



THERMAUVERGNE

Regional Action Plan

Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region (France)

InnovaSPA
Interreg Europe



**DES SOLUTIONS
DE SANTÉ INNOVANTES
POUR LES RÉGIONS THERMALES**

Un projet de coopération
interrégionale pour la mise en œuvre
de politiques d'innovation santé



Part I – General information

Project: InnovaSPA
Partner organisation: Association Thermauvergne
Country: France
NUTS2 region: Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes
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Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact: Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
 European Territorial Cooperation programme
 Other regional development policy instrument

Name of the policy instrument addressed: **Regional thermal plan**

General Features about the targeted policy instrument: the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Thermal Plan

The main objective of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes thermal plan is to support the development of new generation spa resorts by investments and collective actions (communication, innovation and training). Identified as major activity sector, thermal spa resorts play an essential part in the field of preventative health and provide adequate answers to clients' expectations as to the improvement and maintaining of their health capital by offering alternative forms of care with no side-effects. Challenge for the resorts: diversify their service range above and beyond the "18 days thermal cure" to attract more clients. With its 24 thermal resorts, the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region made Thermalism a priority and aims at becoming the reference region for wellness and preventative health.

To address this societal challenge, the Region launched a Thermal Plan, granted 23M€ for phase 1 (2016 - 2018) and 20M€ for phase 2 (2019 - 2021), in order to support the development of new generation thermal spa resorts. Regional ambition is to accelerate job creation (+2000 jobs in the next 5 years), and double up tourist numbers and turnover generated by thermal spa resorts.

The Regional Thermal Plan financially enables mature resorts which are ready to invest, encourages resorts (through studies) to mature their project around a common vision, federates every resort around collective actions.

The Regional Thermal Plan supports the thermal spa sector across the entire value chain.

The Regional Thermal Plan animates stakeholders' cohesion and a strong collaboration with regional operations (spa towns and resorts federation, cluster, IIMT...) is at the heart of the system.

We choose to address a new policy instrument instead of the original one (the Operational Program Feder - Axe 1)

We received an official answer of the FEDER office of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, explaining that it was impossible to influence this policy instrument coming to an end. As the policy instrument addressed cannot be influenced by "light" changes, such as an improvement in the monitoring or submission of projects, we decided to choose the option to influence another policy instrument already implemented and we decided to focus our work and action plan towards this objective. Our most important stakeholder, Emilie Peyronnet, in charge of the thermalism and health department at the Region travelled with our organisation to study visits and she proposed to us to choose a new policy instrument, the regional thermal plan which is a regional policy instrument.

The Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region launched the second phase of the regional thermal plan for 2019-2021. Priority is given to the thermal towns and operators which are not accompanied in the first phase of the regional thermal plan 2016-2018.

Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

ACTION 1: Climate therapy as a key component of the new generation thermal products



1. **The background** (please describe the lessons learnt from the project that constitute the basis for the development of the present Action Plan)

The concept of Medical SPA “Eglės sanatorija” located in two Lithuanian resorts visited during InnovaSPA cooperation – Birštonas and Druskininkai – is known for deep medical SPA traditional treatment and natural therapeutic factors – mineral water, therapeutic mud and climate therapy. Natural factors in the medical SPA “Eglės sanatorija” are combined with modern technologies and innovative medical equipment.

The medical SPA “Eglės sanatorija” in Birštonas, which is situated in the picturesque regional park at the loops of the Nemunas River, opened its door comparatively recently as the first residential complex and medical treatment centre was opened in 2013.

The medical SPA “Eglės sanatorija” in Birštonas presents a complex composed of four interconnected parts welcoming the guests of the medical SPA comfortably and without going out reach any place of the medical SPA including the health care centre, living rooms, canteen, etc. The medical SPA offers modern single, double or double joint rooms, lux class suites, rooms for disabled people, and rooms for people suffering from allergies with anti-allergic flooring. The rooftop is equipped with an especially popular sunbathing terrace. A total of 730 guests can stay at the medical SPA at one time.

