



Co-funded by
the European Union

(2021-1-IT03-KA220-YOU-000029198)

KA 220-YOU

Cooperation partnerships in youth

READ THE RIVER

European Research



TITLE

RIDE: Rivers of Ideas

PROJECT COORDINATION

RibellARCI APS

DOCUMENT COORDINATION

Društvo Bodi Svetloba

CONTRIBUTIONS

Robin Dewa, Joana Diniz, Joaquim Ramos Pinto, Spyros Koutsogiannis, Lucrezia Ferrà, Daniele Belmonte, Daniele Iervolino, Michela Castaldi.

DOCUMENT EDITING AND PRODUCTION

Društvo Bodi Svetloba

EDITION DATE

February 2024

FINANCING

Erasmus+ and European Union

DISCLAIMER

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. Project Reference No: 2021-1-IT03-KA220-YOU-000029198.

SUMMARY

1. **Executive summary**
2. **Introduction**
3. **Partners**
4. **Theoretical Underpinnings of the research**
5. **Research Methodology**
6. **Descriptive results**
 - 6.1. **Description of the Survey Sample**
 - 6.2. **Results of the preliminary interviews and focus groups**
7. **Main findings of the research**
8. **Conclusions and recommendations**
9. **References**
10. **Appendices**

Executive Summary

Erasmus Ka220 Youth project RIDE (River of IDEas) aims to promote knowledge and dissemination of best practices at local and European levels for the enhancement of rivers and local communities. The project aims to increase the competencies of young people to plan environmentally sustainable river recovery actions, to activate the local community and to open a channel of communication between young people and institutions.

In order to achieve these goals, the partners of the RIDE project have undertaken various steps based on the suitable methodologies for the project. These were conducted in all participating countries of the project, namely Italy, Greece, Portugal, Germany, and Slovenia. The use of the collection of data through desk research, interviews, and focus groups, among others, contributed to new ideas and solutions aimed at securing the engagement of young people for the protected creation and development of rivers.

This Read The River- European Research report based on the activities of the first phase of the project also serves as the basis for the second phase of the project with practical activities.



"Calore" River, Apice, Italy

Introduction

State of art about rivers in Europe

Rivers are an important part of the European Green Deal of the European Union and of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

Green Deal literally means green pact: a package of concrete measures - laws and investments - to be implemented over the next thirty years, always with 2050 as the time horizon. The objective? Set in motion what have been defined as “ambitious interventions to address climate change and environmental challenges, with the aim of limiting global warming to 1.5°C and avoiding massive loss of biodiversity.”

At the heart of the Green Deal we find climate neutrality. In fact, Europe aims to do its part in limiting the increase in global warming, becoming the first continent with zero climate impact by 2050. According to estimates by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and as established by the Agreements of Paris in 2015, it is necessary not to exceed the threshold of 1.5° C compared to the pre-industrial period in order to guarantee a future for the planet and the men who inhabit it. Added to this is another objective: to outline a strategy aimed at achieving decoupling, i.e. the decoupling of economic growth from carbon emissions.

To achieve these objectives, it is obviously necessary to adopt a holistic approach which, by setting intermediate targets, allows us to intervene on multiple fronts simultaneously, from industry to energy, from transport to sustainable finance and agriculture. In particular, among the goals to be achieved we find:

- Decarbonizing the production of electricity, a path that passes through the strengthening of the production of renewable energy, but also discouraging the use of fossil fuels;
- Another pillar of the road towards carbon neutrality involves the introduction of new rules for building and renovating homes and industries around Europe so as to make them more energy efficient. 40% of our energy consumption concerns buildings;
- Rethink mobility from a sustainable perspective, introducing new forms of private and public transport with less impact, cheaper and healthier, reducing the continent's polluting emissions;
- Supporting the industry on a green economy path is fundamental, as the European industry currently uses only 12% recycled materials;

- Promote biodiversity, protecting forests and animal species at risk of extinction.

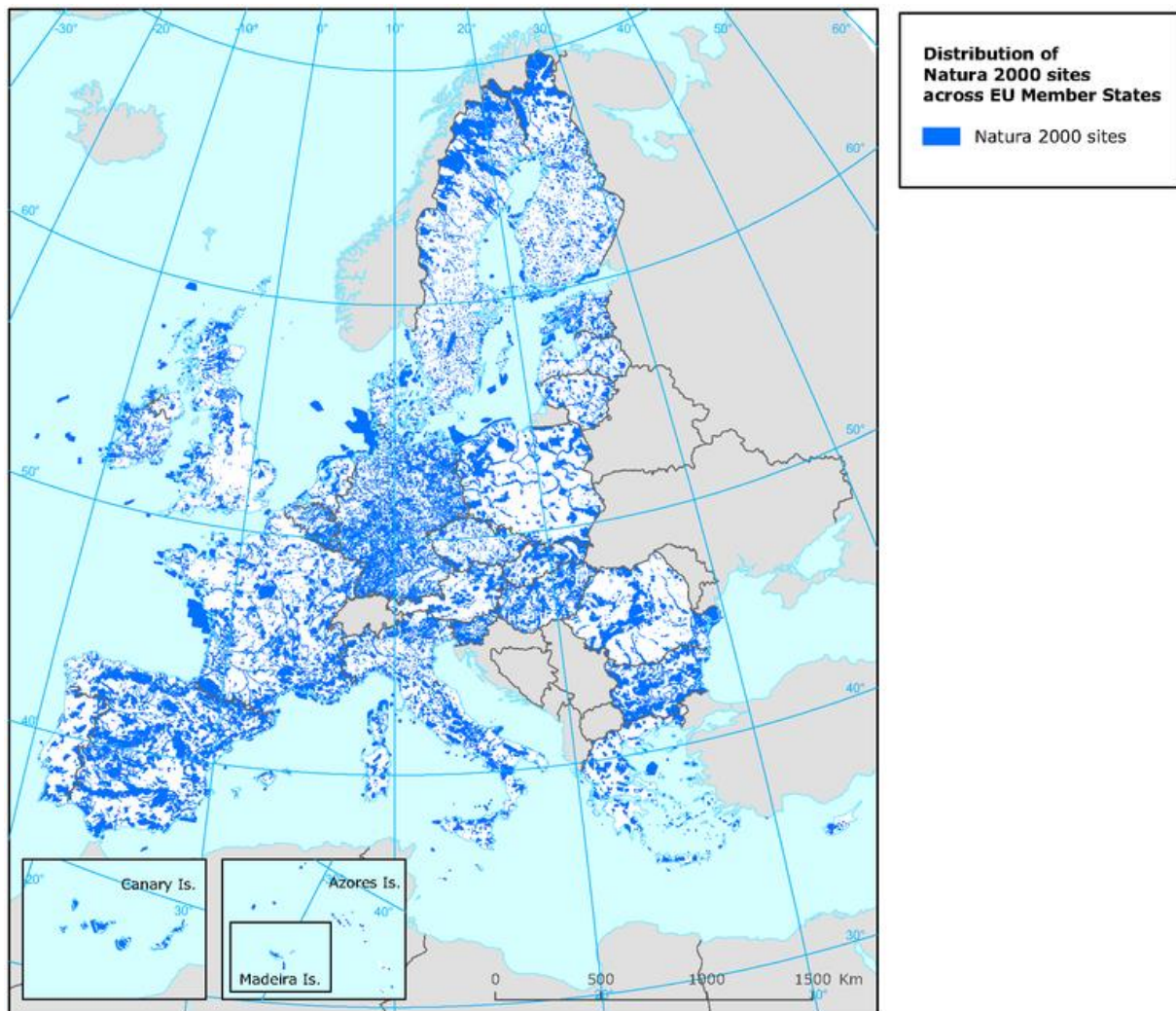
2	ZERO HUNGER	Many migratory fish require unobstructed rivers to complete their life cycles and have viable populations and millions of people around the world depend on these and other freshwater fish as their major source of protein.
6	CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION	Healthy and connected rivers recharge aquifers and build floodplains and wetlands, all of which contribute to delivery of sustainable water supplies. Protecting and restoring free-flowing rivers are essential for people and wildlife that depend on the services that they provide.
8	DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	Healthy rivers can provide opportunities for tourism that can create jobs and promote local culture.
11	SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	Healthy and connected rivers provide flood mitigation, decreasing the economic and human losses caused by water-related disasters. Free-flowing rivers are cultural and natural heritage and protecting them will directly contribute to this SDG.
12	RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	Healthy and connected rivers are crucial for sustainable water consumption, and also critical for sustainable tourism that promotes local culture.
13	CLIMATE ACTION	Healthy floodplains help reduce risks from floods and droughts, which are increasing in intensity and frequency as the climate changes. River flows carry sediments downstream to build up and maintain deltas. Without them, deltas will succumb to rising sea levels.
14	LIFE BELOW WATER	Healthy rivers provide habitat for anadromous fish and are a crucial part of coastal fisheries near estuarine ecosystems and depend on connectivity to thrive. Estuaries generally support a significant portion of “marine” catch.
15	LIFE ON LAND	Rivers with high connectivity are among the most ecologically important freshwater habitats, places where vulnerable species—including a myriad of migratory fish, river dolphins and terrestrial wildlife —can thrive.

The Sustainability Development Goals related with rivers.

Global and European milestones concerning rivers are as follows:

- 1) Earth Summit 1992 started Agenda 21, a plan of action to be used globally, nationally, and locally by organizations of the UN.
- 2) Framework for Community action in the field of water policy adopted in 2000, by the European Union and the Council of European Union, where water is assumed to be “a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such”, and sets directives to the Member States assume responsibility and take action in water protection. Article 8 mentions the importance of monitoring the volume and level of the flow of rivers as well as their ecological and chemical status while setting conditions for river basin management plans and the quality elements for the classification of ecological status for rivers (biological elements, hydro-morphological elements supporting the biological elements; river continuity; morphological conditions; chemical and physical elements supporting the biological elements; thermal, oxygenation and nutrient conditions, salinity and acidity; pollution, etc.).
- 3) From 2005-2015 the UN International Decade for Action “Water for Life” took place. The first World Rivers Day was celebrated in 2005 to focus on water ecosystems, raising awareness towards the increasing threats to rivers and their values, and encouraging people to take action for river protection.
- 4) In 2015, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted to be implemented by 2030. Considering rivers, SDG 6 mentions “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” by “...protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes” and “... introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems”
- 5) UNEP Mid-Term Strategy 2018-2021 was created after the 2030 Agenda. The previous analysis concludes that freshwater ecosystems are at risk, with loss of water quality and loss of biodiversity.

Considering Europe, the EU, national, regional, and local legal requirements concerning the river and the utilization of parts of the river are connected with several EU directives to be transformed into national laws such as EU Natura 2000.



The main legal requirements for rivers on the European level are as follows:

Directive 2000/60/EC: Framework for Community action in the field of water policy

Specify rules to prevent the deterioration of the status of water bodies in the European Union (Union) and to achieve 'the good status' of rivers, lakes, and groundwater in Europe by 2015.

In particular, this includes:

- protect all forms of water (surface*, groundwater*, inland* and transitional*);
- restoring ecosystems in and around these water bodies;
- reduce pollution in water bodies;

- ensure sustainable use of water by individuals and businesses.

The legislation delegates clear responsibilities to national authorities, which are obliged to:

- identify the individual river basins within their territory, i.e. the surrounding territorial areas that flow into specific river systems;
- designate the authorities that manage these basins in line with EU standards;
- analyze the characteristics of each river basin and establish reference conditions for each type of water body to qualify its status;
- analyze the impact of human activities and an economic assessment of water use;
- monitor water status in each basin;
- record protected areas, such as those used for drinking water, that require special attention;
- produce and implement 'river basin management plans to prevent the deterioration of surface water, protect and improve groundwater, and preserve protected areas;
- ensure that the cost of water services is recovered, so that resources are used efficiently and the polluter pays;
- provide information and allow public consultation of their river basin management plans.

The directive has been in force since 22 October 2000 and was to become law in the EU Member States by 22 December 2003.

Water is increasingly at the center of debates in the Union due to the ever-increasing demand for sufficient quantities of good quality water for a wide range of uses. This directive aims to protect and improve water quality.

EU Water Framework Directive: Integrated River Basin Management for Europe (European Commission).

Surface water: inland waters, except groundwater; transitional and coastal waters.

Groundwater: all water below the surface of the ground.

Inland waters: all surface waters, running or stagnant.

Transitional waters: waters near river mouths, which are partly saline in nature but contain substantial freshwater flows.

The main document is Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 which has established a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1).

Subsequent amendments to Directive 2000/60/EC have been incorporated into the original text. This consolidated version has documentary value only.

Directive 2006/118/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on the protection of groundwater against pollution and deterioration (OJ L 372, 27.12.2006, p. 19).

Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on the assessment and management of flood risks (OJ L 288, 6.11.2007, p. 27).

