

ZEROCO2 Impact: Policy change and other outputs of the Interreg Europe ZEROCO2 Project

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From 2016 to 2020, the [Interreg Europe ZEROCO2 project](#) defined Near Zero CO₂ Emission Buildings due to energy use (NZCO2EB). The European-funded project demonstrated the combination of different technologies and energy efficiency sources – in addition to presenting various financial methodologies in order to promote NZCO2EB in the partner regions of Slovenia, Greece, Italy, Finland, France and Malta – and these technologies could be used to achieve set carbon reduction targets to design tailored policies, which promote NZCO2EB at the local, regional, national and EU levels.

Due to the project's success, in 2021 consortium received additional EU Interreg Europe funds to continue its applauded work in increasing awareness of and sharing best practices in the realm of decarbonisation technologies for buildings. The extension of ZEROCO2 allowed the partnership and their stakeholders to take another stride forward toward decarbonisation and adopting net zero policies, addressing the EU Green Deal, by targeting policy instruments to optimise allocated recovery funds with a focus on deep renovation of public and residential buildings.

In Malta, the one-year project extension came at an unprecedented time, when the energy transition serves as the top priority at EU level and among stakeholders and citizens alike. The project has succeeded in amplifying the need for greater energy efficiency and renewable energy in the built environment. The feedback from the relevant policymakers has so far been very positive.

The University of Malta is proud to have looped in the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) responsible of setting local standards and transposing EN standards, to consider the setting up of a committee to discuss the setting up of a local standard on indoor air quality based on the EN standard and any particular local needs. Currently, architects and engineers lack clarity around this subject, given that there are different standards dealing with this issue e.g., the ASHRAE, REHVA, CIBSE and EN standards.



Although the addressed policy instrument (i.e., Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 Malta's Operational Programme) is coming to its end, the new Cohesion Policy was still not prepared by the time that this application for funding was made. Nevertheless, many of the aims of this policy have been extended and are actually included in the new cohesion policy. The progress made so far lies in streamlining the funding opportunities from The Cohesion Fund and the Recovery and Resilience Fund so that no duplication of projects is made. ZEROCO2 has succeeded in highlighting the priority areas within the building sector where support is to be given a priority, especially for social housing projects.

Furthermore, in the South Ostrobothnia region of Finland, ZEROCO2 project partner Thermopolis has strongly influenced their climate roadmap. The addressed policy instrument, which was adapted from



“The Regional Strategy of South Ostrobothnia” to “The Climate and Circular Economy Roadmap for South Ostrobothnia”, is straightforward in its measures, with one of its tasks being to inform operators in the region of the possible subsidies available.

As our partners at Thermopolis have realised, a concrete roadmap is easier to implement. Concreteness has been the goal of the South Ostrobothnia Union, but the ZEROCO2 project has enabled Thermopolis to assist the South Ostrobothnia Union to identify together concrete energy and building related tasks, which are outlined in the roadmap. The importance of good ventilation has been highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic and is specifically mentioned in the roadmap. The roadmap also highlights the ZEROCO2 project and the fact that buildings are a major source of carbon emissions in South Ostrobothnia.



The ZEROCO2 partnership at the Interregional Exchange of Experience & Good Practices Peer Review in June 2022 in Malta

In Crete, Greece, project partner MAICH has reported that ZEROCO2 activities have contributed significantly in the initiation of a national programme (in 2022) concerning the energy renovation of public buildings, called “ILEKTRA”. The total funds mobilised by this initiative are around € 1 billion, and each public building which undergoes energy renovation should reduce its CO₂ emissions by at least 30%.

Additionally, MAICH had identified two good practice examples that should be transferred to the region of Crete:

- a) Encouraging behavioural changes in households and micro SMEs proposed by Malta



- b) Energy book keeping in buildings proposed by ZEROCO2 partners in Slovenia; this is in line with the collection and monitoring of energy data in buildings in Crete before taking action for improving their energy behaviour. This good practice could be easily transferred to Greece as it fits with the region's needs and is low cost.

