

MAKING THE EU BUDGET WORK FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET - citizens' recommendations for EU funds 2014 – 2020



Bulgaria Croatia Czech Republic Hungary Latvia Macedonia Poland Slovakia



energy efficiency



sustainable transport



biodiversity



waste management



partnership



renewable energy

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Introduction

In 2012, the CEE Bankwatch Network, in cooperation with its partnering organizations from *Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Macedonia, Poland and Slovakia* organized a series of contests for best citizens' sustainable project proposals: 'Better Ideas for EU Funds'¹.

The competition was carried out in the eight countries in question, with the main purpose of:

- Demonstrating that citizens can actively participate in the process of the EU Budget spending through grassroots initiatives and small-scale projects;
- To encourage citizens to actively participate in the process of programming of funds for the next programming period 2014-2020;

Several hundred project ideas in different fields ranging from community development to energy efficiency and waste management were collected and evaluated by national expert panels in the participating countries. The best ideas were selected on the basis of their potential to contribute to the sustainable development of the communities in question and were awarded at the end of 2012.

On the basis of the project proposals reviewed, the experts on the national panels were requested to draft their recommendations towards national and EU authorities, for improved involvement of citizens in the process of planning and programming of the next EU budget, and for the sustainable development of European regions.

This paper is a summary of all the expert panels' recommendations from the eight CEE countries. It aims to contribute to a productive dialogue between citizens and institutions, an essential engagement needed during the current period of negotiations over the future EU Budget.

1 More on the contest can be found here: <http://bankwatch.org/contest>



Citizens contest in Bulgaria: 3000 people concerned about sustainable EU funds



The Bulgarian contest was organized by the CEE Bankwatch Network and the Environmental Association ZaZemiata. The 3000 EUR award budget was split into 3 awards of 1000 EUR each. The contest was actively promoted for four months (July-October 2012) through online and social Media, press, radio interviews, distribution of fliers in universities, conferences and festivals. It is interesting to see and analyse the results from website visits compared to the other CEE countries where the competition took place. Nearly 3000 views of the specialized website and almost 400 downloads of the application form transformed into 65 projects proposals.

This shows that there are many citizens who are interested in offering their ideas, but often do not dare to do so and have no confidence in putting their ideas on paper and entering a competition for funding. We also have to admit that the project criteria were too broad – projects in favour of communities that have a green element and which can be realized or partly realized with 1000 EUR within 1 year. The authors of the Bulgarian competition wanted to have all possible areas of civil activity, but this also required a broad definition of the criteria.

During the evaluation of the projects two elements gained attention: the quality of the submitted ideas and the quality of the submitted projects. The quality of the suggested ideas gained indisputable high grades. It became obvious that the citizens are a genuine bank for ideas based on the reality of their lives and reflecting the problems of their region, municipality and community.

The weak point was the quality of a number of submitted projects. The majority of participants cannot turn their idea into a well structured proposal. This can be compensated if there are suitable programmes at schools, universities or professional education services.

Small grants in Bulgaria – practically non-existent

In Bulgaria there are very few mechanisms supported by the state or by the European budget that support small civil projects of any kind. European funding is associated mainly with the negative image of corruption and bureaucracy. Out of pure pragmatism it has to be admitted that most of the European funding opportunities available on store:

- Include complicated application procedures (e.g. too many different forms, signatures and documents which need to be supplied as part of the application procedure);
- Target too limited a circle of beneficiaries: primarily municipalities are the recipients of CP funding in Bulgaria (95% of the funding is only available to municipal authorities). NGOs have access only to some biodiversity focused calls for proposals under OP Environment. Citizens and scientific institutions are completely excluded from CP funding both as beneficiaries and partners;
- Suffer from the lack of capacity of beneficiaries: e.g. there were some training courses for beneficiaries offered under the technical component of different OPs in Bulgaria, but they were both insufficient in number, inappropriate in timing (i.e. most of the trainings occurred at the beginning of the current programming period and were not repeated thereafter) and not custom-tailored to the specific needs of the concrete beneficiaries;
- Lack adequate support to beneficiaries: The Managing Authorities (MAs) of the OPs distributing cohesion funding did not provide adequate support to beneficiaries, were too slow on reviewing progress reports and payment requests and were a priori willing “to punish” the beneficiaries: they provided lengthy, often confusing and changing guidelines on how to fill in an application form or how to manage different aspects of the project implementation, which mostly caused more confusion among beneficiaries and slowed down the implementation of projects and the absorption of CP funds;
- Lack of a “personalized” approach to beneficiaries on the part of MAs of OPs: e.g. they most often avoid answering concrete questions from beneficiaries. Instead they tend to provide ready-made answers and guidelines, which most often confuse rather than help beneficiaries;



- Promote the approach “let's look for projects that can get the available funding” instead of “we have projects that we need to think how to fund”. Many projects were “copy-paste” from other municipalities, without considering the local needs and specifics. Worse, local strategic development and spacial planning documents were changed on an “ad-hoc” basis by municipal councils to “accommodate” the requirements of the specific call for proposals, i.e. projects were done “by the piece”, without any long-term vision and focus on local development.
- The authorities do not have a reasonable idea about the potential and interest from citizens and civil groups towards mechanisms for small initiatives and projects through micro and small grant schemes. There is the “chicken and egg” dilemma where authorities claim that there is no interest for small grants, as citizens do not have a developed capacity to write projects, but there has never been a genuine small grant scheme to prove or measure the actual interest.
- Authorities do not like small grant schemes, considering them too demanding and hard to manage under the current structures and staff numbers.
- Authorities tend to prefer large-scale projects – predominantly in infrastructure – that they consider easier to manage and that ensure a quicker absorption rate of the European funding, even though the actual effect in changing the life of citizens for the better is often doubtful;
- Counting on large scale projects creates a vacuum in the capacity to implement a variety of small scale projects and this turns into an obstacle for the achievement of “inclusive growth” and leads to a vicious circle and a social gap between the few who can access public funding and the majority who feel “out of the game” and do not have the motivation to demand access.

Sustainable development means funds accessible for everyone

Based on the experience of the jury from the competition and from their EU funds related work as experts, the jury has drafted the following recommendations related to the eventual development of small grant schemes for citizens (Some of the recommendations are applicable to other European funding areas as well):