Directive 2008/105/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on environmental quality standards in the field of water policy, amending and subsequently repealing Council Directives 82/176/EEC, 83/513/EEC, 84/156/EEC, 84/491/EEC and 86/280/EEC, and amending Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 348, 24.12.2008, p. 84).

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions: Action Plan to Safeguard Europe's Aquatic Resources [COM(2012) 673 final of 14.11.2012].

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Water Framework Directive and Floods Directive: Actions in favour of the 'good status' of EU waters and the reduction of flood risks.

EU policy has established the main legal framework for the protection and management of our freshwater resources in an ecological system-based,

holistic approach, the Water Framework Directive (WFD). It aims to prevent and reduce pollution, promote sustainable water use, protect and improve the aquatic environment, and mitigate the effects of floods and droughts. The overall objective is to achieve good environmental status for all waters. Member States are therefore requested to draw up so-called River Basin Management Plans based on natural geographical river basins, as well as specific programs of measures to achieve the objectives.

The WFD is supported by more targeted directives, i.e. the Groundwater Directive, the Drinking Water Directive and the Bathing Water Directive, the Nitrates Directive, the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, the Environmental Quality Standards Directive, and the Floods Directive:

The directive on the protection of groundwater against pollution and deterioration provides specific criteria for the assessment of good chemical status, the identification of significant and sustained upward trends, and the definition of starting points for trend reversals. All threshold values for pollutants (with the exception of nitrates and pesticides, for which the limits are set by specific EU legislation) are set by the Member States.

The revised Drinking Water Directive of 2020 defines essential quality standards for water intended for human consumption. It requires Member States to regularly monitor the quality of water intended for human consumption by using a 'sampling points' method. Member States can include additional requirements specific to their territory but only if this leads to setting higher standards. The directive also requires the provision of regular information to consumers. Furthermore, the quality of drinking water has to be reported to the Commission every three years. The revised directive was proposed by the Commission on 1 February 2018, in response to the European Citizens' Initiative 'Right2Water', replacing the previous directive of 1998. The revised directive updated existing safety standards and improved access to safe drinking water along the lines of the latest recommendations of the World Health Organization. It furthermore increases transparency for consumers on the quality and supply of drinking water, thereby helping to reduce the number of plastic bottles through increased confidence in tap water. An EU-wide risk-based water safety assessment will help to identify and address possible risks to water sources already at the distribution level.

The Bathing Water Directive aims to enhance public health and environmental protection by laying down provisions for the monitoring and classification (in four categories) of bathing water and informing the public about it. During the bathing season, Member States have to take samples of bathing water and assess the concentration of at least two specific bacteria

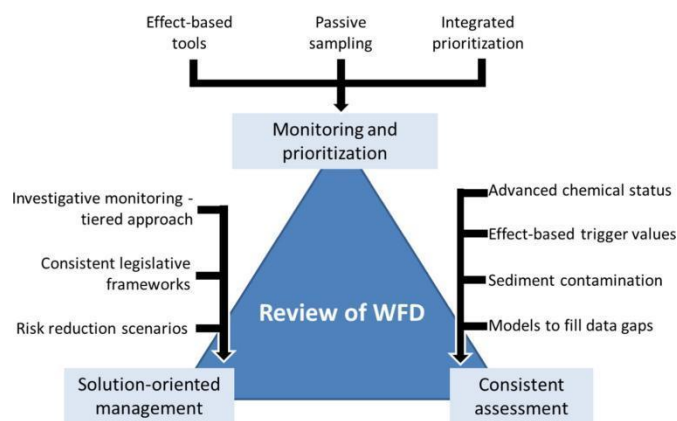
once a month at each bathing water site. They have to inform the public through 'bathing water profiles' containing for instance information on the kind of pollution and sources that affect the quality of the bathing water. There is a standard symbol for informing the public about the bathing water classification and any bathing prohibition. A summary report on the quality of bathing water is published annually by the Commission and the European Environment Agency (EEA).

The Environmental Quality Standard Directive establishes limits on concentrations of 33 priority substances presenting a significant risk to, or via, the aquatic environment at the EU level and eight other pollutants in surface waters. During a review, 12 new substances were added to the existing list and an obligation was introduced for the Commission to establish an additional list of substances to be monitored in all Member States (watch list) to support future reviews of the priority substances list.

The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive aims to protect the environment from the adverse effects of urban wastewater discharges and discharges from the industry. The directive sets minimum standards and timetables for the collection, treatment, and discharge of urban waste water, introduces controls on the disposal of sewage sludge, and requires the dumping of sewage sludge at sea to be phased out.

The Nitrates Directive aims to protect waters from nitrates from agricultural sources. A complementary regulation requires Member States to send a report to the Commission every four years, providing details of codes of good agricultural practice, designated nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZ), water monitoring, and a summary of action programs. Both the directive and the regulation aim to safeguard drinking water and prevent damage from eutrophication. In May 2018, the Commission published the implementation report, in which it stressed that water pollution caused by nitrates from agriculture has decreased in Europe in the last two decades, but worrying hot spots remain and need stronger action.

The EU Floods Directive aims to reduce and manage the risks posed by floods to human health, the environment, infrastructure, and property. It requires Member States to carry out preliminary assessments to identify the river basins and associated coastal areas at risk and then prepare flood risk maps and management plans focused on prevention, protection, and preparedness. All of these tasks are to be carried out in accordance with the WFD and the river basin management plans set out therein.



"Towards the review of the European Union Water Framework Directive: Recommendations for more efficient assessment and management of chemical contamination in European surface water resources"

Rivers are protected differently across the EU. All European Directives establish a common framework for Member States to manage their territories, although laws and protective measures are implemented differently across the EU. Here, we outline the distinct actions taken by the five countries involved in the project. Greece has 202 areas registered as Special Protection Areas (SPA) and 241 as Sites of Community Importance (SCI). These 443 zones form the Greek part of Natura 2000 and cover, roughly, 19% of Greece. Their registration was finalized in 2010-2011.

The harmonization of Greek legislation with the Community Framework Directive 2000/60 / EC was conducted with Law 3199/2003 (Government Gazette 280 A/09.12.2003) and the Presidential Decree 51/2007 (Government Gazette 54/A/08.03.2007). The provisions of the above national legislation incorporate the basic concepts of the Water Resources Directive and, at the same time, the new administrative structure is established, as well as the responsibilities of the individual parties.

The main priority of the Special Secretariat for Water is to draw up the River Basin Management Plans of the country's 14 River Basin Districts in accordance with community and national legislation. The River Basins and the River Basin Districts have been designated by the Decision of the National Water Committee of 16.07.2010.

In Italy, the main national water legislation from 1999 until April 2006 was Legislative Decree No. 152/99, which transposes European Directives

91/271/EEC concerning urban wastewater treatment and 91/676/EEC concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources. In order to protect and restore surface water and groundwater, the decree identifies environmental quality objectives for significant water bodies and quality objectives by specific destination, indicating the methodology for attributing the ecological and environmental status of all water bodies. On 3 April 2006, Legislative Decree No. 152 'Environmental Regulations' was issued, representing a single code for the protection of the environment and repealing previous water regulations. Part Three Section II deals specifically with the Protection of Waters from Pollution and Annex 1 identifies the criteria for establishing the ecological status of each. Ecological status is defined as a function of biological quality elements (phytoplankton, macrophytes and phytobenthos, benthic macroinvertebrates and fish fauna), hydromorphological elements (hydrological regime and morphological conditions) and elements of basic physical-chemical quality. In DLgs 152/06, the methodology of DLgs 152/99, which made it possible to assign a score to the chemical and biological status, which in turn classified the water bodies, has not been resumed. It was necessary to wait for the publication of the Part III Implementing Decrees in order to start monitoring under the WFD. Since 2008, there has been the progressive publication of the Implementing Decrees, thus allowing the completion of the regulatory framework of reference, in particular:

- Ministerial Decree no. 131 of 16 June 2008 containing provisions relating to the technical criteria for the characterization of water bodies (typification, identification of water bodies, pressure analysis);
- Legislative Decree no. 30 of 16 March 2009 implementing Directive 2006/118/EC containing the criteria for the identification of groundwater bodies, delimitation, characterization, and monitoring methods for the classification of the status of water bodies

- Ministerial Decree no. 56 of 14 April 2009 containing the technical criteria for the monitoring of water bodies and the identification of reference conditions;

- Ministerial Decree no. 260 of 8 November 2010 containing the technical criteria for the classification of the status of water bodies. On the other hand, the objectives by specific destination remain unchanged with regard to waters suitable for the life of cyprinid and salmonid fish and waters suitable

for the life of mollusks; Annex 2 Part Three takes up, without substantial changes, the criteria for classification present in Legislative Decree 152/99. The environmental quality objectives in the new decree have remained substantially unchanged with respect to DLgs 152/99, and we speak of achieving the environmental quality status corresponding to 'good' by 22/12/2015 and no longer 2016.

This work aims to draw up the Province of Benevento's Fish Management Plan. It was conducted in accordance with the new assessment criteria required by the EU Directive 2000/60/EC. It is the result of studies carried out on fish fauna and river systems and intends to propose a series of actions aimed at water protection through the planning of a new monitoring network. Methodologically, the complexity of the investigations required a preliminary phase of data collection, processing, and drafting, followed by a field survey activity with the aid of appropriate instrumentation. From the study of the characteristics of each stretch of water, the documentation drawn up will be able to indicate the integrated management plan of the fish species present in the provincial waters, aimed at identifying the areas of greatest ichthio faunal importance, the aquatic environments of greatest naturalistic value and finally provide the main programmatic lines for the management of fishing activity and the protection of fish stocks. This type of work therefore stems from the need to support fishing management practices with appropriate knowledge and skills and to provide an overall guideline for the conservation of the remaining available ichthio faunal resources. The present condition of our waters is in fact strongly modified compared to the recent past: economic needs and, at times, incorrect land management planning have affected the natural quality of hydrographic basins, heavily transforming the original ecological characteristics of rivers. In general, pollution from discharges of agricultural and urban origin, water withdrawals for hydroelectric, drinking, and irrigation purposes, embankments, and morphological modifications of riverbeds and banks, have decreased the quality level of aquatic environments, consequently also affecting the quantity and quality of the fish stocks originally present. However, these practices have also favored the onset of complex phenomena of transformation of aquatic biocoenosis, often causing negative effects on native and endemic species to the point of determining in some cases the extinction of entire populations. A further source of modification on the

structure of fish populations brought about by man is obviously directly linked to fishing activities and re-population works.

The practice of river contracts was introduced in France and Belgium as early as the early 1980s and has also spread significantly in Italy where national law has recognized river contracts in the 'environmental code' as voluntary participatory instruments contributing to the implementation of the water and flood directives. Other regions of the world have also seen applications of this instrument or other similar participatory methods for the integrated management of water resources.

The application of river contracts for the management of water and surrounding territories with the involvement of stakeholders provides an opportunity to greatly assist the implementation of climate change adaptation strategies and plans at the regional and local levels.

One of the most interesting features is the "structural" involvement in the contract idea of different categories of actors that actually realize a public-private partnership (PPP): non-state public bodies, private sector, and civil society potentially able to implement the local and individual measures that are at the basis of building resilient territories.

River contracts are able to promote growth in awareness of the value of environmental assets and their importance for the quality of human life and thus stimulate individual action in sectors -such as hydraulic safety- where traditionally responsibility has been exclusively delegated to the public sector.

In some institutional contexts, such as the Italian one, river contracts have found a precise regulation, in fact, in addition to their definition, reported in the Environmental Code (Article 68 bis), basic requirements have been established, elaborated by the Ministry of the Environment together with ISPRA and the National Table of River Contracts (2015).

In 2017, the Ministry of the Environment established the National Observatory of River Contracts, within the CREIAMO PA Project, a central structure of direction and coordination that responds to the need to harmonize the implementation of River Contracts on local, regional, and national scales.

The River Contracts (CdF) are voluntary instruments of strategic and negotiated planning that pursue the protection, the correct management of water resources, and the valorization of river territories together with the safeguard from hydraulic risk, contributing to local development.

The subjects adhering to the CoF define a shared Action Programme (PA) and commit themselves to implement it through the signature of an agreement.

River contracts contribute to the pursuit of the objectives of environmental legislation, with particular reference to Directive 2000/60/EC (Water Framework Directive), which provides for the achievement of the 'good status' of water bodies, its daughter directives, together with Directive 2007/60/EC (Floods Directive), and Directives 42/93/EEC (Habitats Directive) and 2008/56/EC (Marine Strategy Framework Directive), as a useful tool for the prevention and reduction of pollution, the sustainable use of water, the protection of the environment and aquatic ecosystems; the mitigation of the effects of drought flooding as well as for the coordination and coherence of the actions and interventions foreseen for the implementation of the above-mentioned directives.

The River Contract, in short, is a legal protocol for the environmental regeneration of the catchment area of a watercourse; it allows the adoption of a system of rules whose criteria of public utility, economic performance, social value, and environmental sustainability intervene in an equal manner in the search for effective solutions for the regeneration of a river basin.

