

The Changing Landscape of Waste Disposal

THREE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION OFFICERS FROM THE **ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES AUTHORITY** EXPLAIN HOW TWO INTERREG EUROPE PROJECTS ARE HELPING TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF WASTE MANAGEMENT AND DISPOSAL IN MALTA.

As Malta's main regulator on environmental matters, the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) always has to be one step ahead in a field that is constantly changing. To be able to do that, its Environment Protection Officers are often on the ground – both locally and abroad – looking for new ways that could help make things better for us as a people and as a nation.

In this article, we look at two Europe-wide projects that could potentially have a huge impact on the way Malta and its citizens will dispose of waste in the years to come by shaping the laws that are being drafted today.

COCOON

Consortium for a Coherent European Landfill Management Strategy

With partners from across Europe – including Belgium, Germany, Spain, Cyprus and the Netherlands – COCOON is a project that aims to help members of the European Union (EU) ensure that landfills across the country are in-line with EU directives and that the best practices in landfill management are implemented.

“Although we don't have much space here in Malta, we have a high-rate of landfilling waste,” Martina Spiteri explains, “additionally, many of the old dumpsites don't have a bottom sealing, which would be used to separate and incubate waste from the surrounding environment. This isn't just limited to Malta, in fact, other EU Member States had similar sites, which were totally acceptable – though not environmentally safe – before the EU directives came into effect.”

Through COCOON, which is part-financed by the Interreg Europe Programme, ERA is now looking to these old landfill sites, with the intention to increase awareness on landfill management, and ensure that old dumpsites are rehabilitated in a way that makes them safer. All this is done through an exchange of best practices where tried-and-tested methods and ideas can be used Europe-wide by any participating countries.

“The first phase of this project, which is just about to be completed, has been a real learning curve for Malta, particularly as we looked at the ways countries like Germany have tackled their landfill problems. Now, we are moving on to the second phase, where a plan of action will be drafted by ERA and Wasteserv Malta Ltd,” Maria Alonso Bomba continues.

While the project will come to a close in 2020, its benefits are already being reaped through the knowledge acquired from the other participating countries.

“As a country, we need to learn that landfills should only be the last option when it comes to disposing of waste. After all, prevention, reduction, preparation for reuse, recycling and recovery should always come before disposal,” Martina concludes.

WINPOL

Waste Management Intelligent Systems and Policies

The future of waste management is upon us, but it's time for regulations to be put in place to control it – and that's where this 54 month-long Interreg Europe project comes in.

WINPOL is led by EMULSA (Municipal Company of Urban Environment Services of Gijón), Spain, and involves a partnership between nine European waste management entities from different regions in Spain, Belgium, Greece (Crete), Slovenia, and Romania. In Malta, the project is being overseen by ERA, which is currently looking at established intelligent systems





WINPOL
Interreg Europe

WINPOL aims to improve waste management in European cities and regions by fostering intelligent systems

www.interregueurope.eu/winpol

and the way they have been received abroad.

“The primary aim of this project is to introduce intelligent waste-management solutions to target municipal [domestic] waste through improving policies and regulations,” says Ariana Schembri. “This is quite new for both ERA and Malta, however, so we have a lot to learn from those who have already started implementing such measures.”

In Gijón, Spain, EMULSA has introduced smart waste bins that notify the entity when the bin is almost full, helping them plan a better route each day – thus also saving time, energy and other resources. These smart bins are also opened with a card that is unique to each citizen, which allows them to amass data that is usually quite tricky to compile, including how many times a bin is used by a particular person, as well as the number of times a bin is opened. This, in turn, helps regulators understand how the polluter-pays principle can be applied such that there is an increased awareness to instigate people to generate less waste. In Malta we are seeing the introduction of the first i-bins.

An interregional cooperation project for improving resource-efficient economy policies.

Project Partners

- EMULSA, Municipal Company of Urban Environment Services of Gijón (ES)
- ACR*, Association of Cities and Regions for sustainable Resource management (BE)
- City of Antwerp (BE)
- Region of Crete (EL)
- Municipality of Heraklion (EL)
- ERA, Environment and Resources Authority (MT)
- Drobeta Turnu Severin City Hall (RO)
- Mehedini County Council (RO)
- SNAGA, Company for Waste Management and other Utility Services (SI)



“At this point in time, we are still in the second semester of the project, so we are looking at what is out there and trying to understand how these would impact Maltese citizens should they be implemented. Moreover, ERA is responsible for drafting the policies and seeing that they are implemented; the actual provision of the actual goods would come at a later stage.”

Meanwhile, ERA is holding meetings with the various stakeholders to get their point of view on the subject. Planned so far are four targeted events reaching out to small and medium enterprises, IT experts, politicians and regulators, and civil society, among others.

“Before implementing any policies, we must see how certain changes could impact those involved – after all, not everything that has worked abroad is guaranteed to work here,” Maria concludes. ☑



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Interreg Europe Programme 2014-2020
Project part-financed by the European Union
European Regional Development Fund
Co-financing rate: 85% European Union funds; 15% National funds