The Medical SPA treatment is a treatment based on natural and reshaped factors, based on old traditions integrated into modern medicine, in order to ensure or restore good health, to prevent health problems. The Medical SPA treatment includes motion, walking, mineral water, massage and psychotherapy.

Medical SPA therapies in “Eglės sanatorija” are:

- Climate therapy: the use of a variety of climatic factors and localities for the treatment, the purpose is to restore the biological link between the organism and the external environment (sun, air temperature, humidity, wind). A person loses these connections without even feeling it, by living in “premises climate” or “climate underneath the clothing” conditions.
- Balneotherapy: the treatment with mineral water which, due to its special chemical composition and specific physical properties, positively affects body malfunctions, therefore, it is used for improving the immune system, treatment and rehabilitation.
- Pelotherapy: the treatment with fango-paraffin and therapeutic mud. They affect the body temperature by mechanical, chemical and biological stimulators stimulating skin receptors.



The policy change achieved thanks to InnovaSPA project concerns the environmental factor with inclusion of the climate therapy concept in the design of new generation preventive health products in the thermal environment. The concept of Medical Spa in Lithuania, a thermal resort with all the components of a preventative health destination available in a resort and based on 3 criteria: the balneology therapy, the mud therapy and the climate therapy, is the good practice that inspired the stakeholders of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region.

Historically the thermal resorts in France were Thermal and Climate resorts but in 2006 we lost the CLIMATE component by law. The former procedures for classifying resorts into "uval", "climatic", "hydromineral", "tourist", "seaside", "winter sports and mountaineering" categories had been created to encourage quality tourism development and recognise their driving force. Over the years, this classification of resorts into six categories had become unclear and the award procedures had become obsolete. By simplifying these procedures and unifying the system of classified tourist resorts, the new classification methods have given the municipalities a specific legal status and given the elected representatives the means to conduct a more coherent local development policy but at the same time, the thermal resorts lost the climatic aspect and specificity.

2. **Action** (please list and describe the actions to be implemented)

The fact that the environmental and climate factor has been reintroduced into the Regional Thermal Plan as key component of a preventative health product is a direct result of our study visit in Lithuania.

The place of environment and climate is now again identified as a major element of the strategy of the thermal spa resort of tomorrow in connection with the preventative health positioning. Our doctors believe that the spa setting is perfect for health prevention and, for example, physical activity will be more beneficial if it is carried out in a natural and preserved environment with a good climate.

The Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Thermal Plan invested 2 sides:

- Support thermal facilities' investment projects: renovation and expansion of the 24 thermal spas resorts of the region by launching 2 calls for projects (Phase 1 and Phase 2). A call has been launched for phase 1 (15 resorts selected) and another call for phase 2 (9 resorts) in order to co-finance the 24 spa resorts of the region.
- Support collective promotion, innovation and training actions: by co-financing collective actions and regional operators as regional tourism board for promotion, training and studies, the cluster for innovation, the regional interuniversity medical institute for training and definition of health prevention product and federation (Route des villes d'eaux du Massif central) for promotion.

The policy change was achieved when the setting up of an objectives book integrant part of the call for projects for phase 2. The launch of phase 2 has been done at the end of 2019 and the policy change achievement at the beginning of 2020 with the announcement of selected projects for the phase 2 in February 2020. This objectives book was part of the call for projects in order to push the beneficiaries to submit proposals in line with the related objectives.

The Region has chosen to make available to the resorts a set of objectives aimed at proposing as a set of ideas for the successful implementation of preventive health services in the thermal spa resorts. The objective of this book was to help resorts in aiming their goals to be reached (on the basis of a common ambition at the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes level), while keeping their own identity, DNA and respecting their stage of development.

The objective book ambition was to help each of the actors in their choices of investments, organisation and management at the resort level in order to make it a recognised prevention health tourist destination as a land conducive to health. All the components identified must come together to attract people to the looking for a better way of life, for a stay into an attractive environment with preserved nature and climate.