In Germany, there is the “Wasserhaushaltsgesetz” WHG (31.07.2009) which governs the use of rivers at the national level. The Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety, and Consumer Protection, aims to regulate the sustainable economical use of water to keep natural balance in place, needed to sustain human life, and that of plants and animals, but also to manage and protect water as a usable good. The WHG sets guidelines in which state laws can slightly vary. The “Wassergesetz für Baden-Württemberg” in its newest form (28.11.2018) governs the use and conservation of water in the southwest of Germany.

Germany has, according to the Ministry of Environment, devoted itself to reaching Goal 6 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. “Clean Water and Sanitation” but according to the Paper “Water Economy in Germany” (2017) released by the Ministry, the goal is only partly met and some points are more pressing. For example Point 6.6 states “By

2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes”. This Goal is surely not met and implemented, as the same paper explicitly says that the chemical condition of German surface waters is bad.

In Portugal, there is the National Water Law (Lei da Água) which establishes the legal framework for water management, including rivers and riverine water, and also the River Basin Management Plans, as required by the WFD. The entity responsible to oversee the water management and the implementation of water policies is the Portuguese Environment Agency (APA), and the regional hydrographic administrations (ARH). All the uses of the river water, such as irrigation, industrial use, or hydropower generation, requires a water use license by the ARH. The ARH is divided by the regions: North, Center, Tejo and West, Alentejo and Algarve. At the local level, there are communal commissions, associations and private companies involved in the management and distribution of water from rivers for agricultural and other activities. These national entities answer all to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Action, which has the conservation and restoration of river ecosystems as a pillar for the actions, plans and projects approved.

Overall, Portuguese law and management of rivers and riverine water aim to ensure the sustainable use and conservation of these valuable natural resources while complying with European directives and international agreements.

In Slovenia, rivers are under the area of the Ministry of Environment in Slovenia. They are regulated by the EU Water Law as well as within Natura 2000. Considering the latter, Slovenia has the highest percentage of the territory in the EU protected under Natura 2000- almost 40% of the total territory. Local, and municipal planning have to take into consideration both European and national guidelines. It is not allowed to build along rivers. The former Slovenian Government's intention to modify the Water Act was met with public opposition and resulted in a referendum where amendments to the Water Act were refused in 2021.

Due to rivers' bad health in the EU, on June 22, 2022, the European Commission introduced the EU Nature Restoration Law, which would require EU member states to revive forests, wetlands, and sea and river landscapes marred by human development.



Reconnecting freshwater ecosystems is the first requirement to bring back the natural functions of rivers, lakes, and wetlands across our continent. Free-flowing rivers are healthy and biodiverse, provide a clean and sufficient water supply, and adapt to the consequences of increasingly frequent climate change-related episodes, like droughts or floods. Practical measures and financial support to ensure an efficient implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Law are urgently needed.

The EU Nature Restoration Law sets targets for the restoration of freshwater ecosystems alongside coastal and terrestrial ones, which include the restoration and re-establishment of areas, the restoration of habitats of species, and the non-deterioration of the areas after restoration. It also sets obligations to remove river barriers in order to improve the natural longitudinal and lateral connectivity of rivers and contribute to the EU objective of restoring at least 25,000 km of free-flowing rivers by 2030. Those targets complement the obligations of the Water Framework Directive and the Nature Directives and will contribute to improving the ecological status and the biological diversity of rivers, lakes, and wetlands.

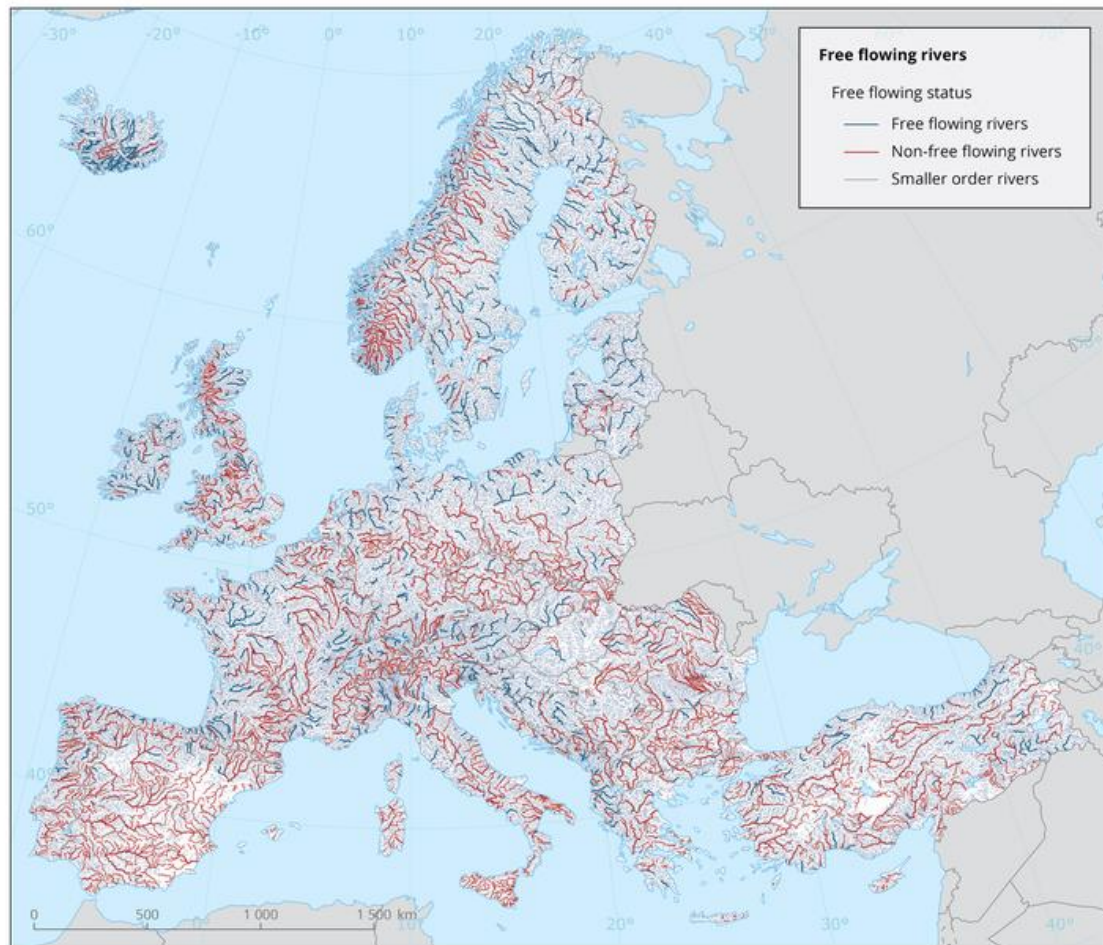
Restoring the connectivity of European rivers and the natural functions of their related floodplains has many benefits for nature and for society in general:

- Free-flowing rivers support biodiverse aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. They ensure nutrient balance, sediment transport, and ecological flows that are necessary for rivers, floodplains, lakes, and wetlands to thrive, directly and indirectly contributing to human well-being as well.
- Free-flowing rivers help protect and restore threatened species, in particular, migratory fish which are able to safely reach their spawning and feeding grounds. Freshwater migratory fish populations have declined by 93% in Europe within the last 50 years. In Europe, all 8 sturgeon species are endangered and the latest update of the IUCN Red List declared the ship sturgeon extinct in the Danube, with the excessive fragmentation of rivers as one of the main causes.
- Restoring free-flowing rivers supports the achievement of many pieces of existing EU legislation or action plans, such as: reaching favourable conservation status for specific habitat types and species of interest under the Birds & Habitats Directive; achieving good ecological status under the Water Framework Directive; achieving the objectives of the Eel Regulation and of the Pan-European Action Plan for Sturgeons.
- In addition, removing river barriers can help improve water quality as it avoids nutrient loading and eutrophication processes in reservoirs or backwaters.
- Free-flowing rivers help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Reservoirs in dammed rivers emit considerable amounts of methane, even in European latitudes, as a result of mud formation. Also, removing lateral barriers to reconnect floodplains to the river sustains wetlands which, when properly managed, store significant amounts of carbon.
- Free-flowing rivers help alleviate the increase in water temperatures, which has deadly consequences for many fish species.
- Rivers that are free-flowing until the sea help protect against storm surges and rising sea levels, as they can carry sediments downstream that replenish deltas and estuaries.
- Free-flowing rivers and reactivation of floodplains improve the water supply of ground waters and soil and contribute to reducing water scarcity

risks. Indeed, having rivers with sufficient flow levels, and which are able to overflow, improves the conditions of habitats and agricultural lands, provides a natural way of water retention, and can ultimately replenish aquifers. In addition, it reduces irrigation demands, which have costly development and maintenance costs, and includes the risk of overusing the water resources.

- Free-flowing rivers reduce the risks of flooding. Indeed, measures to restore the natural functions of floodplains, such as removing or relocating lateral river barriers such as dykes, and/or re-meandering channelized rivers, allow the river to overflow and create “sponges”, which can absorb excess water in case of flooding.
- Restoring floodplains can avoid millions of euros of flood damage, and is often less costly than having to fix embankments destroyed by flooding events.
- Removing dams can avoid significant maintenance costs, and create short and long-term jobs. Dam removals are much less expensive than repair and maintenance over many years.
- Free-flowing rivers provide opportunities for tourism and recreation and support the maintenance and preservation of other valuable ecosystem services such as drinking water purification and regulation of heat waves. Free-flowing rivers allow citizens to access the river. Studies conducted in Austria on the Mur/Mura River showed that free-flowing river sections have more recreational value than dammed sections.

The high density of barriers in European rivers means that migratory fish species have to go through many obstacles before reaching their spawning grounds - with mortality rates getting higher at each passage. Adapting river barriers with fish protection and guidance facilities might reduce fish mortality rates but not avoid overall impacts on fish. High-technology fish protection and guidance facilities also come at a substantial cost which should be balanced with the ecological benefits they provide. For barriers which are not to be removed, fish protection and guidance are the best possible option, worth the cost although fully free-flowing segments are the most cost-effective option to deliver better connectivity for fish at a basin level. On the positive side, dam removal has been gaining momentum in Europe with 239 dams removed across Europe in 2021 alone.



Map of EU free-flowing rivers <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/free-flowing-rivers-in-europe>

YOUTH DISCUSSION

There are different youth laws and policies in participating countries.

In Slovenia, youth policy is well established as the Act on Public Interest in the Youth Sector, as a “harmonized set of measures of various public policies with the purpose of promoting and facilitating the integration of youth in the economic, cultural and political life of the community and appropriate

support mechanisms for developing youth work and operation of youth organizations, which is carried out in cooperation with autonomous and democratic representatives of youth organizations and professional and other organizations”.

The measures to implement youth policy are taken by the state or local communities. In principle, youth policy is part of other sector policies (e.g. education, health, employment) and therefore falls within the competence of different Ministries, e.g. the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Culture, etc). Consequently, the implementation of youth policy is not linked to a single institution. The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth is identified as the public authority responsible for the youth field. The Office for Youth mainly focuses on promoting youth work, coordinating measures within youth policy, and ensuring adequate social dialogue with young people. Youth Office has been co-funding youth work programs since its beginnings.

Several pieces of legislation regulate the youth field. The Act on Public Interest in the Youth Sector which entered into force in 2010, may be considered as the most comprehensive and binding official document that addresses the needs and/or rights of young people and stipulates how youth issues should be addressed.

The Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013–2022 was adopted in 2013 for the period 2013–2022. It serves as an overarching strategic public document or action plan that integrates the major directions to be followed in policy-making on youth matters at the national level. Measures of the National program for youth cover the following fields: education, employment and entrepreneurship, housing, health and well-being, the social position of youth, the development of the youth sector, culture and creativity, heritage, and media.

Among forms of participation, young people in Slovenia most commonly participate in voluntary activities (35.7%), which represent a central mechanism of social inclusion of young people. Slovenian youth are most frequently members of organizations in the fields of sports, recreation, and culture, while their membership in political parties is considerably lower. Young people in Slovenia feel they have very little political influence, and in comparison with the EU average tend to be much less interested or involved in politics.

The Students Association Act, which was adopted by the Slovenian National Assembly in 1994, ensures in Article 6 the participation of the

representatives of student organizations in all matters relating to the interest of students on national and local levels. The Students Association Act was also the legal basis for the government's decision to establish a Government Council for Students Affairs.

The Youth Councils Act provides opportunities for the participation of young people in adopting statutory and other regulations that have an impact on the life and work of young people.

The **Council of the Government for Youth** is a consultative body for youth-related issues at the national level. As an expert advisory body of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, it provides assistance in decision-making processes that cover student issues. Young people can also be consulted at the local level, as some municipalities have a special body (e.g., committee or commission) for Youth, wherein young people are involved and can participate. The Council of the Government for Youth adopts positions or decisions by order of the agenda. A decision is adopted if it secures the votes of a majority of the members from the representatives of youth organizations and associations, and the majority of the representatives from the Government. The Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth meets at least quarterly, with meetings convened and chaired by the President of the Council.