Meanwhile in Slovenia, the Local Energy Agency Spodnje Podravje (LEASP) has established an advisory group targeting different sectors in implementing energy efficiency and renewable energy (RES) measures. Additionally, a new call on co-financing of new ventilation systems for public buildings will be published in Spring 2023.

The SWOT analysis conducted in the additional year of the extended ZEROCO2 project for the Spodnje Podravje region of Slovenia clearly demonstrated the lack of capacity and knowledge of the public sector to reduce energy consumption or monitor the savings that were foreseen following energy renovations. Therefore, the good practice identified by the Finnish ZEROCO2 partner, Thermopolis, calling for a Regional Energy Council to implement the ZEROCO2 Action Plan in Slovenia with great success. The identified good practice and its success clearly exemplifies the necessity of bringing resources (i.e., available subsidies, application methodologies, etc.) closer to the "people". The Advisory Group in Slovenia is now at the early stage of rollout of the Energy Advisory Group, with the guidebooks having been developed and online workshops targeting the public sector currently being held. It is also planned (at the ministry level) to expand the support also to other sectors and establish regional offices that will provide energy consultation and support in the application for national funding.

Thanks to ZEROCO2 in Slovenia, the targeted instrument is being revised, and results of the SWOT have provided some concrete guidance on how to tackle the COVID-19 requirements (i.e., new EU Requirements) in future energy renovations of buildings. After the revision of the Energy Act (policy instrument), the Operational Programme 2021-2027 will allocate funding for the call, *Modernisation of existing ventilations or installation of new ventilations systems in public buildings*. The investments within this call must be in line with the revised Energy Act and new EU regulations.

Thanks to the ZEROCO2 project in the Molise region of Italy, the policymakers now better understand interventions they can promote and support concerning the energy efficiency of public buildings and systems (e.g., residential and non-residential): increase investments to improve the energy performance of residential public buildings and systems, to combat energy poverty and non-residential buildings with priority on energy-intensive buildings (e.g., schools, hospitals and cultural heritage) and in combination with seismic safety measures; Gross domestic electricity consumption: Reduction; Gross production of electricity from renewable sources as a percentage of gross internal consumption of electricity (Consumption of electricity covered by renewable sources). The targeted policy instrument in the Molise region through ZEROCO2 was the Regional Operational Programme ERDF-ESF of Molise 2014-2020).

In France, AVITEM had targeted the policy instrument of the Operational Programme ERDF-ESF PACA. The regional SWOT analysis conducted during the final year of the extended ZEROCO2 project allowed local stakeholders to gain an external and neutral point of view on their regulations and practices,



integrating the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. Some valuable recommendations came out of the process, some of the most interesting being:

- a) Specify more clearly the intentions concerning the renovation of housing for households eligible for ANAH aid
- b) Beyond the quantitative, focus on the qualitative by defining performance criteria for renovation operations at the BBC renovation or passive level that will have a real impact on the reduction of energy consumption and GHG
- c) Strengthen the synergies and communication between the different actors involved in the energy and environmental renovation of buildings
- d) Strengthen training actions for the building value chain
- e) Facilitate the positioning of bio-based products and systems in operations that must meet regulatory requirements by supporting the financing of evaluations and certifications

Although the project has officially come to a close, the impact of the Interreg Europe ZEROCO2 project lives on. ZEROCO2 shall continue to inspire exchange on the local, regional, national and EU levels, decoupling economic growth from the use of resources and supporting the shift towards decarbonisation, increased use of renewable energy sources and promotion of energy efficiency in Europe's building stock.



Project partners

1. Local Energy Agency Spodnje Podravje (LEASP) – Slovenia



2. Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAICH) – Greece



3. Molise Region – Italy



4. Thermopolis Ltd. – Finland



5. Agency for Sustainable Med Cities & Territories (AVITEM) – France



6. University of Malta – Malta



External expertise: European Institute for Innovation - Technology (Eifl-Tech) – Germany



European Union
European Regional
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