The objectives were also to share commitments, accepted by the actors of the thermal town, within the framework of the Resort Charter (this Resort charter model has been created by the Region and thermals actors).

The booklet of objectives was organised around 3 pillars: the health prevention product, the governance and marketing at the destination level and the setting of the resort.

- The health prevention product: construction of a product around 4 essential axes linked to nutrition, physical activities, the mind and the environment; and whose content will be determined according to the case of each person following a health prevention programme. Its content does not have to be uniform; indeed, it should not be the same for every resort. The implementation of the health prevention product requires in-depth work and training for dedicated health workers, and at least information for the resort's stakeholders.

- Governance and marketing: from the operational organisation of the players to share a common positioning at resort level, values around the health prevention product, its promotion and marketing, actions to professionalise the socio-professionals in the resort.

- The environmental framework of the resort where the proposed product can be used (Arrival - reception / Living and visiting environment / Services). Consideration at the regional level could be given to a form of certification or label in order to gain in legibility and credibility. The concrete implementation of this concept of tourist and thermal health prevention resort will be progressive, according to the current state of affairs of the resorts and the investments to be made to reach the general objectives fixed by the resort.

9 candidates have been selected during phase 2 of the regional thermal plan. The selected candidates are:

- Néris-les-Bains
- Bourbon l'Archambault
- Saint-Laurent-les-Bains
- La Léchère
- Vals-les-Bains
- Bride-les-Bains
- Vichy
- Châtel-Guyon
- Aix-les-Bains

Regular Steering Committees were and are planned by the MA in order to follow the development of the 9 selected projects

19.05.2020 thermal commission meeting and post-covid recovery plan

23.09.2020 Thermal meeting: progress of projects related to the RACI matrix

28.09.2020 Thermal meeting on the side-lines of the tourism summits.

07.06.2021 Steering Committee - report Thermal Plan phase 2 and online meeting with the AURA president

20.09.2021 Stakeholder's meetings - report Thermal Plan phase 2

Territorial Impact

Into the health prevention product pillar of the objectives book, for the construction of the product, the Region suggested to do it around 4 essential axis: nutrition, physical, mental and environmental activities. This new notion - environmental activities related to climate therapy as one of the 4 essential axes - ensures that the concept of climate therapy has been included into the process of new preventative health products creation and this has been done thanks to the good practice discovered during the study visit in Lithuania (where the Managing Authority was present) and in this regard is a direct improvement of the policy thanks to InnovaSPA cooperation.

3. **Players involved** (please indicate the organisations in the region who are involved in the development and implementation of the action and explain their role)

Thermauvergne association, as leadpartner of InnovaSPA project.

The Regional Council of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes as Managing Authority of the Regional Thermal Plan, the policy instrument targeted and stakeholder of InnovaSPA project.

Other regional stakeholders involved into the regional stakeholder's group of InnovaSPA project involved in the development and implementation of the action. The Interuniversity Regional Institute of Thermal Medicine in charge of the definition of future generation preventative health products in thermal environment. This study on going includes the climate therapy as key component of the new generation of preventive health products in the thermal environment. This action is financed by Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region in the framework of the phase 2 of the Regional Thermal Plan.

Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes tourism board worked on the positive impacts of the mountain for health in order to know if simple exposure to nature have scientifically proven benefits for human health. This study, financed by the Region Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes in the framework of the Regional Thermal Plan, showed that climate therapy is a benefice for human health.

4. **Timeframe**

For the monitoring of the projects proposals approved, the MA created a document called a Self-assessment chart for the thermal destinations concerned. This document allows the MA to visualize in a synthetic way the priorities of the resort and the maturity of the actions relative to the 3 parts of the thermal Plan: Health prevention, living environment and governance/marketing.