Young people are also officially consulted at the **Council of the Government for Student Affairs** (national level). The Council for Student Affairs discusses and offers opinions on the material relating to the establishment and implementation of policies related to student issues.

The Council of the Government for Student Affairs also adopts positions or decisions by order of the agenda. The decision is adopted if a majority of the members present vote for it. The Council of the Government for Student Affairs usually meets every month, or at least once every two months.

The Office of Youth has introduced the following instruments:

- 1) Administrative support for the Government Council for Youth, including prior preparation of the Public Interest in Youth Sector Act, which defined the legal basis for its functioning.
- 2) Introducing the Mlad.si Portal, which is a website for encouraging members of the youth sector to participate in the shaping of youth policy.
- 3) A yearly contract with the Youth Council of Slovenia to implement the structured dialogue processes on national, regional, and local levels.

- 4) Regional consultations with local key actors in youth policy-making, including young people, youth organizations, youth centers, and decision-makers from local and national levels.

The main actor of the structured dialogue in Slovenia is the Youth Council of Slovenia. With financial support from the Office for Youth, the Youth Council of Slovenia uses various methods for consultation with young people, namely:

- local consultations/workshops with young people on a relevant topic held in different cities across Slovenia. The conclusions of these local consultations serve as a basis for the development of further activities on the national level
- a national conference, where young people, along with professionals from different areas of expertise, discuss topics and conclusions from the local consultations, and at which a final document that is usually presented at the European youth conference, and which presents a resolution about a discussed issue, is formed

Within the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, representatives of the following youth organizations defend the youth's interests:

- National youth organizations
- National Youth Council of Slovenia
- Slovenian Student Union
- Secondary-School Student Organization of Slovenia
- youth organizations in the representative trade unions
- youth centers
- the local community youth councils, and
- other NGOs active in the youth field.

Within the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Student Affairs, representatives of the following actors defend the interests of students and youth:

- Slovenian Student Union
- Student Council of the University of Ljubljana
- Student Council of the University of Maribor
- Student Council of the University of Primorska, and
- Student Council of the University of Nova Gorica.

The national preparatory process for the implementation of the structured dialogue at the EU level is led by the Youth Council of Slovenia. The National Steering Committee guides the process.

The Committee is composed of representatives of the following youth actors: the Youth Council of Slovenia and the Network MaMa.

There is no distinct provision for specific target groups. However, the Resolution of the National Programme for Youth 2013–2022 underlines the need to increase political and social participation among youth with fewer opportunities.

For the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Student Affairs, the target group is students.

The Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth set up four different working groups to discuss the most relevant topics for the development of youth policy in Slovenia. Key public authorities, represented in those working groups are:

- the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth (that provides organizational and administrative tasks for the Council)
- the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport
- the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
- the Ministry of Interior
- the Ministry of Public Administration
- the Ministry of Justice, and
- the Ministry of Finance.

Within the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Student Affairs, the following public actors have their representatives:

- the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport
- the Ministry of Culture
- the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
- the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, the Ministry of Health
- the Ministry of Finance
- the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning
- the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology
- the Ministry of Infrastructure, and
- the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth.

Within the process of the **structured dialogue**, the National Steering Committee that guides the process is composed of the following public actors:

- the National Agency of the program Erasmus+: Youth in Action
- the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth
- the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, and
- the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

Besides an extensive list of relevant governmental and non-governmental actors that participate in listed national consultation processes, youth organizations acting at the local level demonstrate relevance in the policy-making process at the level of municipalities. In accordance with the Youth Council Act, the local community youth councils provide opportunities for participation in making policies that have an impact on the life and work of young people. However, local community youth councils have been set up only in a few local settings.

The extent of youth participation in policy-making processes is not measured separately. On the basis of the minutes of the meetings, participation levels can be established in the meetings of the Council of the Government for Youth. The content of each meeting is summarized in the news section on the mlad.si web page. and the Council of the Government for Student Affairs. The minutes can be found on the Council's web page.

An example of good practice for structured dialogue is an open, transparent, long-term, continuous, and systematic dialogue between youth and decision-makers at the national and local levels in the youth sector. The Youth Council of Slovenia strives to open a space for discussion and exchange of views between young people and decision-makers on local, national, and European issues that concern young people, and to establish cooperation between young people, youth organizations, and decision-makers in developing common youth policies in Slovenia.

The following outcomes may be identified for the three main consultation processes:

The Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth

Summaries of the meetings of the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth are available on the mlad.si web page. The summaries provide information on concrete initiatives proposed by young people. Based on the minutes and summaries of the meetings, the role of youth in particular is to:

- present proposals (simplification of initiatives from young people to decision-makers, introduction of age-based quotas, promotion of dialogue)
- present the responsibility of the work of ministries in the field of youth

- listen to reports on the implementation of programs by the national authorities
- get information about the preparation of amendments to laws concerning youth in Slovenia.

The Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Student Affairs

Minutes of the meetings of the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Student Affairs are available on the web pages of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. Based on the minutes of the meetings, the role of youth in the Council is to:

- propose a review of activities in the policy areas that are of interest to students
- propose amendments to legislation in favor of greater rights for students (e.g., that a student who graduates retains the right of student status until the end of the academic year)
- suggest debate on all matters relating to students
- hear reporting on the implementation of policies relating to students.

Structured dialogue

The National Youth Council of Slovenia has also established a web-based platform that allows young people to become actively involved in decision-making processes. In cooperation with other actors from the youth sector, the Youth Council of Slovenia organized a number of events of structured dialogue in Slovenia. As a result, a national website available for encouraging consultations among young people and public authorities has been set up.

Mlad. si is a youth information and communication system. The portal is intended for gathering relevant information for the youth sector and presenting it in one place. These include initiatives and proposals for youth policy-making. It was developed by the Office for Youth to strengthen the supportive environment by providing information. The editorial policy is determined by the Office for Youth and Youth Network MaMa; the monitoring and editorial committees are inter-sector, and the proposals are also drafted and approved by the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth.

For example, concrete results of the structured dialogue in the period 2010–2015 were:

- More than 1 thousand young people and at least 100 decision-makers were involved in the projects involving consultations among young people and decision-makers
- Young people's 104 initiatives for the local level and 12 opinions for the national level about necessary measures were presented to respective decision-makers. Among others, the initiative 'First Challenge', which aimed to provide jobs for unemployed young people, was initiated by young people and implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities
- The foundations for a continued dialogue between young people and decision-makers on the local level were established
- The Youth Council of Slovenia has been recognized by decision-makers from the national and local levels as a competent dialogue partner.

Another important result is a set of programmatic documents from the National Youth Council of Slovenia. They are 'umbrella' documents that identify the key issues in young people's participation in decision-making processes. In 2011, the National Youth Council issued a policy paper: 'Youth Participation'. The purpose of the policy paper was to define the term 'youth participation' and its areas, to determine its meaning, to lay out problems, and to propose measures that can improve youth participation and the conditions needed for it. In the document, the National Youth Council appealed to all Ministries to work in the youth field, so as to provide youth participation in the decision-making processes. In addition, the Ministries could have various possibilities, e.g., to regularly include youth representatives in their departments in which the preparation of regulation is taking place

In addition to the already explained structured dialogue that serves as an open, transparent, long-term, continuous, and systematic dialogue between the youth and decision-makers at national and local levels in the youth sector, the following large-scale dialogues have also taken place.

In Italy, According to Article 31 of the Constitution, the Republic protects young people 'by promoting the necessary institutions for this purpose'. According to Article 117 of the Constitution, youth issues are governed by concurrent legislation. Therefore, legislative power over youth policy matters is attributed both to the central government and to the regions and autonomous provinces; the determination of fundamental principles is instead reserved for State law.

At national level, a framework law on youth has not yet been approved. Of the 20 Italian Regions, 16 have adopted legislation on youth policies in compliance with the constraints imposed by the Constitution, current European and international legislation and the national youth strategy. Therefore, at present, Italian youth policies are based on a bottom-up approach, which is a peculiar feature of Italian youth legislation.

In Campania, youth policies are governed by Regional Law No. 26 of 8 August 2016:

The Region within the scope of its competences and in compliance with the European recommendations, contained in the European Commission's White Paper (A New Impetus for European Youth) and the European Charter for the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life, as well as with the relevant national legislation in force:

- a) recognises young people as an asset of the territory and as a fundamental and essential resource of the community;
- b) encourages mutually beneficial relations both within the world of youth and externally with that of adults;
- c) pursues the well-being and full development of young people living in the area and their families in order to foster social cohesion and the cultural and economic growth of the community
- d) promotes policies and guidelines that enhance young people and support their personal and professional growth, autonomy and culture of merit
- e) it promotes socio-cultural exchanges in compliance with international and community standards and programmes
- f) promotes the Euro-Mediterranean belonging of the young generations; g) recognises, moreover, the development of young people's protagonism and active citizenship, as a contribution to the growth of individual and community welfare
- h) promotes interventions and services for young people that guarantee easy access, listening and healthy lifestyles and the rejection of violence in all its forms;
- i) contributes to the acquisition and enhancement of young people's skills and talents and supports, through non-formal and informal education, training, vocational guidance and access to the world of work, the affirmation of young people and their integration into school and employment
- l) prevents and counteracts youth discomfort, risk factors and deviance among young people through projects, prevention and good practice initiatives
- m) promotes education for legality, participation in peace and human rights initiatives.

The purposes of this law are implemented by the Region, the local authorities and non-profit associations, according to their respective competences.

Actions and interventions in favour of young people are based on the principles of equal opportunities, equal treatment, equality and non-discrimination.

Youth organizations present in Campania (Italy):

Campania Regional Youth Forum

The Campania Regional Youth Forum is an autonomous body established at the Presidency of the Regional Council established by Regional Law 26/2016.le of Campania.

The Forum has the task of contributing to the Campania Region's policy direction on youth policies

The Forum is aimed at young people in Campania aged between 16 and 34 and works to simplify their relationship with the institutions.

Youth Forum Coordination of the Province of Benevento

The COORDINATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE PROVINCE OF BENEVENTO is intended as a body for the representation, connection and participation of all the Coordination of Young Municipalities of the Province of Benevento, which aims to bring young people closer to the Institutions and the Institutions closer to the world of young people.

The Coordination intends to be a place of growth, exchange of ideas, comparison between young people living in different territorial realities of the Province, in order to pursue common objectives while respecting individual local realities.

The Coordination ensures that young people have the conditions to intervene directly with the elective bodies, contributing with their own proposals to the decision-making phase, which the latter will have to take on issues of interest to young people.

The Coordination of Youth Forums of the Province of Benevento is a body of participation, representation and connection of the Municipal Youth Forums active on the territory.

It promotes, in synergy with the Province, a joint growth and a mutual and fruitful confrontation between young people aged between 16 and 34 years, living in different territorial realities of the Samnite province.

It is a place where the exchange of ideas and dialogue leads to the achievement of an active citizenship made up of identity, belonging and rights.

The Provincial Coordination pursues the following objectives

- provide support to Municipal Administrations wishing to set up a Municipal Youth Forum;
- to provide support to the Municipal Forums within their territorial area;
- to coordinate at provincial level the activity of the Municipal Youth Forums;
- analysing the needs and inconveniences of young people in the provincial community;

- to stimulate the debate on topics particularly felt by young people;
- to realise aggregative and cultural activities for the young people of the provincial community;
- to promote forms of participation and active citizenship
- disseminating news and good practices within an information-training-work framework;
- to organise activities and initiatives in the field of youth policies;
- to support the Provincial Administration for an information, communication and planning strategy involving municipal forums, youth associations, and youth information points;
- to give opinions to the competent bodies on everything concerning the world of youth;
- promote the culture of voluntary work and its values throughout the territory.

Municipal Youth Forums

The Forums have the following aims

- to represent the young people of the area in a democratic and participatory manner
- to encourage young people to participate democratically in public life, contributing to the formation of a healthy and robust social fabric of young people in the city
- provide the city's young people with a strong tool for dialogue and institutional relations with the municipal administration;
- to provide young people with a place where they can express themselves freely on matters of concern to them, including on proposals and policies of the municipalities and provinces, defining the objectives and programmes relating to youth policies within the administration's remit
- offer young people the opportunity to submit proposals;
- to enable the aforementioned bodies to consult young people on specific issues;
- to provide a forum where projects concerning young people can be developed, monitored and evaluated;
- Providing a forum for consultation with youth associations and organisations;
- encourage the participation of young people in other local authority consultative bodies;
- giving young people the opportunity to express themselves and act on issues that concern them, training them in democratic life and in the management of community life;
- Promote public initiatives, conferences, debates, research on youth policies;
- to promote projects at local, provincial, regional and community level, also in collaboration with public bodies, associations and other forums, aimed at young people

- to promote a communication relationship with the young people of the Body in collaboration with the realities, aggregations, institutions present in the Forum or interested in its work
- to promote the establishment of an integrated information system between the local administration, young people and youth organisations, with regard to the needs emerging in the municipal area and the actions to be taken in relation thereto
- to support the Municipal Administration in the information and communication strategy involving the institutions, aggregations, associations included in the Forum, in an organic relationship with the structures of the "InformaGiovani", which synergistically interact with the entire activity of the Forum, as provided for by the Resolution of the Council of Europe of 25/11/03 concerning common objectives on participation and information of young people (OJEU, 5/12/03)
- Deepening, examining and making proposals on the relationship between local authorities and the reality of youth;
- promote forms of voluntary work and collaboration with the administration's services for young people.