- Simplification of the application procedures in order to decrease the obligatory steps, ease the beneficiaries, prevent the chance for hidden pressure and corruption and decrease red-tape through computerization of all stages of the application process. The implementation, reporting and monitoring of projects;
- Earmarking at least 40% of Technical Assistance and Administrative Capacity funds to the development of capacity and applicable skills to develop and manage projects for the applicants and the broader target groups of each programme.
- Founding of functional and motivated mobile mediator groups that assist local communities to identify resources, develop a vision and develop adequate project proposals.
- Adequate financial conditions – opportunities to support more people and more initiatives with smaller grants, while developing the financial and administrative capacity of local communities.
- Feedback from the managing authorities when a project is rejected.
- An independent civil board, formed on an annual rotation principle, which will monitor and have true control functions over the way the operative programmes are managed.
- Supporting NGOs and civic groups (via small grants) to perform civic monitoring of the work of local municipal councils and municipal administrations: e.g. via participation in the meetings of the municipal councils and the specialized working groups within them, as well as participation in specialized working groups for project preparation, evaluation and monitoring within municipal administrations;
- Setting requirements for a higher number of NGO representatives to be elected in the Monitoring Committees of the respective OPs with FULL VOTING rights as is the case with the rest of the members from state administrations (during this programming period, there was usually only 1 thematic NGO representative per monitoring committee and only with observatory functions).
- It is necessary to ease the financial requirements for the implementation of projects including an increase in the advance and mid-term payments, precise regulation and on time payments according to the scheduled terms, especially for small projects.
- Introduction of a unified procedural mechanism for personal financial responsibility at all hierarchy levels for anyone who has made decisions which cause harm to certain projects and programmes, where the legal and procedural conflict of these decisions can be proven.
- A minimum of 60% of the funds under Regional Development and Rural Development and a minimum of 30% of the funds under Competitiveness and Human Resources should be redirected under a regulated territorial quota principle according to the principle of Community-Led Local Development.
- Regulating a minimum of 20% of the funds under the Trans-border Cooperation, Environment, Regional Development and Rural Development to budget individual small-scale projects (under 50 000 EUR), which are to be allowed under simplified procedures.



- Earmarking of 10% under Environment, 15% under Competitiveness, 20% of Regional Development and 30% of Transport to delegate from the Managing Authorities towards obligatory complementary activities on top of the projects to ensure environmental infrastructure, decrease of greenhouse emissions and to increase the share of green jobs (including when the completed projects are already running)
- To form regional Operative Programmes (NUTS 2), and this to be set already in the Regulations. Also to reform the Rural Development Program in the direction of regional management of funds and a more tailored approach.
- A minimal financial quota for the training of non-governmental players from Technical Assistance.
- Definition of opportunities for individual beneficiaries - small civil groups and cooperatives.
- To use a European definition for green jobs and the opening of green jobs to be a criteria under every EU funded project;
- The funded projects should be sustainable – both environmentally and economically. How is it guaranteed that the projects will continue to exist after? How do the projects generate income to support themselves over time? One way, in the case of cyclical funding, is to slowly decrease public aid throughout the years, while increasing the percentage of own contribution, thus ensuring that projects are on market ground.
- The managements of funding for small civil projects should be granted to some larger NGOs. The grant schemes should be divided in two – for beginners and very small projects 1000-5000 EUR with no more than 15% own contribution.
- Opportunities for direct, on-going and online dialogue between EU structures and citizens regarding implementation of projects at the local level: e.g. via specifically established web sites and other Internet-based communication channels.
- Right now, most Bulgarian citizens do not know how to communicate with Brussels; therefore a wider public campaign is also needed in this direction.

Small projects achieve greater results – make them available in Bulgaria

The presence of small grants will keep communities alive and active and will provoke them to analyze their own needs. To date this is done by the government, which is very demotivating, leads to apathy and the feeling of not being in charge of their own lives. Programmes for financing of small projects and initiatives will always enjoy a high popularity and, by default, this ensures them against failure, while initiating serious positive changes in the communities. The results from the competition undoubtedly show that communities have a great number of ideas and the presence of a vision for the future.

The contest demonstrated that *there were a number of areas of community interest, and with potentially high environmental, social and economic impact, which are NOT FUNDED by any EU funding scheme in Bulgaria (or funding is obviously very insufficient) during the current programming period.* Some of those areas included:

- Environmental education both for children/students and adults;
- Lack of seed money for patents and pilot-testing of new technologies and business ideas developed by local communities and individual citizens: e.g. for improving energy efficiency, utilization of alternative energy sources, improving waste management practices, alternative means of public and city-to-city transport, etc.
- Adaptation and implementation of good and innovative practices in Bulgaria in areas such as: urban planning, city transport, waste management, etc. developed with CP funding in other EU countries (e.g. with respect to new building technologies, landscaping and green buildings, urban agriculture, etc.).
- Lack of seed money for projects developed by local communities and citizens leading directly to small-scale improvements of urban/rural environments: e.g. restoration of small community public gardens and green areas around high-rise residential buildings; re-establishing local tourism routes; developing small-scale urban agriculture projects, as well as projects for “green” roofs and vertical landscaping.

Green, smart and inclusive development is an aim that needs to get everyone on board in order for this to be achieved. It also means that we need to allow small scale solutions to be funded. Let's make it possible with small grant schemes as of 2014!



Croatia: can a small grant save the earth?



In Croatia projects were assessed according to multiple criteria set by the evaluation team which were based according to the project call. The evaluated criteria were: **general impression** about the application, **relevance** (to identify whether the project has been prepared according to the call for projects), **EU funds compliance** (to identify whether the project fits the general EU requirements), **Operational Programme for Environment compliance** (to identify whether the project can be part of the programme), **budget quality**, **soft versus concrete activities** (according to the call for proposals preference was given to concrete activities), **feasibility**, and whether the **results** were **measurable**. The scores given per project ranged from 0 to 10 where 0 was low quality and 10 was the highest quality. The jury consisted of 3 evaluators who independently evaluated the projects and the results were compiled by a project manager in Zelena Akcija. According to the evaluated criteria and the call for proposals guidelines, the perfect project would be in line with the sustainable development goals of the EUROPE2020 strategy so as to comply with the EU funds compliance criteria. In order to comply with OP Environment criteria, the project needed to be in the water, waste or energy sector and comply with ex-ante conditionalities of the Cohesion Policy for these sectors. The budget would be prepared according to sound management principles and would include funds for concrete activities which are feasible for implementation in the short-term and the results of the project should be easily measurable and evaluated.

Small grants in service of increasing the absorption rate

One of the most famous quotes of Aldo Leopold, founder of land ethics, seems to be true and it states: "Often citizens think that heat comes from radiators and food comes from the supermarkets". One of the main characteristics of projects submitted, however small it is, is that it always aims at reducing material consumption, the reduction of CO₂, saving trees for paper production, saving CO₂ from the transport sector, saving energy in the production stage etc. Small projects often have several positive and social and economic impacts and this is exactly what connects them to the EUROPE2020 strategy. Most of the projects received through this process showed a significant level of knowledge and presented a variety of ideas for enabling smart, inclusive and sustainable development of the European Union. It has been noticed through communication with project applicants that there is little knowledge about the possibilities for usage of EU funding for similar initiatives and thus this opportunity was more than welcomed. This conclusion is also applicable for the Croatian government whose 7 years of IPA funding passed rapidly with investment in large scale projects from Operational programmes, omitting the fact that there are varieties of ideas among citizens (most emphasised as NGOs) who could participate in not only programming, but also implementation of the programmes. The low absorption rate of current IPA funds which will still be available for spending in the next 2 years is an additional problem for the current Croatian authorities – while an extremely high absorption of funds for NGOs could and should present the greatest opportunity for future EU funds schemes. Although some steps have been made towards increasing Croatian institutional EU funds absorption capacities in terms of employment of new people in the EU funds managing bodies, Croatia should still invest also in free training for potential users/beneficiaries of EU funds in general as this could certainly increase one of the main internal EU funds indicator; absorption rate.