In the "living environment", environment characteristics are evaluated as listed below:

- Promotion of soft mobility: soft paths, shuttles, electric bikes, cycle tracks, etc.
- Accessibility of the resort to people with disabilities
- Enhancement of water within the resort
- Presence of planted areas and connection with open nature
- Thermal Park positioned as a reference point in the resort, both as the green lung of the resort and as a place for life and activities
- Commitment to the preservation of the environment: autonomous public lighting, rainwater recovery, etc

And each characteristic can be assessed as follow:

- Non-existent
- Under consideration
- Under implementation
- Achieved
- Priority
- Not a priority

This document is helpful for the follow up of the project's development.

The monitoring of the regional thermal plan is managed by the MA.

The monitoring of the policy change reported in the regional action plan is assumed by LP.

A stakeholders meeting, has been organised by LP with MA, on the 20 September 2021.

The European Thermal Meetings in Vichy on the 4th November 2021 have been the occasion, for AURA president, to make a presentation of the results of the Regional thermal Plan.

A study trip on thermalism in Auvergne Rhône-Alpes on the 06 & 07 December 2021 in Chatel-Guyon and Vals-les-Bains has been the occasion to present the results of InnovaSPA project to the regional thermal ecosystem.

Further meetings on the progress of the 9 projects funded under the regional thermal plan 2, in line with the RACI matrix defined at the beginning of the year, will take place in 2022.

5. **Costs** (if relevant)

For the phase 2 of the regional thermal plan (2019 - 2021), 20M€ have been invested by the region into 9 thermal resorts.

6. **Funding sources** (if relevant):

Through the policy instrument addressed, the Regional Thermal Plan.

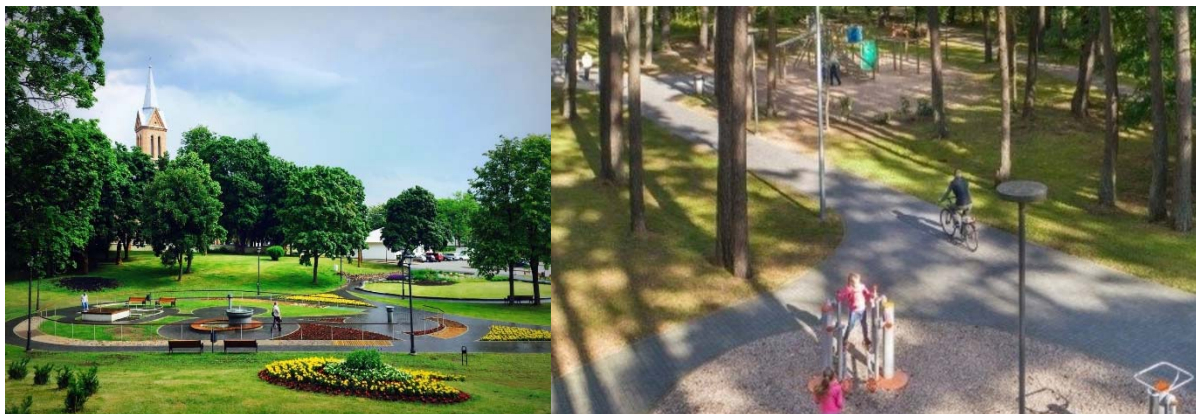
ACTION 2: The architectural nature-based signature

1. **The background** (please describe the lessons learnt from the project that constitute the basis for the development of the present Action Plan)

The concrete illustration of this thermal nature-based therapy has been discovered in Lithuania during the study visit in Birštonas in particular with the discovery of the Vytautas Jurgis Meška Park with the "Druskupis" open-air mineral water evaporation structure, the Kneipp Garden and the Mineral water pavilion "Birutės Villa" as part of the thermal therapy. These 3 architectural and nature-based therapeutic elements are the basement of the climate therapy in Birštonas.