The Forum is open to the contribution of everyone, including outsiders, without prejudice to the right to vote only for councillors who are members of the Forum. Participation in the Forum is free of charge.

The Forum has the task of

- Promote public initiatives, conferences, debates, research on youth policies;
- Promoting projects on topics of interest to young people and aimed at promoting the involvement and participation of young citizens of Campania at local, provincial, regional and community level, also in collaboration with public bodies, associations and other Forums;
- Set up working groups, with reference to the areas of interest identified in Article 4, which are consistent with the local context;
- Examine and adopt the documents drawn up by the various Working Groups;
- Promoting a relationship of communication, listening and consultation with the young people of the municipality in collaboration with the organisations, associations and institutions present in the forum or interested in its work;
- To express an opinion, within twenty days of receipt of the documentation, on the budget of the municipality, with reference to the expenditure chapters concerning youth policies;
- To promote the setting up of an integrated information system between the municipal administration, young people and youth organisations, with regard to the needs emerging in the municipal area and to the related actions
- Deepening, examining and making proposals on the relationship between the local authority and the youth reality;
- Promote forms of voluntary work and collaboration with the services of the municipal administration aimed at young people;

- Convene at least once a year a public assembly, suitably publicised at the main places of reference and aggregation of young people in the territories and communities of reference, to present its programme, which will be forwarded to the Council for approval
- Propose any amendments to these Rules and Regulations to the Municipal Administration: this request will be discussed in the Municipal Council at its first useful session.

Portuguese National policies and strategies

At the governmental level, the oversight and promotion of youth affairs fall under the purview of the Secretary of State of Sport and Youth. This emphasis on youth representation extends across various platforms, with three key entities playing pivotal roles in advocating for the interests of the younger generation – the National Youth Council (Conselho Nacional da Juventude or CNJ), the National Register of Youth Associations (Registo Nacional do Associativismo Jovem or RNAJ), and the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth (Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude or IPDJ).

On a regional and local scale, some municipalities have taken proactive measures to ensure that the voices of the youth are not only heard but actively contribute to the public discourse. A notable example is the city of Aveiro, which recently established the Youth Advisory Board as an integral component of the Municipal structure. Comprising representatives from various youth institutions and associations, this board serves as a conduit for the collective aspirations and concerns of the youth.

In other municipalities, a similar objective is achieved through the formation of Youth Municipal Councils, designed to bridge the gap between the younger demographic and decision-makers, thereby fostering a more inclusive public debate. This approach reflects a commitment to actively involve the youth in shaping the policies that directly impact them.

Recognizing the significant role of associativism in empowering the youth, the Portuguese legal framework for associativism explicitly acknowledges its importance. Through legal provisions aimed at promoting youth associations, the government seeks to provide a solid foundation for the active engagement of young individuals in public affairs and spaces. This emphasis on associativism serves as a robust instrument to enhance youth participation in crucial societal dialogues, ensuring that their perspectives are not only acknowledged but actively contribute to the shaping of the nation's future.

In Germany, youth policy-making takes place at different levels. At the federal (Bund) level, it is under the responsibility of the Federal Ministry for Family

Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, BMFSFJ). The Ministry is responsible for encouraging and supporting youth (and child and youth welfare) policy activities in cases where it has supra-regional significance and cannot be encouraged and supported by a federal state alone.

At the federal state (Länder) level, it is the ministries in charge of youth affairs and the youth

offices that initiate, promote, and develop child and youth policy and services. The ministries cooperate and coordinate their work through the Conference of Ministers for Youth and Family Affairs (Jugend- und Familienministerkonferenz, JMFK).

At the local level, it is the towns and municipalities with their youth offices that plan and fund child and youth services. The cooperation between public and non-public institutions and organizations is determined by the principle of subsidiarity. This principle says that a central authority performs only those tasks that cannot be executed by a person, group, or organization at a more local level.

In 2019 a joint youth strategy of the Federal Government was developed. The inter-ministerial working group was set up to help develop the strategy and to coordinate

the cross-sector cooperation. The youth strategy was developed taking into account

certain main fields of action, among them participation, diversity, rural & urban space,

mobility, Europe & the world, environment, health and security.'

Regarding relevant laws and ordinances, it is to be said that neither on a national nor on

a regional level is there a separate law that deals with the needs and rights of young

people comprehensively. Instead, there are a multitude of laws that touch on and

therefore regulate areas of young people's lives, the most important of which we are

going to list in the following, including a description of what they each regulate.

In Greece, the youth policy report (2012) notes that no national youth policy nor youth strategy exists. Instead, youth policy is considered "cross-sectoral" with youth affairs legislated across various ministries and incorporating national, European, and international policies. Numerous laws cover youth

issues such as education, employment, sports, family, rights, health, social protections, and local youth councils. In the city of Kalamata, there is the Colab Youth Center that strongly supports the area by listening to the voices of the younger and having contact with the councils if it's needed.

1. Book 8 German Social Code – Child and Youth Services (Sozialgesetzbuch Achtes Buch – Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, SGB VIII)

This law governs 'the services and structures of child and youth services including youth work and youth social work.'

1. Youth Courts Act (Jugendgerichtsgesetz, JGG)

This law regulates 'criminal the law in relation to young people.'

2. Protection of Young Persons Act (Jugendschutzgesetz, JuSchG)

This law regulates 'the protection of children and young people in public including restrictions on the sale, supply, and consumption of legal drugs, access to films and computer games, gambling, and the presence of children and young people in restaurants and discos.'

3. Young Persons (Protection of Employment) Act (Gesetz zum Schutze der

arbeitenden Jugend, JArbSchG)

This law regulates employment protection for young people, including working hours, overtime, and holiday entitlement.

4. Act to Promote Youth Voluntary Services (Gesetz zur Förderung von Jugendfreiwilligendiensten, JFDG)

This law regulates 'the Voluntary Social Year (Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr, FSJ) and the Voluntary Ecological Year (Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr, FÖJ).'

5. Act on Proceedings in Family Matters and in Matters of Non-contentious

Jurisdiction (Gesetz über das Verfahren in Familiensachen und in den Angelegenheiten der freiwilligen Gerichtsbarkeit, FamFG)

This law regulates ‘proceedings in family matters, including divorce, parentage, adoption, estate.’

6. Act on cooperation and information in child protection matters (Gesetz zur

Kooperation und Information im Kinderschutz, KKG)

This law protects ‘the welfare of children and young people and promotes their physical, mental and emotional development.’

7. Adoption Placement Act (Adoptionsvermittlungsgesetz, AdVermiG)

This law ‘regulates adoption placement and prohibit(s) surrogacy.’

8. German Interstate Treaty on the Protection of Minors in the Media (Jugendmedienschutz-Staatsvertrag, JMStV)

‘JMStV is an agreement between all federal states (Länder) to ensure the same level of protection for young people across Germany. The regulations aim to prevent broadcasting and television services that could harm or endanger the development or upbringing of children and young people.’

9. Federal Training Assistance Act (Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz, BAföG)

Regulates ‘individual financial assistance for young people in training’.

10. Book 12 German Social Code – Social Assistance (Sozialgesetzbuch

Zwölftes Buch – Sozialhilfe, SGB XII)

Regulates ‘social assistance in Germany. Specific to young people, SGB XII covers the standard needs rates, training and participation expenses, and cost reimbursements for placement with another family’ among other things.

11. The German Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch, BGB)

Regulates ‘legal relationships between private individuals. Specific to young people, it regulates areas such as the age of majority and capacity to contract.

**12. Book 3 German Social Code – Employment Promotion
(Sozialgesetzbuch**

Drittes Buch – Arbeitsförderung, SGB III)

‘Specific to young people, it regulates areas such as vocational training assistance’.

13. Book 2 German Social Code – Basic Security for Jobseekers

(Sozialgesetzbuch Zweites Buch – Grundsicherung für Arbeitsuchende,

SGB II) aims ‘to enable recipients to live a dignified existence by providing basic

security for jobseekers’.

**14. German Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch, StGB) ‘StGB only
applies to criminal**

acts by young people and adolescents where such acts are not covered by the

provisions of the Youth Courts Act (Jugendgerichtsgesetz, JGG)’.

**15. Book 9 German Social Code – Rehabilitation and Participation of
Disabled**

**Persons (Sozialgesetzbuch Neuntes Buch – Rehabilitation und Teilhabe
von Menschen mit Behinderungen, SGB IX)**

This law sets ‘out regulations for people with disabilities and people at risk of disability. Specific to young people, SGB IX contains rules on the scope of application and support for young apprentices with disabilities.’

16. Federal Elections Act (Bundeswahlgesetz, BWahlG)

This law regulates ‘young people’s right to vote (aktives Wahlrecht) and right to be elected (passives Wahlrecht)’ In the district, to which Kreßberg and therefore Tempelhof belongs, a Youth Forum was put into place in 2017. It takes place once a year and one male and female student each per class, from grade 8 through 12, are invited. They are allowed to skip regular classes during this time for participation. The projects created or initiated during this forum then receive support from local politicians, aiming to find

ways for their matters and voices to be heard in and influence local politics. The community Tempelhof calls a free school their own, which focuses on providing young people with the opportunity to freely develop their interests, strengths, and skills through the school's alternative schooling program. Within this schooling concept, there is room for young people's initiatives and ideas, more so than in the traditional schooling system in Germany. The community is also working on increasing the opportunities for participation for their own children and the young people living within their community and finding fitting structures for this. The government has setup an experimental phase of temporarily including young people in the community with the right to participate in inner politics to a certain degree. Through access to more of the internal politics of the community, young people will have a direct influence on matters regarding the land owned by Grundstiftung Tempelhof and its use. How big of a vote and say the community is going to grant young people is only going to be more clear further down the road.

Partners



The coordinator RibellARCI Association from Apice, Italy

Has its roots in the history of Italian solidarity and has always been committed to trying to reduce the symptoms of social problems experienced by the young and the old. It participates in various projects of national importance. The association has always been committed to the integration of immigrants in Italy as well as to Pan-European integration between various European cultures. It was founded with non-profit purposes as it pursues social objectives. It aims to bring together the best youth energies who want to encourage and stimulate the participation and civic sense of citizens and young people. Furthermore, the association pursues objectives aimed at removing the economic and social obstacles that prevent the free education of individuals, especially those

belonging to the weakest groups. It promotes cultural exchanges in order to operate in synergy with institutions at all levels. To pursue these goals and achieve these objectives, the association is affiliated with the national ARCI platform to achieve a greater level of connection between the local substratum and higher decision-making levels.



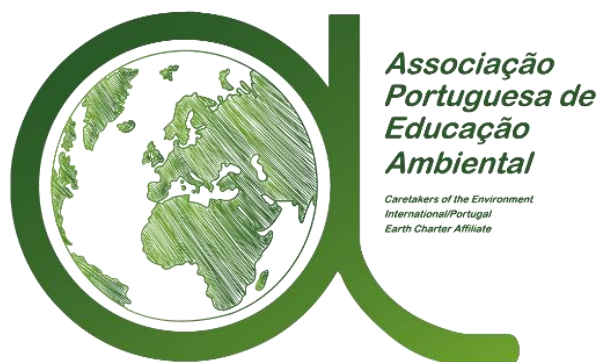
Linc (to work together)

LINC is an Italian association active in the fields of design, youth, culture, and various fields of education. Linc was born from the encounter between a cooperative active since 2000 and an association founded in 2015 which have made community empowerment the cornerstone of their work. These two paths have become a common road over time through the first shared European projects and the work done together. For example, in the youth field, it has participated in various Italian and European projects such as Growing Together-Elba Island of Communities, Adults4Green-training adults for sustainable life, Metaversing, Reconstituent, Ride, European Cross project, etc. In the field of culture, it has participated in projects such as SOS Project: Sense of Sharing, listening to community events, CarNatal, etc.



Greek Social Youth Development (K.A.N.E), a non-governmental and non-profit organization active in

the fields of Education, Youth, Social Inclusion, Vocational Training, and Culture was founded in 2008 in Kalamata, Greece. The organization's main objectives are to foster youth motivation for active citizenship and to support the personal and professional development of people through educational activities, especially targeting people at risk or facing social exclusion, young people in general, and adult/vet learners.