The awarded and also received projects were characterized mainly by their small size and focus on local issues and the needs of the local community, however if all the problems were replicated on a national or European level, all these projects would definitely contribute to the sustainability goals of the EUROPE2020 strategy, which is the main strategy for designing and developing cohesion funds in the budget period 2014.-2020. It is maybe hard to imagine for the citizens of Belgium, Netherlands or Germany that there are still cities without recycling programmes in the European Union, but without serious Cohesion Policy investment in this sector there will be no progress in countries such as Croatia. The same replication model can be used in Energy efficiency in the construction sector, railroad transport development and similar. The recommendations of the citizens' panel are therefore as follows:



Be in line with Europe 2020

Waste sector

- Waste management sector alone in the EU could provide more than 400,000 new working places if only the waste framework directive minimums and standards would be met. Therefore recycling and prevention programmes should be supported and prioritized no matter their total financial value (in terms of “hard investments”).

Urban sustainability

- The cities in Croatia, but also everywhere in Europe, have a lot of unused land which can be leased to citizens and this initiative aims to establish shared urban gardens, where citizens of big residential buildings can have a piece of land for growing vegetables for food.

Transport

- Financing of transport sector projects should focus on sustainable transport and mobility issues, (i.e. financing the development of bicycle routes in cities, investments in upgrading railroad infrastructure etc.)

Energy

- Investments in energy sector should have 2 directions; prevention of consumption (how to save energy, how to extend the durability of batteries, how to read specifications on electrical appliances, house insulation etc.) and energy production (installation of photovoltaic panels, solar collectors, wind farms etc.)

Institutional

- Projects with small investments in infrastructure, but more focused in organizational development or the improvement of current practices should not be discouraged from financing (not to give priority to a project just because it presents big investment)
- In Croatia, there is enormous need to develop opportunities for civil society initiatives; i.e. to open special EU funds lines for subjects which are not able to fulfil financial sustainability criteria (Lack of big financial balances from NGOs often leads to the disapproval of projects, even though implementation is feasible).
- Alignment of EU and Croatian financial regulations (NGOs in Croatia often have difficulties in following EU rules and this often results with in troubles with tax authorities in Croatia).



Engage citizens and local communities, support the environment and social enterprise in the Czech Republic



In the Czech Republic, CEE Bankwatch Network organised the contest under the name “Better ideas? Contest of ideas for European funding”. Active citizens, NGOs and small municipalities sent more than 50 suggestions on how to use European funds in the next budget period meaningfully to support environment protection, engage citizens and support local communities.

Project ideas were evaluated by a jury of five members, including NGO representatives, media, experts and local politicians. Based on the common traits of the projects submitted and experience from the current programming period, the jury compiled the following set of recommendations.

Participation of citizens in preparation, evaluation and realization of projects

Common participation, community planning and society-wide acceptance of projects influencing public spaces, landscape and local economy are key tools for achieving long term sustainability. If a project is well accepted by the community, there is much higher willingness to take care of it and develop it further.

Engagement of the public in community projects is on the rise, as projects represented in the contest show. In more than half of the participating projects, participation of the public was a key element, with 20 % of the projects aimed directly at community development, 34 % of projects engaged the public throughout planning and realisation and counted on their active participation.

The current practice of public involvement in planning is not positive. Usually, citizens only get acquainted with a project in its final stage. They are normally not allowed to participate in the early stages of planning and effectively apply their ideas and requests. This leads to a lack of trust and identification with the project, particularly those which influence the citizens' environment in a wider sense, such as those regarding public space in cities, landscape changes, environmental protection and behaviour change including energy and resource efficiency. Projects supporting local heritage and traditions should allow for public participation in the early stages.

Enable broad participation

- to enable financing of public engagement of citizens and communities from early planning, such as community planning processes, including the building of capacities of civil society to enable their fully-fledged participation
- in project evaluation, giving preferential treatment to those engaging the public
- to prepare methods and manuals for project applicants, helping them to engage citizens
- to prepare instruments for support of small projects, with low administrative demands, including the possibility of supporting small activities which are part of long-term community activities.

Support for social enterprise

Projects supported from EU funds should ideally not only contribute to economic development and fulfil the criteria of specific indicators of the Operational Programmes, but should also bring further benefits for the whole society. One of the ways to achieve this is the support of social enterprise in a wider sense – all kinds of project which pursue wider goals of societal benefits may be included here, be it environmental protection, development of local communities and economies, employment for disadvantaged groups, social cohesion or corporate responsibility.

Social enterprises often do not cover their costs only from their own business activities. They use several forms of multi-source financing, including donations, grants or public subsidies.



Foster social entrepreneurship

- ensure that the usual forms of social enterprise such as cooperatives or non-profit organisations are eligible beneficiaries in the full spectrum of operational programmes, not only in those financed from the ESF
- provide financial benefits for projects which, apart from main criteria, also provide other benefits for society such as employment of the disadvantaged, environment protection and responsibility and local economic development

Support for environmental protection

From the projects presented in the contest it is clear that in the field of nature and landscape protection, there is a high need for financing both investment and non-investment measures.

Protection of natural values and biodiversity protection is thus not only a question of one-time investments, but also a question of long-term natural management helping to sustain valuable ecosystems.

Currently, financing for long-term management and upkeep of ecosystems and landscape is missing, for example for the revitalisation of river beds in the open countryside through changes of management practice. This is one of the reasons for slow absorption of finance aimed at support for revitalisation measures.

Another obstacle here is the impossibility of financing project preparation of revitalisations. The project preparation phase is very administration intensive in land management projects, with all the necessary plans and permits. Financial support however comes only later and depends on the success of the project application which cannot be ensured ex-ante.

Many of the projects presented in the contest contained a high share of voluntary work. Rules for financing in the current budgetary period under OP Environment have been on the other hand made stricter and require subcontracting. Many nature protection organisations with their own expert capacities and sufficient volunteers are pressed to reorient from real activities to project management. Outsourcing can often be more expensive than activities implemented by the organisation itself. Including volunteering and non-financial assets in co-financing options is a way to make good use of finance for environmental protection.

Nature protection management from the ground

- open a financial support for non-investment measures in management and up keep of valuables biotops and landscapes
- include voluntary work and non-financial assets among co-financing options
- not to require subcontracting in small nature protection projects
- allow separate financing for project preparation

Financing of small projects

Small community activities often require only limited amounts of financial support to take place. Time and financial costs of project application and administration are often too high for them to apply for EU funding. Bottom up activities based on the interest of the community are better accepted by locals and can achieve very good results in terms of protection of environment, support for local economy or social benefits. Without extra funding, however, they remain limited in impact and outreach. In the contest, many such small projects were presented. For these kinds of projects, it would be impossible to apply for financing under the current rules of EU funding, with high demands on administration, pre-financing and co-financing.