Vytautas Jurgis Meška Park was created in a 25 hectares forest area. Nature helps to relax and soothes the mind like no other place, this is the reason why landscape and climate therapy is one of the methods used to improve emotional well-being in patients. Dr. Vytautas Jurgis Meška was a Lithuanian physician-resortologist, physiotherapist, rehabilitation physician, former president of the Lithuanian Scientific Society of Physiotherapists and Resortologists, president of S. Kneipp's Scientific Medicine Association of Lithuania, chair of the Municipal Council of Birštonas, and an honorary citizen of Birštonas. And the park bears his name.

The park is composed of 3 key nature-based therapeutic elements: the "Druskupis" open-air mineral water evaporation structure, the Kneipp Garden and the Mineral water pavilion "Birutės Villa".



"Druskupis" open-air mineral water evaporation structure

Druskupis is an open-air mineral water evaporation structure in Birštonas, which objective is to benefit from the healthy "sea effect" air. Resort residents and incoming city guests can try open-air inhalations, strengthen their health and harden their body with light therapy. This open-air mineral water evaporation tower-pavilion is an original architecture with a mineral water fountain and salt gallery. The mineral water flowing through the evaporator walls, exposed to sun and wind, evaporates in the tower itself and within 50-80 m enriched, "sea effect" air. The air enriched with drops of mineral water has the same effect as breathing in sea air, making you feel as if you are walking along the sea shore. The Druskupis evaporation tower is supplied with mineral water from a mineral water spring called Ruta. The "sea effect" air from the evaporator allows for a comprehensive combination of rehabilitation procedures at Birštonas Sanatoriums and natural remedies for

health, which will only further enhance the healing effect and help the sufferers to stand on their feet faster. Breathing in salt-saturated air is particularly beneficial for people with a variety of respiratory illnesses, and this type of air also benefits the skin by making it smoother, supple and brighter with the action of mineral water. Meditation by observing the tap water improves well-being and helps overcome nervous tension.

The water tower structure is based on the inhalation therapy. Technically the mineral water is led through the rare structures of the tree branches and then the mineral guide is released as slow raindrops (fountain principle) through these branches. The mineral water drips slowly and created a slow evaporating effect. Minerals in the water settle on the branches and some of these minerals evaporates in the air near the branches. People can inhale these evaporated minerals when walking or being near arranged branches. This is how minerals enter the respiratory tract, lungs, skin. It's like inhalation therapy in the open air.

This water tower structure has been designed as an architect-engineer and is adapted to the space, to the existing source and considering external operating conditions. This structure unique in Lithuania is the creation of an architect helped by the technical team avec le resort and town.



Kneipp Garden

"Water cures everything; water works wonders; prevention is better than cure" – this is the unique philosophy of health that German priest Sebastian Kneipp came up with and perfected in the 19th century, and which is promoted at the Birštonas resort. Wellness according to Sebastian Kneipp strengthens one's entire constitution, hardens the body and the soul, and bolsters the immune system. Sebastian Kneipp's holistic concept of improving health is based on five elements: water therapy, exercise therapy, plant therapy, balance therapy and nutrition. In line with Kneipp's recommendations, the city of Birštonas created a Kneipp Garden for cold water applications to harden the body and strengthen the immune system. The procedure are dedicated to the hands (the capillary blood in the hands is chilled; when it circulates into the body's blood flow, it activates the immune system processes), to the feet (by walking barefoot on various surfaces, the pressure points of the feet are pressed, and this is directly linked with the body's organs. The pressure of soft surfaces on these points is more uniform and even, thus activating the central nervous system – this has a soothing, relaxing effect. The pressure of sharper surfaces on these points varies, thus affecting the cardiovascular system and stimulating and activating the body), to the legs (the change in temperatures as well as the water and air improve and activate the immune system, the lymphatic system and venous circulation).