Portuguese Association for Environmental Education, ASPEA, is a Portuguese NGO, funded in 1990, with 6 regional delegations (Lisboa, Aveiro, Viseu, Bragança, Braga, Faial) which mission is to educate, conduct campaigns and raise environmental awareness directing its activities to all

audiences.

Among other projects, ASPEA coordinates in Portugal the Projeto Rios, which is a Iberian project that aims to answer to the visible problem, on a national and global scale, regarding the alteration and deterioration of the quality of rivers and the lack of effective involvement of users and the population in general, intending to promote education, awareness and active involvement of the community in the importance and appreciation of the environment through the adoption of a 500 meter long section of a river or stream. The Rivers Project groups must carry out two river monitoring activities per year, one in the spring and one in the autumn, as well as a river improvement action.



Slovenian Bodi svetloba NGO, for educational and humanitarian activities, was officially established in December 2017. It is a member organization of the Slovenian NGDO network SLOGA and the international network Global Call To Action Against Poverty (GCAP). The president of the NGO is the vice president of the SLOGA council. It is active in the field of global education and 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Currently, the NGO is involved in various Erasmus Ka2 projects in school, youth, and adult fields.



German Wildfluss Akademie is an NGO that offers an independent educational opportunity for residents of the Isar region who want a life in harmony with other people and nature. In their workshops, they show you how to create a sustainable and safe coexistence with the river, how to get to know the fascinating ecosystem of the wild Isar

river and to experience enriching perspectives on the diverse living environment in the Isar area.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the research

Theoretical underpinnings of the research include many elements that are based on a holistic approach to the river issues in particular and the environment in general. They have various kinds of outcomes envisioned such as the acquisition of skills for exercising active citizenship on the part of young people (including activism, empathy, competencies, critical thinking, critical media literacy, and other 21st-century skills), the acquisition of awareness of the importance of river protection among community

members in general and young people in particular, the acquisition of more and better ideas on the interventions that can be pursued for the improvement of the river communities to which young people belong, and the establishment of a dialogue between young people and institutions in order to help speed up the environmental regeneration processes by involving young members as well as all other interested parties.

In their research, the consortium of the partners of the project has focused upon three types of targets, namely: young people, the local community (including local institutions), and non-governmental organizations/volunteers. The consortium members have all agreed to place special importance on the active involvement of young people (for example, the inclusion of young participants at Erasmus RIDE LTTA in Kalamata, Greece in May 2023).

However, the first step taken was collecting the data relevant to the topic of the project. The partners of the consortium found it important to include data from their own respective countries as well as from the EU as a whole. Data were collected on various topics such as the general state of rivers in participating countries, youth laws and policies aimed at both environment/rivers and young people, the level of youth participation, the cultural heritage of the places linked to the river, both material and mythological, practical use of rivers in past and present, challenges to the health of rivers on one hand and good practices and potential solutions for the redevelopment of rivers and their territories. The aim was also to involve both community and personal attachment to rivers as they are both important in order to secure the beneficial outcome for rivers.

In order to get information from those involved with rivers, interviews, and focus groups were conducted in order to have information from all countries involved and to have general results about them.

Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the procedures, methods, and techniques for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data (both qualitative and quantitative) used to portray the research effectively.

It concerns the systematic design of a study to ensure that the data gathered is valuable and reliable and to guarantee results that meet the aims and objectives of the study. The consortium has employed surveys and case studies as data collection tools in research in order to conduct the research more efficiently.

Our quantitative research has focused on gathering and analyzing numerical data in order to be used to find averages and patterns among participating countries in the project.

Additionally, our qualitative research has helped to form better summaries of our findings in the data collected. In this case, we have been interested in discovering connections to rivers among the surveyed participants and in discovering their attitudes towards challenges our rivers face and their personal and community involvements with their rivers, etc. People selected to participate in our surveys didn't have the same particular opinion about the subject matter but had also different views.

Our descriptive research has included surveys and case studies and has been effective at analyzing topics and issues connected to rivers.

Our analytical research has helped us to develop new concepts related to the research subject by learning about the opinions of some people regarding the issues and challenges of rivers.

We have also employed both primary and secondary research. Our primary research has included surveys while our secondary research has included using previously gathered data from other sources such as articles that have been collected during our desktop research.

Questionnaires as one of the most common types of surveys were used in order to acquire a lot of information quickly. Focus groups and research interviews were used to understand the research methods in a well-defined manner.

Description of the Survey Sample

For the purpose of the project, as a part of the Intellectual Output 1, interviews have been carried out and focus groups established.

Data for interviews have been carefully selected such as different stakeholders (farmers, young people, local administrators, citizens, etc.) in order to get different perspectives and experiences on the topic matter. Interviewees gave general information about themselves and then proceeded to questions which consisted of four parts.

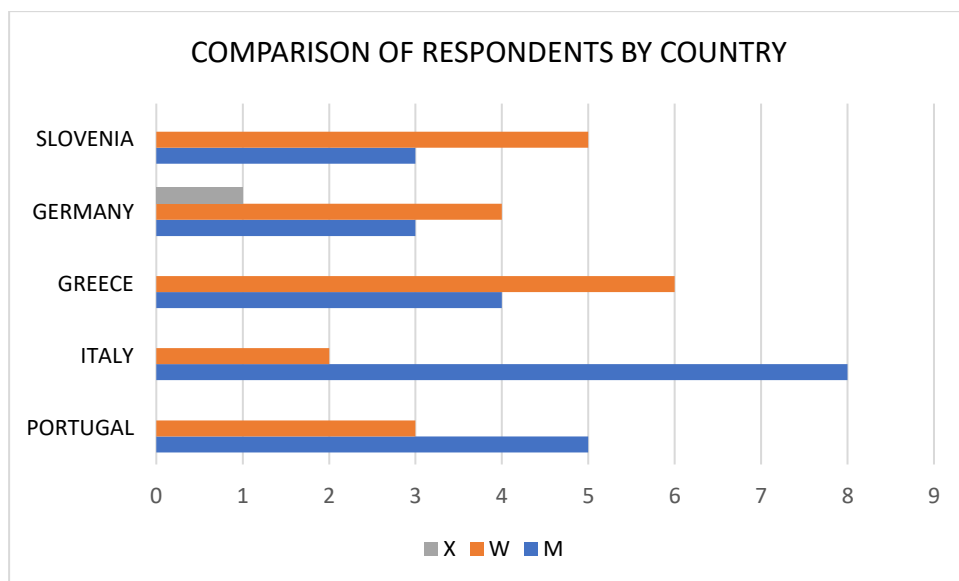
The first part dealt with the topic of cultural heritage (if interviewees knew any myths or historical events linked to their rivers and if they did, they had to describe them), the second part dealt with questions about the use of river (in the past, in the present, how individuals use rivers, conflicts about rivers and accessibility to them), the third part dealt with environmental aspects of the river (health of rivers, positive and negative human impact on rivers, problems related to rivers and possible solutions to overcome them) and the final, fourth part dealt with one's involvement with rivers (personal involvement, community involvement, activities to protect river on personal and community levels).

The focus groups were created in order to discuss the responses of interviewees and to find additional solutions to the river challenges. The focus was on empowering young persons in order to equip them with skills and competencies for the second part of the activities of the project which are based on practical activities.

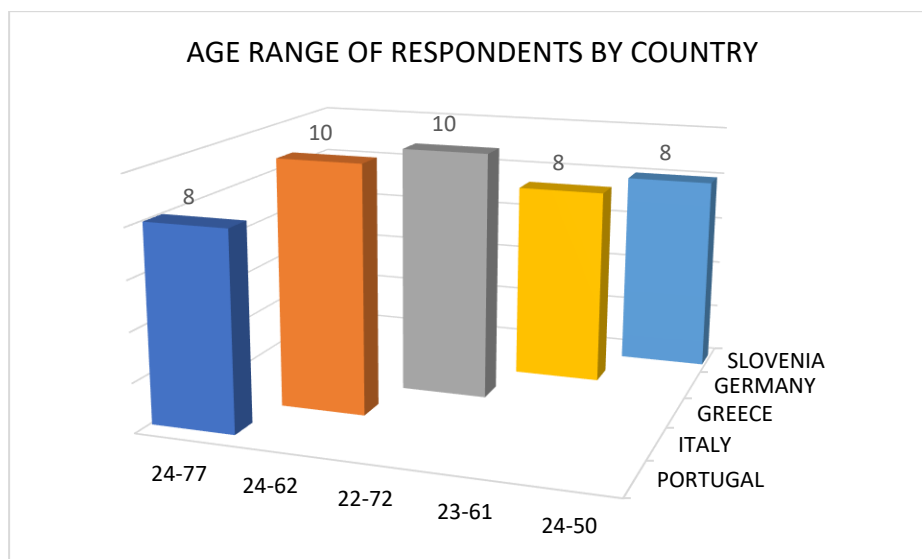
Results of the preliminary interviews and focus groups

Participating countries in the consortium chose 8-10 persons for preliminary interviews with some of them wanting to remain anonymous or not give all details about themselves. Results were different among participating countries.

Considering the gender of interviewees, Portugal had 5 men and 3 women, Italy 8 men and 2 women, Greece had 4 men and 6 women, Germany had 3 men, 4 women, and 1 person who declined to state his/her gender, and Slovenia 3 men and 5 women.



The age of persons interviewed was the following: Portugal between 24-77 years of age, Italy between 24 to 62 years of age, Greece between 22-72 years of age, Germany between 23-61 years of age, and Slovenia between 24 to 50 years of age.

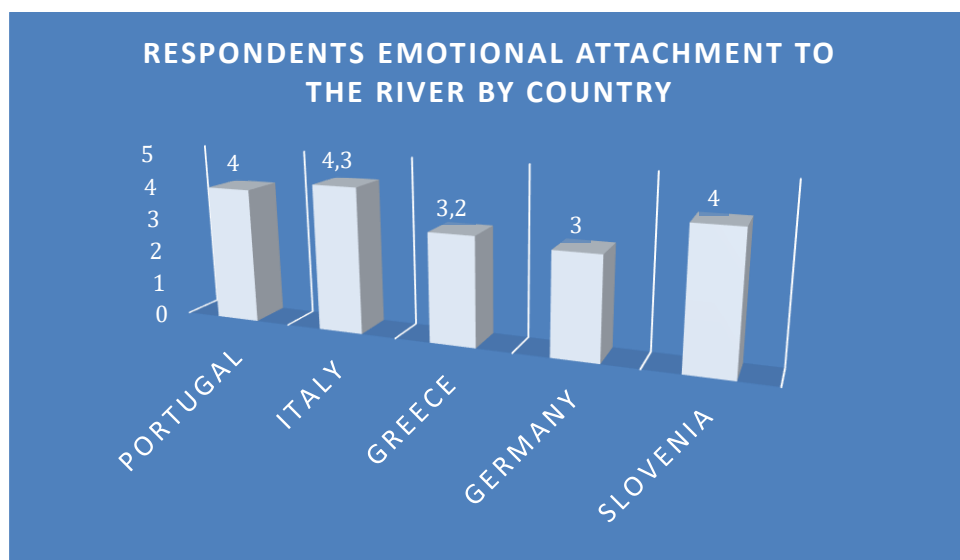


In Italy and Germany, all interviewees live close to their rivers while in other countries most of the interviewees live close by them.

Most of the interviewees with high degree education come from Germany and Slovenia, 6 persons in both countries, followed by Portugal with 5 persons with high degree education.

In Portugal and Italy, most interviewees connected their rivers with particular historical events. On the other hand, in Greece, most participants connected their river with ancient Greek Spartan myth, while in Slovenia they connected it mostly with the Ancient Greek Argonaut myth and with the most famous Slovenian poet Prešeren's poem about Urška and a Water Man.

Considering the emotional attachment to the river, the highest one is in Italy (median mark 4.3 out of 5), followed by Portugal and Slovenia (both countries' median mark almost 4), Greece (median mark 3.2), and Germany (median mark 3).