One of possible ways to improve this situation is to provide support in the form of a block grant financing the whole process from preparation through realisation to administration. Small projects without subcontracting should be able to use simplified administrative procedures to decrease the burden for the final beneficiary. Another option is to open the possibility for small projects to apply for financing of eligible costs during or after the actual realisation of the project.

Ease small projects from administrative burdens

- finance small projects in the form of block grants
- set different, simplified rules for application and administration processes for small projects
- allow application for financing during or after realisation of small projects



Establishing an eco-social market economy in Hungary²



Numerous environmental NGOs in Hungary have addressed the environmental impacts of regional development since before EU accession in order to ensure that regional and cohesion policy serve sustainable development.

In 2012, the National Society of Conservationists – Friends of the Earth Hungary, in cooperation with the Central and Eastern European Bankwatch Network launched a programme to present the idea that civil society and citizens also have plenty of valuable ideas regarding how EU funds could be used in line with the principles of sustainability. CEE Bankwatch and its partners organised the project contest in eight countries; in Hungary, the jury received 45 project ideas out of which they selected 12 for presentation, including four that they also awarded financially.

All the selected project ideas propose solutions that, along with a contribution to environment protection and community development, also create jobs and aim at the awareness-raising and capacity-building of citizens, thus enhancing their skills and competences inevitable to develop sustainable lifestyles. The ideas of the community repair workshop, community gardens and composting schemes, the construction waste recycling charity, etc. have benefits including the enhancement of environmental awareness and self-sufficiency of the local public.

Jury Recommendations

As the project ideas also prove, Cohesion Policy should serve the evolvement of an ecosocial market economy that operates within ecological limits (i.e. respects the carrying capacity of the environment). The economy serves an increase in the quality of life and the well-being of the society; social interaction is determined by a value-base going beyond material values, and embracing universal human values (such as physical, psychological, mental well-being, education/arts, democratic rights, free time, safety, security, family and community relations, quality of the environment), as it is impossible to produce even material values without cooperation, mutual understanding, trust and good morals.

Cohesion Policy should serve the evolvement of an ecosocial market economy by:

- supporting the decrease of demand for energy and resources; the production of high added value; the development of local economies in line with the principles of sovereignty and self-sufficiency; the development of a knowledge-based society, whereby
- preventing the externalities of private profits from being devolved to society and
- refraining from the support of end-of-pipe “solutions”;
- observing and promoting the principles of subsidiarity, and partnership; subsidiarity strengthens the sovereignty and self-sufficiency of regions and countries; by relying on internal resources and developing internal markets, such policies ensure that the added value produced locally also stays in the region;
- supporting measures for social justice, prevention, community-building; and
- Supporting the promotion of sustainable production and consumption patterns and innovation for the efficient and frugal, thus sustainable use of resources.

² Based on the recommendations of environmental NGOs, regional NGO conferences on cohesion policy and of the project idea contest “EU alapok, Te érted?!”



The above goals and objectives shall be implemented by also observing the below **principles**.

- a) **Economically profitable activities** should, as a priority, mainly be triggered through the creation of demand. Profit-making enterprises may also be given refundable support; however, they should not be entitled to non-refundable grants due to the distorting impact thereof on the market and competition.
- b) Hungarian cohesion policy should not pursue **employment** as merely a tool to serve economic needs and it should also refrain from degrading citizens to mere living resources of economic processes. The goals of regional and social policy have to be harmonized. The long-term success of measures for strengthening employment presumes the development of unprompted action, social capital and public trust. Therefore, the development of citizens' participation, local communities and civil society are inevitable. In order to enhance society's capacities to raise incomes, cohesion policy should support life-long learning and education embedded in employment, the ownership of production tools and access to markets. It should also promote the introduction of employment modes that enable the harmonization of roles at labour and in the family.
- c) **Complex programmes:** Cohesion policy programmes should enable and promote the support of complex programmes including investments and "soft" measures. This would prevent the risk of fragmenting complex development programmes into projects whereby the failure of a project proposal may question the meaningfulness and jeopardize the success of the whole complex development.
- d) **Partnership:** In order to promote good governance, a key objective of the European Union, Cohesion Policy should strongly support the strengthening of active citizenship, self-organising communities and civil society. A wide range of stakeholders in society, including NGOs, should be involved in the identification and development of Cohesion Policy priorities and funding measures at all levels. Funding criteria should be adapted to the special conditions of the target sector, so that they could absorb the funds efficiently and sustainably for public benefits. Technical assistance funds should support the capacity-building of social actors in their participation in the development and implementation of Cohesion Policy.

In order to achieve the above goals and objective, Cohesion Policy funds should be spent along the following measures.

Agriculture, rural development

- restructuring of large-scale intensive cultivation, development of functional small farms;
- change of cultivation from intensive to extensive cultures;
- development of a network of field protection wood rows (hedges) with a view to nature conservation;
- climate adaptation of grown cultures and technologies;
- return to agricultural production using natural manure for soil fertilisation;
- complex, multi-purpose, ecological rural development based on the traditions and knowledge of local societies.

Energy

- promotion of independence from large supply systems, development of independent micro-networks (separate for industrial actors and households);
- change to the small-scale local use of renewable energy sources; biomass energy production should not compromise food production;
- restructuring and modernisation of public lighting for the sake of energy efficiency and nature conservation.

Social cohesion

- supporting intersectoral cooperation programmes;
- supporting programmes enhancing active citizenship;
- development of the human capacities of civil society organisations;
- regional social inclusion programmes supporting public self-reliance initiatives;
- supporting community initiatives and the development of community spaces;
- safeguarding of conditions of civil monitoring; measures to ensure the transparency of local decision-making;
- strengthening of decentralised decision-making systems and the involvement of social actors therein;
- removal of ITC barriers.



Economy

- development and strengthening of consumption systems based on local products; support to the development of mechanisms strengthening local economies;
- promotion of social enterprises;
- supporting development of production cycles based on ecosystem services and the reprocessing of secondary raw materials.

Transport

- measures supporting pedestrian traffic; traffic mitigation;
- development of rail freight transport; improvement of rail tracks, electrification, up-to-date installation of the European Train Control System;
- upgrading of tram tracks in urban public transport; development of suburban transport;
- support to organised transport of workers and car sharing;
- establishment of urban bike rental systems and measures to increase the safety of cycling;
- programmes designed to relieve road traffic.

Public administration

- support to microregional development plans and integrated local environmental programmes;
- improving public accessibility of electronic public administration systems, including adaptation of these electronic service schemes to demand and enabling society to use these;
- elimination of parallel capacities.

Environment and nature protection

- establishment of new urban green infrastructure with recreational and protective purposes;
- elaboration of watershed-based environmental management and resource use plans;
- support of measures aimed at the networking of natural systems;
- promotion of the use of reed-fields and grasslands;
- support of measures and campaigns promoting and spreading sustainable production and consumption patterns;
- educational and internship programmes;
- support of initiatives for the use of secondary raw materials.