Mineral water pavilion "Birutės Villa"

The Mineral water pavilion "Birutės Villa" is a pavilion with a mineral water basin, a fountain and a mineral water vaporization wall. Visitors of the new wellness centre can improve their health by inhaling the air saturated with minerals, pampering their body and soul, doing a workout, practising yoga and drinking herbal tea. This recent pavilion is not meant for commercial use and charges no admission fee. "Birutės Villa" is an indoor pavilion and can be visited all year round. The pavilion can accommodate about 50 people at a time –

they can make themselves comfortable on the bunks or at the tables. This pavilion was built with the purpose of using the benefits of mineral water for health. It was given the name 'Birutés Villa' to highlight the cosy atmosphere of the wellness centre nestled in the unique natural environment of Birštonas.



2. **Action** (please list and describe the actions to be implemented)

The stakeholder's group of InnovaSPA project in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region found this nature-based experience very interesting and has the intention to use the Birštonas park planning example as a good practice in the design of new generation preventive health products in the thermal environment, new products with nature-based architectural elements as a concrete experience to be built into the thermal parks of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region.

The difficulty in France is the access to the thermal waters, because, considered as medicinal waters the access to the thermal waters is highly controlled and requires authorizations of the Health agency.

This action is about developing a new regional strategy for the next programming period in which a new generation nature-based planning of thermal parks will be investigated. The stakeholder's group of InnovaSPA project in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region found the open-air mineral water evaporation structure particularly interesting because this structure could be identified as the emblem of thermal resorts of the region as a signature.



3. **Players involved** (please indicate the organisations in the region who are involved in the development and implementation of the action and explain their role)

The Regional Council of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes as Managing Authority of the Regional Thermal Plan, the policy instrument targeted.

Thermauvergne association, as leadpartner of InnovaSPA project.

The Route des Villes d'Eaux du Massif Central, an Intercommunal Association for tourism and culture development that aims to make emerge a new thermal tourism sector. The Route des Villes d'Eaux du Massif Central, inspired by this idea of nature-based experience and looking for new generation nature-based thermal parks planning/architecture is currently working on a project proposal in order to push this new nature-based strategy for new generation of thermal resorts. This project proposal is under discussion with the region Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes for developing a 3 years project that will be co-financed by the Route des Villes d'Eaux

du Massif Central, the region Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and the Massif central convention with the idea to work with a school of architecture and the council for architecture, town planning and the environment in order to develop a new strategy based on the water staging, nature-based experience, new architectural elements as for example this open-air mineral water evaporation structure.

The link between Thermauvergne and the Route des Villes d'Eaux du Massif central associations: the same management and the same team which shares its working time between the 2 associations; but with 2 different strategies because Thermauvergne works on medial thermalism and health prevention and the Route des Villes d'Eaux du Massif central works on tourism, wellness, culture, heritage and architecture. Both associations are complementary.

4. Timeframe

A stakeholders meeting, has been organised by LP with MA, on the 20 September 2021. The European Thermal Meetings in Vichy on the 4th November 2021 have been the occasion, for AURA president, to make a presentation of the results of the Regional thermal Plan.

A study trip on thermalism in Auvergne Rhône-Alpes on the 06 & 07 December 2021 in Chatel-Guyon and Vals-les-Bains has been the occasion to present the results of InnovaSPA project to the regional thermal ecosystem.

The Route des Villes d'Eaux du Massif central is currently working on the organisation in February of a meeting with the Massif central representatives in region.

The project proposal will be submitted in March or April 2022 for an implementation from September 2022 to September 2025.

5. Costs (if relevant)

The project submitted by the Route des Villes d'Eaux du Massif central for 3 years will be around 400 000€ but for now we do not know how much will be dedicated to the nature-based development strategy and the work with the school of architecture for the creation of an open-air mineral water tower signature.

6. Funding sources (if relevant):

The project submitted by the Route des Villes d'Eaux du Massif central for 3 years will be around 400 000€ co-financed by the Massif central convention and the 4 related regions including the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region. For now, we do not know the amount coming from Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes policy 2021-2027. This question is currently under discussion with the Managing Authority.