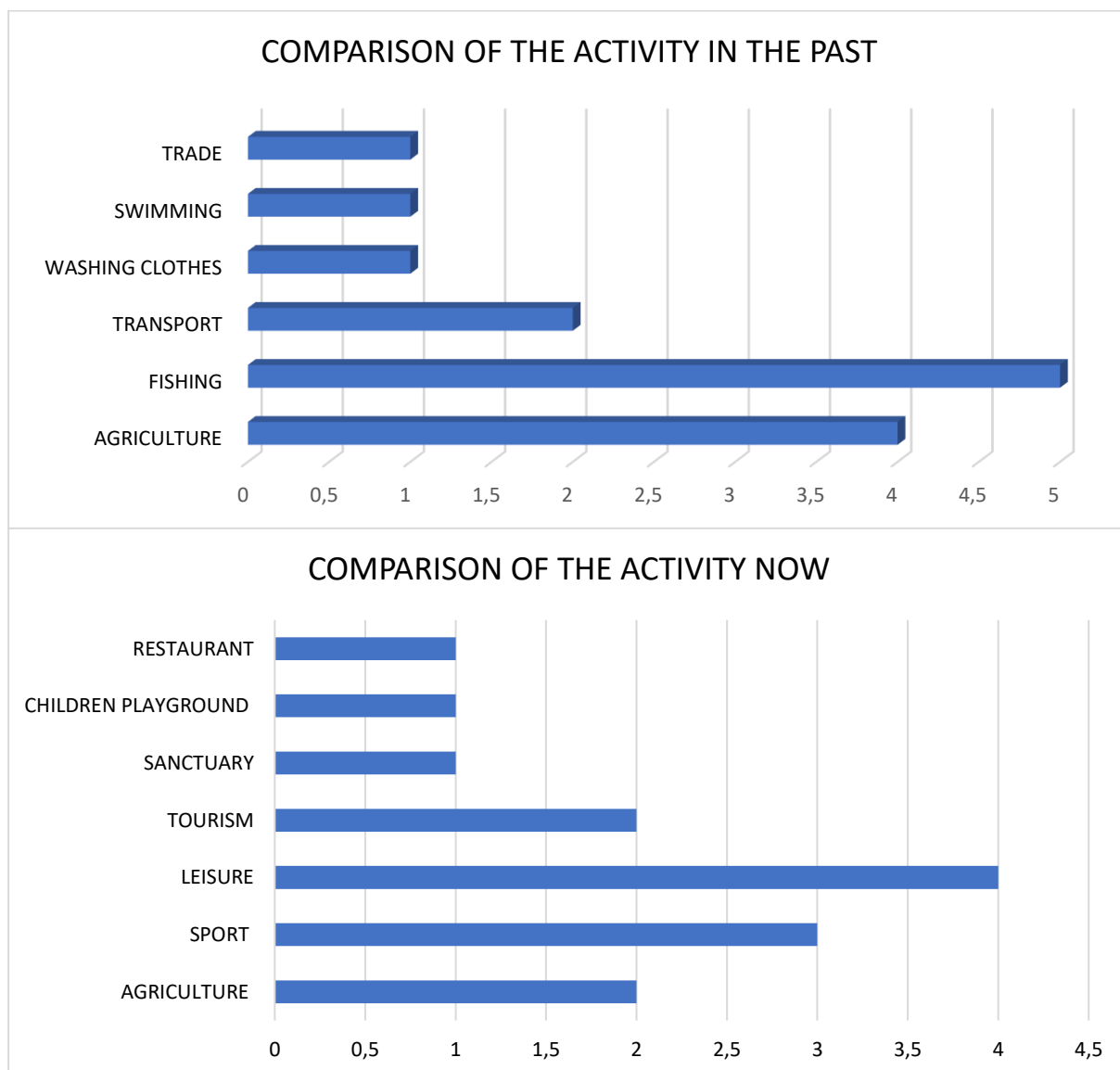


In Portugal, attachment to the river is mostly connected with memories of childhood, in Greece with living by the river or visiting it, in Germany and Slovenia with present activities such as leisure (walking by the river, bathing in it), in Italy with living by the river and memories of childhood.

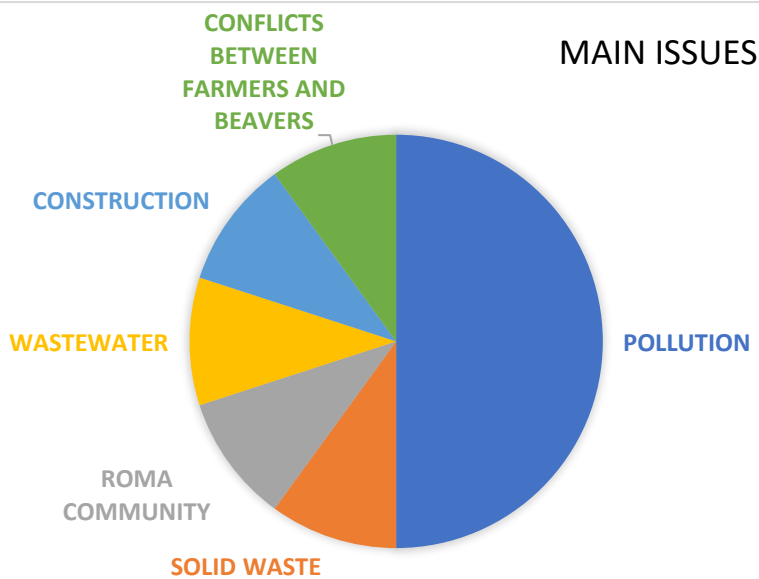
The use of the river in Portugal in the past was mostly for agriculture, fishing, and transport, in Italy and Germany for fishing, agriculture, and washing clothes, in Greece for agriculture, fishing, and swimming while in Slovenia for transport, trade, and fishing.

The current use of the river in Portugal is for agriculture, sport, and leisure, in Italy for energy, sport, and agriculture, in Greece for leisure, sports, and

tourism, in Germany for leisure, sanctuary, and children's playgrounds while in Slovenia it is for leisure, tourism, and a restaurant.



The main problems according to the Portuguese interviewed are pollution and solid waste, in Italy pollution and wastewater, in Greece pollution from factories and Roma community, in Germany pollution and conflicts between farmers and beavers and in Slovenia pollution and construction.



The solutions proposed from the communities are various. In Portugal the most common topics were education, reforestation, flood prevention, and widening of the river. While in Italy the community proposed to raise awareness about the environment, the establishment of environmental NGOs,

and the end of pollution. In Greece increasing education and awareness among factories were the proposed solutions. For Germany community is important the re-naturalization of the river and awareness raising. While in Slovenia cleaning the river, a ban on pesticides and more inspection of the river.

Focus Groups Overview

Focus group meetings have taken place in all countries.

The Portuguese focus group was represented by participants from various organizations.

Target groups:

First, the interviews were analyzed and the target group was defined as the youth of the community that should work on river issues.

Challenges/Obstacles/Problems:

Participants identified main problems concerning the river management and the environment, such as over-exploitation of the water, sedimentation/erosion resulting in the destruction of margins and fields, invasive alien species (i.e. *Eichhornia crassipes*, *Myriophyllum aquaticum*), discharges to the river, floods and the physical and emotional disconnection of the community to the river.

Historically and culturally the river has always been linked to agriculture practice, nowadays to the big farmers of the region. The challenge now is to have the river as the place where the community members come together, appreciate the landscape and the ecosystem, and care for the protection and conservation of biodiversity.

Strong points and advantages :

The strong points include the historical connection to the river such as memories when adults speak of the times when hundreds of people would gather in the river to have a good time together, domestic and familiar life connected to the river, and organizations interested in advocating for the river.

Solutions/Interventions:

Solutions and interventions discussed include:

- organizing an open event celebrating the river, restoring places along the river to bring people to it (like pedestrian walkways)
- creating better infrastructure for preventing floods and having better water management so when summer and water scarcity come, the farmers have a tank for water use, and therefore avoid over-exploitation of natural water canals that would run freely. Restoring places in the river to bring people to it, such as fluvial beaches or pedestrian walkways, where people are invited to feel and live the river.
- promote an open event where communities celebrate the river and its cultural history.

Actors:

Participants mentioned various stakeholders that should be involved such as Eixo Primary School, local NGOs (ASPEA; Bioliving; Grupo Cultural A Semente), government agencies like APA (Environment Portuguese Agency); water management administrators (Águas do Centro), Municipal Council, local community.

Remarks:

Participants' conclusions include the present stage of disconnection to the river and its pollution (such as chemical discharges to the river) as well as floods on one hand and water scarcity on the other hand. The main idea was to open the discussion of river issues to the community through an open event, where the community is invited to celebrate the river and its cultural history.

The German focus group was represented by participants from various organizations.

Target groups:

First, the interviews were analyzed and the target group was defined as the youth of the community as well as other stakeholders that should work on river issues.

Challenges/Obstacles/Problems:

Participants identified the main problems such as strengthening the Rotbach River 100 years ago, limited rainfalls and dry periods, problems with shadowing the riverbanks and the river, problems with bio top areas beside the stream and between stream and fields.

The challenge now is to have a dialogue between village people and farmers around it and the re-naturalization of the river as well as to involve the group of young people currently starting to live and create projects on the acre close to the river, as they will be in closest proximity to it.

Strong points and advantages :

Participants identified possible dates for Plenum as the 6th or 20th of July as there are people in the local community who advocate for our project and the re-naturalization of the river. Local authorities are interested as well but there is a need for the water authority to accept this as well.

Solutions/Interventions:

Continued activities to increase awareness and foster a connection between the people and the river should be a focus.

Actors:

The actors mentioned were local authorities, members of Tempelhof Genossenschaft, the local agriculture department, and people of the young experimental living project who reside and aim to create

projects in close proximity to the river on an acre.

Remarks:

An open discussion is planned for July 2023 to clear up the remaining questions. This will be a good next step to continue the productive and helpful exchange of this focus group discussion, which served as a great first step to gathering, collecting, and networking with different voices. It is especially encouraging to perceive the interest of many people for action to be taken in relation to the Rotbach River.

The Slovenian focus group was represented by participants from various organizations.

Target groups:

First, the interviews were analyzed and the target group was defined as the youth of the community as well as other stakeholders that should work on river issues.

Challenges/Obstacles/Problems:

Participants have identified challenges, obstacles, and problems such as cleaning the river as the mayor of Ljubljana promised that in the future the Ljubljanica River in Ljubljana will again be safe to swim like in the past. Participants have identified another problem with floods which are almost annual in Slovenia. Anti-flood measures along the Ljubljanica River were carried out after severe floods in 2010. Another issue is nutrias, considered by many as invasive animal species, whose population grew along the Ljubljanica River and in the Ljubljana Marshes. The Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food issued a decision for the hunting of these animals, but on the other hand opponents of hunting nutrias, including Mrs. Tina Gaber, the partner of the Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golob, submitted almost 25,000 signatures against the slaughter of these animals to the Ministry to prove with the signatures that a significant part of the Slovenian public does not support violent short-term solutions to the problems of human coexistence with other living creatures in Slovenia. The decision to start hunting nutrias has now been postponed to the beginning of September.

Strong points and advantages :

Participants identified strong cultural aspects and connections to the Ljubljana River and its surroundings. The River Ljubljana has been mentioned in poems of the Slovenian national poet Prešeren, and it has been proclaimed a cultural treasure due to thousands of archaeological objects recovered from the Ljubljana River (in the ancient times the Ljubljana River or Nauportus River in Roman times was considered a sacred river) which makes the river one of the most important rivers in connection to archaeology in Europe. Participants mentioned the works of the Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik, many of them on or near the Ljubljana River, which are UNESCO World Heritage sites as well as remains of the pile-dwellings in the Ljubljana Marshes are also UNESCO World Heritage sites. The area along the Ljubljana River is also a favorite place for foreign tourists and locals



alike for walking or just relaxing along the river.

Roman gladius sword with the scabbard fittings from the Ljubljana River at Vrhnika, Slovenia

Solutions/Interventions:

As future anti-flood measures, participants recognized the need for the removal of silt from the river bed in order to increase the capacity of the water channel, an important step to prevent flooding. The water in the Ljubljana River has nowhere to go once the Sava River water volumes are high so in order to avoid flooding, the river bed must be deepened so as to increase the capacity of the channel. The annual

cleaning of the Ljubljanica River should be accompanied by more awareness-raising activities about the importance of the preservation and protection of the river. Teachers from the participating primary school near the Ljubljanica River suggested the open event and school activities where school children in cooperation with young people can plan activities for awareness raising during school festivals such as St. George's Day (Gregorjevo in Slovene language) when children release paper boats at the rivers, etc.

Actors:

The actors mentioned were local authorities, members of environmental and other NGOs, activists, teachers and students, the local population living or working near the river, etc.

Remarks:

The focus group was active during the discussion. In cooperation with primary school, the event is planned either by the end of 2023 or in the first half of 2024 depending on the length of the project. Various ideas represent a good opportunity to involve as wide opportunities as possible in order to engage interested people to take practical steps to promote the preservation and protection of the Ljubljanica River.

The Greek focus group was represented by participants from various organizations.

Target groups:

First, the interviews were analyzed and the target group was defined as the youth of the community as well as other stakeholders that should work on river issues.

Challenges/Obstacles/Problems:

The main issues raised were environmental concerns and poor river protection legislation. The Focus Group appeared to be really irritated by the waste problem in the river. It appears abandoned, even if it is not, and the water that the farmers use will be contaminated by the plastic sooner or later. Furthermore, the fact that water is dwindling year by year as a result of climate change will present problems in the future. The lack of a legislative framework that includes big factories

that use the same river is an issue for both the quality and quantity of water.