Conclusions

The National Society of Conservationists considers the implementation and multiplication of the valuable project ideas received in the course of the project contest “EU alapok, Teérted?!” crucial. Therefore, they would like to draw the attention of decision-makers in charge of the identification of the priorities of EU cohesion policy funds to the 12 best project ideas selected by the jury. The Society recommends elaborating funding measures based on the ideas presented in the project proposals in the framework of cohesion policy programming and planning. This would ensure that Hungary uses EU funds in line with sustainability and for the benefit of local communities through these initiatives and similar ones.



For an integrated and participatory bottom-up approach towards EU funds in Latvia



The Latvian Green Movement in cooperation with the Central and Eastern European Bankwatch Network launched the project contest “Better ideas for EU funds use” where NGOs, activist groups, citizens and communities were invited to submit their ideas aimed at local sustainable development and be in line with supported areas and investment priorities of EU funds in period of 2014-2020.

There were 26 applications received during the contest and the ideas were mostly in areas of environmental education, integrated local development, environmental infrastructure, recycling and sustainable consumption, sustainable energy use. All applications were evaluated by a citizens’ panel (jury) which consisted of six experts representing such fields of expertise as sustainable energy, environmental education, environmental media, environmental investments, local development and overall development of civil society. In its assessment, the jury was mainly focusing on four areas i.e. how the proposed activities promote local sustainability; how society at large would benefit; how the contribution to local community development would be ensured; whether the project results would be tangible.

The received ideas often reflected multi-sector cooperation, creative partnerships and a *bottom-up* approach. The jury concluded that despite many of those ideas being vital to local development, the current implementation system would prevent many of those coming to fruition due to various reasons. Thus, these recommendations are aimed at improving opportunities for NGO participation and civil society involvement in EU funds programming as well as the implementation of activities.

Transparent and institutionalised communication about NGO participation opportunities in EU funds programming

Line ministries should use existing information channels and approach coordination bodies and cooperation councils of NGOs to inform them about participation opportunities in EU funds programming, including taking part in working groups and providing comments on draft EU funds planning documents in Latvia. Existing structures such as the Cooperation council of Memorandum between Cabinet of Ministers and NGOs, and advisory bodies of NGOs attached to line ministries should be used for two-way communication. NGOs should be able to choose their own representatives, who would represent the priorities of sector during the programming process.

Strengthening of horizontal priorities in EU funds implementation

Horizontal priorities, in particular the priority of sustainable development, should be strengthened both in the programming stage and during implementation of activities. The impact on environment, sustainability of economic activities, principles of equality and non-discrimination should be assessed and carefully considered during the implementation of projects.

Non-governmental organisations should be recognised as a legitimate beneficiary and easier mechanisms for applying for financing should be used

The European Commission has already pointed out in its documents and communications that it is necessary to involve civil society not only during planning, but also during the implementation of EU funds. In the programming period of 2007-2013 in Latvia, NGOs often were not defined as potential beneficiaries and in this way making it impossible for them to apply for tenders. Moreover in the area of nature management and environmental protection, NGOs were not defined as eligible beneficiaries in any activity or project tender. As a result NGOs were prevented from contributing to or managing implementation of such activities as creation of public tourism infrastructure in specially protected nature areas. NGOs have also faced the situation where they are not allowed to take part in tenders because of their participation in steering committees or monitoring committees. The European Commission has emphasized that administration of EU funds should be made easier.



Line ministries should inform about what type of activities and projects they plan to start and in which ones NGOs can offer their competencies

Line ministries and their subordinated institutions implement various projects where NGOs can team up as partners with valuable experience in the field or could provide certain services. This approach is partnership in implementation and allows for the effective use of the available expertise of NGOs, while at the same time contributing to the strengthening of NGO capacity. Information about planned activities and upcoming tenders should be provided regularly and proactively. This would also strengthen the multi-sector approach, when good ideas are matched with available financing, instead of programming financing within narrow sectors. Activities where NGOs are the target audience i.e. public administration projects aimed at information preparation and capacity building activities, should require mandatory NGO involvement in the preparation phase of such projects.

Training on preparing project applications

There should be meaningful information given and training provided to potential beneficiaries or the target audience of particular activities to increase the quality of elaboration of project ideas. Information about best practice should be provided in order to avoid low-quality and copy-paste projects.

Support to the strengthening of NGO capacity

There should be separate programmes aimed at an increase in NGO capacity in certain areas. This type of support allows NGOs to get involved in advocacy activities in a more professional and systematic way. This also increases social capital and promotes public participation.

Lighter requirements for implementation of small projects (30.000 EUR)

Administrative burden on small projects in relation to their budget is rather huge. Therefore easier requirements should be applied. This approach is intact with lighter accounting regulations and administrative rules for NGOs in Latvia whose annual turnover is less than 25 thousand LVL (35.6 thousand EUR). Similarly the ceiling for LEADER type of projects in Latvia is also 20,000 LVL (28.5 thousand EUR). Applying easier requirements for small projects would also enable smaller NGOs to apply for EU funding.

Applying a bottom-up approach in the programming of local development activities

The new National development plan 2014-2020 and policies of line ministries would exclude a number of areas in Latvia from receiving any financing from EU funds. Leaving out part of the less developed areas, territorial cohesion across Latvia would not be promoted. Small local level partnerships (NGOs, schools, local businesses etc.) should be given the opportunity to apply for EU funds for the implementation of certain activities (i.e. LEADER type approach) with a condition that a local development strategy is prepared. Support for such bottom-up initiatives would allow civil society to define its own priorities, cooperate among various groups and implement projects that reflect the needs of the local community.



Prioritize local initiatives in Macedonia



The citizen's panel was set up for the purpose of the public contest entitled "Better ideas for EU funds". Their task was to evaluate the project ideas and to choose the winners. Also, the panel discussed their recommendations in terms of EU financing in future.

Investing in local environmentally sustainable projects

The contest showed a lot of local initiatives with great ideas and benefits for local people. Such initiatives should be prioritized when it comes to EU financing. The ideas and projects to be supported should be in line with the Europe 2020 strategy and in Macedonia, the focus should be on energy efficiency projects, renewable energy projects and other environmentally sustainable initiatives.

According to the Instrument for Pre-Accession, the environmental protection should be a horizontal issue for which at least 10% of the total funds would be allocated. This rule should be implemented also nationally, from the overall state budget and also including local municipality budgets. The Macedonian Government needs to make all possible efforts to participate in the EU's Life + programme as this programme would enable crucial funding.

The Government needs to also ensure proper training for the potential users/beneficiaries of this programme. IPA as an instrument can be used to obtain such trainings, or a special fund for capacity building could be established, providing funding to those willing to participate in certain trainings.

Participation in programming

One of the biggest problems with the programming of the IPA funds in Macedonia is the lack of a National development plan, where the long term strategic goals of the country are determined. This plan needs to be developed in a participatory manner, and enable the participation and input of all interested civil society organisations. Without such plan, a discussion about national or local priorities is impossible. Municipalities need to take part and help identify and define the needs of the local population so that they are incorporated in the National development plan.

