2022. Three transnational policy forums/dialogues will be organized: the first one as high-level Policy Forum, the second in

⁸ Location (implementation years, name of the funded project); Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Austria were not considered in this analysis

collaboration with the BIOEAST Initiative, and the third one as part of the GoDanuBio Final conference (D.C.3.1). Anteja/Poly4Eml will coordinate the exchange with the Brain Trust and follow its guidance for ultimate fine tuning of activities in WPT3.