Citizens need to be involved in the IPA programming in order to achieve successfully designed programmes and projects which would have an essential meaning in the local communities. But, in order to include citizens, one needs to provide proper and timely information for the processes. With only a few civil society grants, the Government should enable proper information flow towards citizens and crucial capacity building. The new financial period 2014-2020 needs to provide grant schemes as mechanisms to decrease unemployment, enhance the work of civil society and enable the participation of citizens in decision making processes. In terms of environmental protection, grants need to be provided to civil society organisations which reach out to local communities and actively promote environmental protection with practical examples and educational activities.

The continuous communication between the civil society organisations and the Government, as well as the EU institutions, is of vital importance in this process. The EU delegation office in Skopje has been quite pro-active in this respect, enabling regular meetings of civil society organisations with the presence of EC representatives, and forwarding the conclusions of these meeting to Brussels.

What is seriously lacking at the moment is proper communication between civil society and the Governmental institutions in charge of programming of the EU funds. A joint mechanism to ensure the participation of civil society in programming needs to be agreed with the Government and fully implemented. Civil society organisations need to have elected representatives which would take an active part in the working groups in the process.



As a summary, the members of the citizen's panel have made the following recommendations:

- As many of the project ideas in the call were small scale projects which required small funding, but ensured great benefit for the local population, a mechanism to enable small grants (up to EUR 50 000) should be set up;
- Grant schemes within the new IPA need to be enabled. Grants for CSOs need not be disbursed via an overall call as presently, but have separate grant schemes under each specific priority, thus enabling equal chances for all interested organisations.
- A mechanism for the systematic involvement of civil society organisations representatives need to be agreed with the Government for the new programming period. The communication between these two parties needs to improve.
- Local projects with positive outcomes for the environment and local population need to be supported by the next financial period. At least 10% of overall funding should go to environmentally sustainable projects. The same should be applied to both the national and local (municipality) budgets in Macedonia.



EU funds in Poland - direct sustainability experience



Projects were assessed according to three main criteria – influence on the local community, on the environment and durability and measurability of effects. Within each category 2-3 subcategories were specified. In each one the project could win from 0 to 2 points. The maximum number of points awarded by one jury member was 16. Jury members, while assessing the scope of influence on local communities, valued the highest those projects which aimed at increasing the quality of life of the local community as well as those whose results would be beneficial to a larger group of recipients. Within the category of environment they took into account such aspects as cutting down on the consumption of unrenowned natural resources, investments into infrastructure such as the installation of solar panels as well as the creation of mechanisms of local and intersectorial cooperation. As far as durability and measurability of effects is concerned projects were preferred that clearly indicated how the durability of effects is going to be achieved after completion of the project and also defined measurable benefits. Moreover, project actions should be aimed at providing permanent and not only temporary solutions.

Improving the quality of life

The awarded projects are characterized mainly by their small size and focus on local issues and the needs of the local community. They aim at solving existing problems such as seasonal water shortages, developing community supported agriculture or constructing almost-passive houses from clay and hay, at a significantly lower cost than traditional construction. Generally speaking – they focus on improving the quality of life of people. What is more, they address directly sustainability as one of the key strategic goals of the European Union. However, very often the notion of sustainability is “hard to touch” by ‘ordinary’ citizens, being very often discussed in a highly complex context (e.g. climate change), therefore it is difficult for many European citizens to identify with. Projects like those awarded in the contest, enable people to experience very direct, ‘instant’, benefits of sustainable approach – increased quality of life, lower electricity or construction spendings, less worry on e.g. how to provide water to the community in a remote mountain area where constructing waterworks would be extremely expensive. Such projects have the potential to change mentality and boost creativity towards sustainable development – because the benefits are felt almost instantly. Therefore it is very important to provide sufficient, appropriately designed support for initiatives of such a kind. It is also crucial that most of the projects focus on engaging the local community or socially marginalized groups in the implementation. What is more, projects fully implement sustainable development.

Recommendations:

- Small NGOs or grassroots initiatives have often difficulties in reaching out for EU funds, due to the demands of high own co-financing (they can take a loan, but there are very limited possibilities to obtain a loan by a small entity, and it is even harder for non-formal initiative) combined with preferred large scale of the project. Therefore creating mechanisms that support such initiatives would be highly advisable.
- Ideas and initiatives like those characterized above have a high innovative potential, which fits perfectly into strategic EU goals, but the necessity of realizing very specific indicators in EU projects prevents people with highly innovative ideas to reach out for EU funds – as innovative projects are more related to risk. Therefore it is recommended that mechanisms enabling small-scale projects with highly innovative potential to be realized are also included in the next EU funds programming period.
- Projects with high replicability potential (those, who can be implemented in similar ways by other groups in different locations) should be prioritized, especially if they bear a potential to self-finance in the future.
- Small projects, which that bear the potential of self-financing in the future, should be able to access revolving funds designed for small entities – so far schemes like JESSICA, etc are mainly designed for entities which can't be classified as grassroots initiatives or small NGOs.



Unlock the potential of small community driven initiatives in Slovakia



Taking into account the outcomes of the evaluation, the Slovak Independent Citizens Panel noted that:

- There is a significant potential for small community based initiatives but due to the current Policy setup this is not being realized. The ideas don't often require big investments, but can significantly improve quality of life, contribute to sustainable resource use and strengthen the local economy by reviving local production and consumption systems.
- Complex projects with mutually interconnected activities and an actively participating target community are often the most effective solution. This approach is rather an exemption in Slovakia.
- Public participation on project planning, preparation and implementation is a key condition to the success of most projects, helps prevent conflict of interests in investments which directly affect the public and contributes to the transparency of public spending.
- Many of excellent project ideas submitted within the contest, which are in line with the priorities of the current programming period, could not be implemented because EU funds management conditions prevent it or because the administrative burden is so high that it discourages potential applicants.

Members of the Panel recommend to the Slovak national institutions responsible for programming of future EU funds to:

- Set up the rules enabling the financing of small projects (with a budget of less than €30,000).
- Minimize, as much as possible, the administrative burden to facilitate implementation of smaller initiatives and projects
- Finance complex consultancy for beneficiaries from technical assistance. Consultancy should not only be focused on financing options and help with applications, but also during the project planning and creation phase.
- Improve the system of indicators on the level of OPs to enable evaluation of the real contribution of EU funded investments towards set goals.
- Create space for active public involvement in project planning, preparation and implementation, especially on the level of municipalities and regional governments. One of the possible measures to spur public involvement would be to introduce it as a condition during project application evaluation.
- Consistently publish important details of supported projects.

The Panel furthermore stresses the fact that the existence of formal rules for the preparing of strategic documents and for evaluation of their impacts on the environment does not ensure the fulfilling of their purpose.

The Panel supports progressive proposals of the European Commission published in the Slovak national position document and calls on DG Regio and DG Environment to enforce:

- active informing and involvement of the public in preparation of strategic documents
- active participation of the public in project planning, preparation and implementation as one of evaluation criteria of project proposals
- requirement of carbon emissions reduction in all relevant measures
- binding sustainability criteria for renewable energy sources (with focus on the sustainable use of solid biomass)
- complex and consistent system of indicators based on a common European methodology
- national system of indicators which will be interconnected on all levels from programme documents to individual projects
- climate impact evaluation system of projects which includes the whole production cycle
- creation of schemes and instruments within the new Policy which will create effective access to EU funds for active citizen and community initiatives, including Community Lead Local Development and innovative financial instruments.



Awarded Citizens' Projects

BULGARIA

MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK “HISSARYA” IN CENTRAL BULGARIA

Favorable natural conditions, historical sights and many forest roads and trails in nearby woods are ideal conditions for the development of mountain biking, and in particular one of its styles - Cross-Country. The project aims to develop 3 routes: a short length, one for beginners and nature lovers, a 4-5 hours route for professionals and an all day long tour, combined with sightseeing.

THE URBAN SOLAR CHARGER

The device will mimic a tree and any portable electronic devices will be charged by the sun, while their owners will be resting on a bench and surfing the Internet. About four of these chargers could be built and exposed within amount of the award - 1000 euro.

BEEES IN THE CITY PARK

The project – settling of a bee colony - will be implemented on the roof of a public building in one of the many parks in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia. Workshops for both children and adults will be run by professional beekeepers, biology teachers and volunteers. Children will be given the opportunity to produce some honey themselves.



Winners Award Ceremony, Sofia, Bulgaria
23 November 2012

For more information on the contest in Bulgaria, go to: <http://bankwatch.org/sastezanie>

CROATIA

BICYCLES SAVE TREES

The project idea is based on low-carbon separate waste collection system in the City of Koprivnica. The project idea is called Bicycles Save Trees and it is run by UZOR Hrvatske (NGO for sustainable development of Croatia). The concept is based on individual waste pick-up with bicycles on demand of the users of their service. The service is provided for free and it is entirely financed by selling of the collected materials. The impact of the project is reduced material consumption, reduction of CO₂, saving trees for paper production, etc.

URBAN GARDENING IN ZAGREB

The project idea is for promotion of urban gardening. The city of Zagreb has a lot of unused land and this initiative aims to establish shared urban gardens, where citizens of big residential buildings can have a piece of land for growing vegetables. The idea is to reduce the distance for food transport and to enable citizens to produce their own healthy food under supervision of experienced producers.

WASTE RECYCLING

The project is based on waste recycling in the City of Karlovac old town area where the collection of waste is impossible for modern motor vehicles. The city of Karlovac does not provide such service in this historic city area therefore the NGO would on voluntary basis collect recycled waste and transfer it to recycling companies.

For more information on the contest in Croatia, go to: <http://bankwatch.org/natjecaj>



CZECH REPUBLIC

COMMUNITY GARDEN SCHEME IN STREDOKLUKY

Community supported food production based on sustainable agriculture with land restoration, participation of local families, sustainability and self-sufficiency education, creating jobs in the countryside. The project will contribute to the reduction of long distance transport of food, restoration of biodiversity on former monoculture fields and support local economy as well as community relations.

REHABILITATION OF PRE-FAB PANEL ESTATES, HOUSE BY HOUSE

Project of ambitious but realistic (already proved) energy retrofits of pre-fab panel buildings to zero energy standard, including wall and roof insulation, triple-glazing, heat recuperation and installation of renewable sources for heating bringing energy savings and combined with storage and use of rain water, these measures are also good climate change adaptation. Apart from technical measures, the projects also educate the inhabitants to use these systems.



Winners Award Ceremony, Prague, the Czech Republic,

SAFE WAYS TO SCHOOL

Project based on community mapping of problematic places from the point of view of pedestrians and bike transport of kids to schools. Kids will be mapping their ways to school and create inputs for changes. Results of mapping, traffic monitoring and public surveys will serve as input for a workgroup of parents in the Community, municipality, police and architects. The work group will prepare plans for technical on the ground changes and school mobility plans, as well as investments for the schools (bike sheds, bike helmets). With a € 45.000 budget from the EU funds the project would serve 4 schools during one year.

THE RIVER CLUB

Development of an association focusing on revitalization of watercourses and surrounding areas to improve biodiversity, ecology of the course as well as the landscape and improve adaptation capacities with innovative management and use of the watercourse and surrounding for ecological agriculture, aquaculture and biomass production. The goal of the association is to join land owners such as municipalities, river basin authorities (owners of watercourses and land in CZ), and field and forest owners and prepare and implement common sustainable management plan.

For more information on the contest in the Czech Republic, go to: <http://bankwatch.org/soutez>

HUNGARY

MEND IT YOURSELF!

The project aims to show young people how they could implement sustainability in their own lives, how they can use, mend, repair old, out-of-order tools, toys, household machines, bicycles in alternative ways. Thus they develop their social competences and other skills inevitable in communities and everyday life, as well as at the jobs market.

They convince youngsters of the values of common environmental action through street improvisation workshops, adventure therapy, theatre workshops etc. Green Roots develop the participants' competences through individual training and through community activities where participants help each other and share their experiences and skills. The main target group of the project is marginalised youth, as well as their existing or future communities.



Winners Award Ceremony, Budapest, Hungary
12 December 2012



Inventor: Hungarian Green Roots (members of the Federation of Young European
Place of implementation: Nyíregyháza
Website: <http://nyiregyhazipenz.blogspot.hu/>

SCONES BAKED IN ASH

The project aims to develop a local production and consumption structure in and around Nyíregyháza, in order to promote the introduction of a local alternative currency. The project promoters strive to develop a cooperative culture, based on cooperation with nature and among its members. This needs gradual development and the specific, hands-on involvement of people that contributes to the restructuring of the social system and the enhancement of the learning skills of participants. As a first step, they would like to restore trust among people through community action, e.g. urban gardening, community rental system, and book-exchange.

Inventor: Cultural Creatives of Nyíregyháza, backed by Inspi-Ráció Association
Place of implementation: Nyíregyháza
Website: <http://nyiregyhazipenz.blogspot.hu/>

PREPARATION OF PLANTATION OF WOOD ALONG THE CHANNELS TO DEVELOP LOCAL ENERGY PRODUCTION AND PROMOTE THE CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

Along the drainage channels owned by the local government and operated by the water management company, the project promoters plan to plant trees of local origin. This would contribute to the conservation of biodiversity, provide employment in the local community, increase forest areas, decrease loss of water due to evaporation and provide raw material for the heating of local public buildings. This would reduce the dependency on foreign energy sources and create energy sovereignty.

Inventor: Derekegyházért Közhasznú Egyesület (local village development association)
Place of implementation: Derekegyház

REDUCE – REUSE – RECYCLE - PARTY / RECYCLING PARTY

The primary aim of the project is to use waste derived from over consumption showing a wide scale of environmentally conscious manners, e.g. through the exchange of used clothes and household goods. As the remained goods are offered to charity associations, the promoters hope to arise social sensibility toward marginalised people by setting good example, as well. The project promoters also plan to present creative ways of reusing things at workshops led by recycling artists at regular intervals. The project award will be used for a noteworthy event, including clothes swapping and recycling artists' workshops in February, 2013.

The project also aims to develop a national network to share 'good practice' widely. Relying on the growing members of community, a platform is to be established for sharing 'common treasure', as well as for the exchange of non-material assets (know-hows), experiences and practices. Obviously, all the ever-broadening community and the environment can benefit from the prominent events, as well.

Being aware of the advantage of the Internet, the project promoters also plan to broaden activities to an international level by inviting artists from abroad (mainly EU member states) and encouraging 'eco-mind' people to be involved into the online and offline sharing community.

Inventor: „Greenland group” civic company – backed by TIT Stúdió Association
Place of implementation: Budapest
Website: <http://www.greenportal.hu>

For more information on the contest in Hungary, go to:
http://mtvsz.blog.hu/2012/06/27/eu_alapok_te_erted#more4614135



LATVIA

1ST PRIZE: ECO-THOUGHTS EXPRESS IN RIEBINI COUNTY

The project aims to increase environmental awareness of children and youngsters and mobilize them to deal with global environmental challenges while contributing to local sustainable development in Riebini County. The ideas and activities have been developed by youngsters themselves and they include production of information materials and drawing books, giving thematic lectures and regularly organizing events in schools of the county and organize exhibition in the end.



Winners Award Ceremony, Riga, Latvia
22 November 2012

2ND PRIZE: FOOTBRIDGES FOR BIRD-WATCHING IN LIEPAJA CITY

The project aims to develop footbridges and set up information billboards in Lake Liepaja to encourage people to learn about nature in the city, do bird-watching and find new ways of co-existence between people and nature. The Liepaja lake is a nature protected area, although there has been a management plan developed, defining areas that can be used for recreation. In practice, those areas are not accessible for visitors and people living in the neighborhood and therefore nature remains distant to many of them

3RD PRIZE: CREATION OF A MULTIFUNCTIONAL CENTER FOR WORK AND RECREATION IN RURAL AREA IN OZOLNIEKI COUNTY

The project aims to support efforts of local NGO in building skills of various social groups to apply ecological management methods and contribute to strengthening of local community. It envisages implementation of various activities that involve cultivation of land in rural area, developing of cycling path and camping site for children's' summer camps, creating a pond. It also includes learning and applying organic farming methods and creating a composting site that could be used by local community.

4TH PRIZE: CREATION OF „GREEN CLASS” IN RAMULI PRIMARY SCHOOL

The project is aimed to create „green class” nearby the school building, where children can learn and research on the environment, observe, discover and deal with various environmental challenges. With new facilities, environmental education methods will become more elaborated as the project will allow the provision of the necessary facilities for learning outdoors. The project has been developed by Ramuli primary school.

For more information on the contest in Latvia, go to: <http://bankwatch.org/konkurss>

MACEDONIA

‘METEO’ SENSOR BOXES

The project's aim is providing free and easily accessible information related to environmental pollution. The NGO Free Software has designed a special box containing custom selected sensors which can measure various environmental parameters. Boxes can be placed anywhere, as long as they have internet access. The project is a direct result of the lack of the city of Skopje to cope with huge air pollution last year, and as a result of increased number of deaths due to air pollution. The project can be implemented by municipalities on local level and it will on one hand increase the information flow towards citizens but also provide the necessary push for municipalities to deal with air pollution locally.



Winners Award Ceremony, Skopje, Macedonia
22 November 2012



WEB AND MOBILE APPLICATIONS FOR A BETTER ENVIRONMENT

This project envisions the production of mobile applications and a web based application for citizens who would report environmental problems in their community. The mobile application takes the location information of the taken photograph and sends the picture on the web server. The urgency and type of problem will be selective from the application. The respective municipality services will be prompted to act in order to resolve the problem.

ECO-SHELTER

The Eco-shelter will be built with recycled materials and will be completely self-sustainable system with installed photovoltaic and solar collectors. The aim of the project is to provide both a low cost, self-sustaining shelter for stray animals and help alleviate the problem with stray animals in a humane way. Animals brought to the shelter will be accommodated. The shelter will provide space for around 80 dogs or cats. Animals will be kept in specially designed area (not in cages). This project can be implemented by any municipality that faces a problem with stray animals.

For more information on the contest in Macedonia, go to: <http://www.ekosvest.com.mk/mk/aktivnost.php?id=16>

POLAND

1ST PRIZE – BIO-CONSTRUCTION

The project is based on an idea of foundation of Bio-construction Technologies Center in Kock (Lubuskie Voivodship, Poland). The idea is for the development of a professional implementation center focused on eco-passive building technologies. It will be financed from production of bio-building materials, consulting services and trainings. On the preliminary stage it would employ around 15/20 people. The foundation of the center would accelerate the formation of a new market segment in the field of residential buildings and thus would help to achieve tangible results in reduction of CO₂ emissions in this sector.



Winners Award Ceremony, Warsaw, Poland
29 November 2012

2ND PRIZE – RAINWATER FOR A RAINY DAY

The project aims at the construction of four reservoirs of rainwater located by three settlements in Krzeszowice (Malopolskie Voivodship, Poland). The main aim of the project is to solve the problem of temporary water shortages that occur in the region mostly from spring to autumn. During the draught period inhabitants could collect water from the reservoirs and use it in their daily farm work. In total the system shall supply water to 40 households and 15 small farms as well as to the employees and guests of the mountain hut.

3RD PRIZE – IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE IN MAZOWSZE

The Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is an alternative local model for agriculture and food distribution. CSA applies also to a specific group of people who support one or more local farms and thus share the risk of costs related to food production with the producers. CSA constitutes an alternative, favorable model for small farms. Thanks to advance payments the farmer knows his annual profit and can run his farm independently from prices fluctuations on the market. Payments are made in the early spring and deliver necessary means for investments in seeds, equipment and fertilizers.

For more information on the contest in Poland, go to: <http://bankwatch.org/konkurs>



SLOVAKIA

OLD, BUT GOOD "VILLAGE JUMBLE SALE"

The aim of the project is to create a roofed market place, a sort of jumble sale where people can bring unused things (e.g. Old tables, chairs, TVs, radios, washing machines, etc.) in order to avoid items ending up in waste collection points, scrap yards or even illegal dumps. As a result, the amount of waste in the region will be reduced.

"GAMES" IN BOHUNICE

A neglected park with garden, chapel and a renovated manor house in the heart of the town could be used by all the citizens. The project suggested turning the garden into an orchard (containing local sorts of apple, pear, plumb, cherry trees, briars etc) with a small herd of sheep, which would graze there and as well as a fishpond. In autumn, the fruit would be sold to citizens, cooked into marmalades and sold at charity events and sheep meat to be eaten at a yearly traditional firemen festival. Fish from fishpond would be distributed on Christmas for the traditional Christmas meal.

RAIL CYCLE-PARK BRATISLAVA BRANCH

An old neglected rail station would be cleaned and revitalized. The aim of the project is to create a cycle track in the station between the tracks to ease the traffic in that part of town, plant trees to improve the environment and renovate the building and create a new community and culture center while keeping the spirit of railways. Also, a small community vegetable garden with a composting place would be selected to motivate people to produce their own food, recycle and make use of biological waste.

For more information on the contest in Slovakia, go to: <http://bankwatch.org/sutaz>



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