Strong points and advantages :

Strong points characterized the fact that the interviewers still care about the river whether they live or not. Also, the community remains as active as possible regarding the cleaning of the riverbanks and the grasses. The festival is also a plus because, as they mentioned, it is a good practice that shows how a big event can leave nothing behind and can include people who actually care for the environment.

Solutions/Interventions:

Solutions and interventions included analyzing issues on environmental protection and the green economy, increasing awareness of the relationships between environment, economy, and society, raising awareness of environmental education and sustainability, expanding skills of young people in the field of environmental education, finding youth leaders that can encourage the choice of environmental protection behavior, especially for the link with their community and their river, and involving them in issues concerning the environment in order to transmit the values of environmental protection and sustainable behavior, informing local authorities about the problems some people face with Roma groups while organizing festivals with the Roma society to fight prejudices and talking with stakeholders about the balance of the water between farmers and factories.

Actors:

The actors mentioned by participants were stakeholders of the village, decision-makers for the river, local authorities, environmental organizations, and other NGOs.

Remarks:

The river still plays a part in the focus group's life whether they live near or far from the river. Social events are organized next to the river and the well-being of it is still important of the people. Especially for the people who live next to it or whose livelihood is depending on the Pamisos River.

The Italian focus group was represented by participants from various organizations.

Target groups:

First, the interviews were analyzed and the target group was defined as the youth of the community as well as other stakeholders that should work on river issues. Additionally, public institutions, hydrogeological protection bodies, organizations and associations involved in environmental protection, and organizations that promote active citizenship in young people are the ones to be approached as well.

Challenges/Obstacles/Problems:

Many problems came up during the discussion, like for example the critical condition in which are the roads that lead to the river and nobody in the community seems to care about. There is a desire to clean the riverside, but nobody is actually taking action to make it happen. There are no easily accessible areas along the river and neither the community nor the local institutions are doing anything. Also, another big problem is the pollution of the river: too much illicit waste dumping and no possibility to monitor them.

Strong points and advantages :

the total inclusion of people of all ages and professional occupations, both for potential growth activities, the training and educational aspect, on the rules of civil and environmental coexistence, with the community.

The scheduled festival is also approved by the existing local realities, which would be able to commit themselves to all aspects of reception and development, such as safety and services. I hope to have relationships between all the institutions and communities of other origins, even for the scarce amount of those at the local level.

Solutions/Interventions:

Among the solutions and interventions mentioned were the increase of community awareness about the problems that the river is alive, the involvement of young people to take the first action and clean some parts of the riverside, the increase of the young people's knowledge about the environment of the local river, and creation of a solid group

of people who care about the river and let the institutions work with them.

Actors:

Actors mentioned include farmers, factory owners along the river, local authorities, environmental organizations, and civil protection bodies

Remarks:

The focus group was really involved during the discussion and each one of the attendees finally described in different ways the main problems of the river and its community. We think we had a great result with a good solution proposal that can actually be implemented in the community to initiate a change. The exchange of ideas and opinions about problems made the discussion very engaging for everyone. The main focal aspects have been identified and that's important for solving the main problems that exist around the riverside area.

Main findings of the research

Focus groups of participating countries were really involved in discussions and all of them selected young people as the main targets. However, in order to get as wide an area of work as possible, additional targets included local administration, schools, NGOs, local communities, etc.

Among the main findings of this research is a problem with the pollution of rivers. This is also a European-wide problem. Various causes for pollution have been gathered including agriculture, industry, transport, and pollution caused by local population.

On the other hand, another finding of the research is that rivers cause more and more flooding nowadays due to climate change effects and other causes. Flood prevention is one of the most important things to be done in local communities.

Another finding of the research deals with the fact that nowadays generation doesn't have a strong connection to nature in general and to rivers in particular. Therefore it is of the utmost importance to raise awareness among young people in order to take an active role in the preservation and protection of rivers by working together with local authorities. In the case of Greece, there is a need to involve the minority group of Roma people as well.

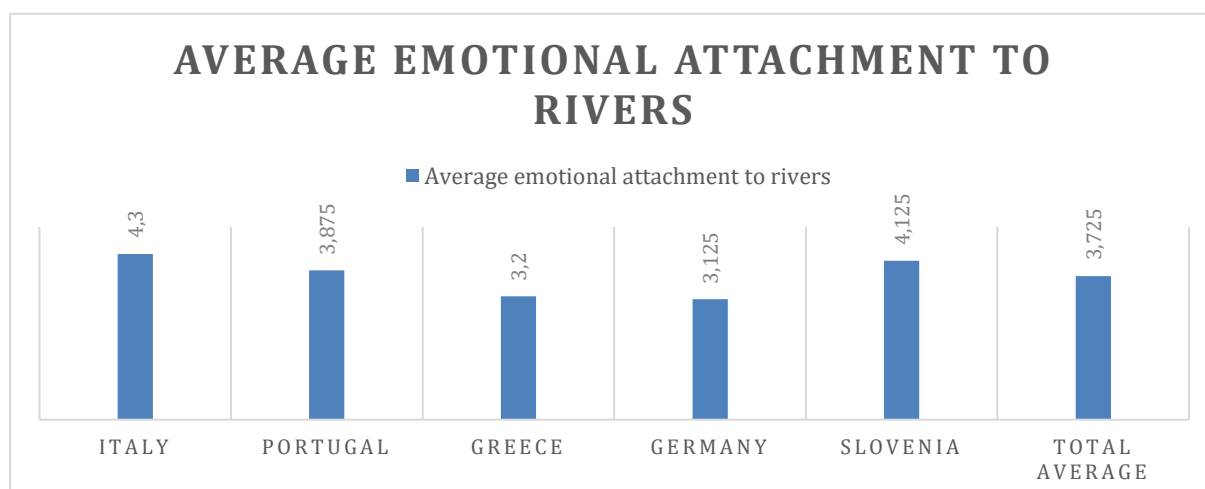
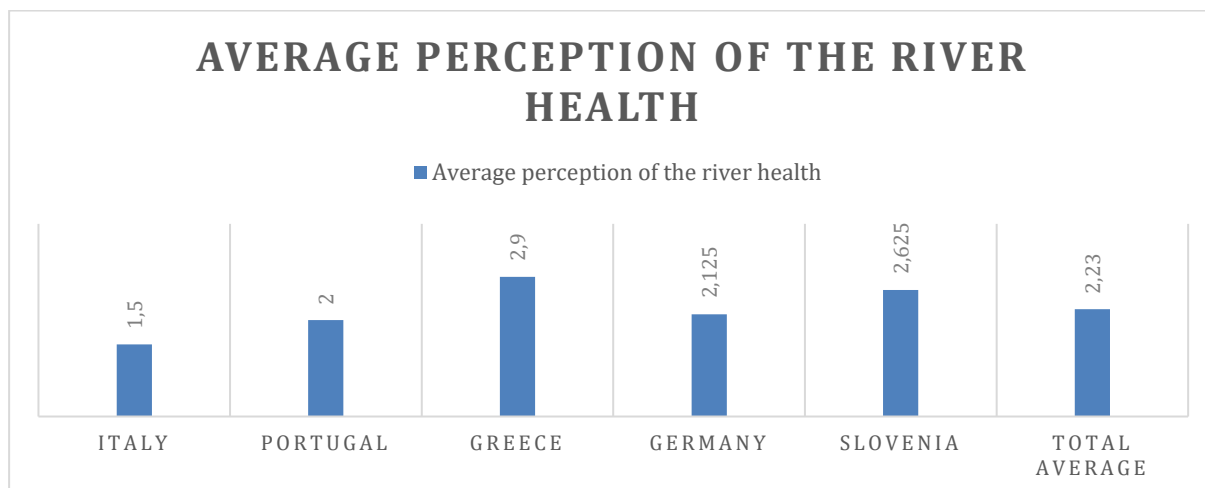
Among the differences found in the research is the fact that most of the researched rivers with the exception of Slovenia's Ljubljana are in the rural areas or in small town areas while a part of the Ljubljana river flows through the city of Ljubljana.

On the other hand, strong points are found in better awareness on the part of some activists, NGOs, and local population members about all these challenges that rivers face. Some people still have cultural connections to the river or memories from the past when connections to rivers were stronger and this knowledge can be passed to future generations.

Looking at the results that we obtained from the interviews is clear how the health of the rivers is not well perceived.

On a scale from 1 to 5, the average perception of the river health given from the communities is around 2.

It is also interesting to note that the general emotional attachment of the communities among their river is above medium.



In Italy, for example, even though the emotional attachment is generally high, the community is not spending much of their free time nearby the river. The perception of the bad health of the river and the low accessibility of the river prevents people to spend more time among the river area.

Conclusions and recommendations

With involvement of the communities around the rivers in our research, we were able to understand that a big part of it is still concerned about their river. They have dreams and expectations, as for example spending time near the river area to relax or to do sport. In some cases, this is not completely possible due to the problems underlined by the interviews. The youth are one of the biggest parts of the communities that may profit more from having a river area in which it's possible to do different activities, alone or with friends and family. Even though institutions still play a big role in the maintenance of the rivers and the areas around them, we saw how it is possible for organizations to lead youth people towards the awareness of living near a river. In Kalamata for example every year KANE organize a big festival near the river, as well as other ecological activities with volunteers such as the collection of plastic. Same thing applies for ASPEA that is strongly involved into ecological and biological education organizing activities during the year by the river. These activities are clearly good to involve people into taking care of the river and spending time there. What is missing is a setup of permanent areas in which every day people can spend their free time. Organizations and institutions could organize more activities of different types (yoga class, open door cooking, music, school education) near the rivers so that different parts of the communities can start to gain confidence towards the river. Our recommendation is to embrace and live more the river: organize a Sunday out with friends, go with your loved one for a relaxing picnic, take your children to play and teach them how to respect the river, go for a walk or a run to stay healthy. We hope that communities give the right respect that rivers deserve.

References

EU Water Framework Directive: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/60/oj>
European Green Deal of the European Union
https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en
Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations
<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
UNEP Medium Term Strategy 2018-2021,
<https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/7621>
EU Natura 2000: <https://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/>
EU Drinking Water Directive, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2020/2184/oj>
EU Bathing Water Directive: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02006L0007-20140101>
EU Environment Quality Standard Directive: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32008L0105>
EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31991L0271>

EU Nitrates Directive: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1561542776070&uri=CELEX:01991L0676-20081211>
The EU Floods Directive <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32007L0060>
River contracts in Italy: <https://www.mdpi.com/2413-8851/6/4/83>
Portuguese Environment Agency: <https://apambiente.pt/en/apa/portuguese-environment-agency-apa>
Slovenia Water Management Office: <https://www.gov.si/en/state-authorities/bodies-within-ministries/slovenian-water-agency/about-the-agency/water-management-office/>
EU Nature Restoration Law: https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/new-nature-restoration-law-boosts-biodiversity-and-climate-action-across-europe-2023-07-12_en
Youth Policy Report in Greece: https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Greece_2012_Youth_Policy_Report.pdf
EU Free Flowing Rivers: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policy-learning-platform/news/dam-removal-towards-25000-km-free-flowing-rivers>
Slovenia Office For Youth: <https://www.gov.si/en/state-authorities/bodies-within-ministries/office-for-youth/about-the-office/>
Slovenian National Youth Strategy: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/slovenia/13-national-youth-strategy>

German Youth Policy: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/kinder-und-jugend/jugendbildung/jugendstrategie/jugendstrategie-der-bundesregierung-77406>

Greek Youth Policy: <https://www.inedivim.gr/>

Italian Youth Policy: <https://www.politichegiovani.gov.it/>

Potuguese National Youth Plan: <https://ipdj.gov.pt/plano-nacional-para-a-juventude>

Ribellarci: <https://ribellarci.wordpress.com>

Bodi svetloba: <https://bodisvetloba.org>

LINC: <https://www.progettolinc.it>

A.N.E: <https://ngokane.org/en>

ASPEA: <https://aspea.org>

Wildfluss Akademie: <https://www.wildflussakademie.de/>

Appendices: Interview Form

Interview - Research IO1

Name of the project: RIDE River of IDEas

Name of the organization:

Interviewer:

Stakeholders to interview

- 2 farmers
- 2 young people (under 27)
- 2 local administrators
- 4 citizens

General information

Name:

Surname:

Age:

Gender:

Education level:

Profession:

Place of living (near or far from river):

Name of the river (if there is):

Nationality:

Partner of NGO/Local Association: Yes/no - Which one?

A- Cultural Heritage

1) Do you know about any myths or historical events linked to the river?
Name and explain them briefly?

2) How much do you emotionally relate yourself to the river? (From 1 to 5 where 1 is Not much and 5 is A lot). Explain why.

B - Usage

1) Name 3 main activities/uses of the river in the past

2) Name 3 main activities/uses of the river nowadays

3) Which is your desire about the river (one or more than one):

- a) sports
- b) leisure (picnic..)
- c) get water for agriculture
- d) a protected area/ sanctuary
- e) an environmental education area
- f) well being
- g) other:

4) Do you identify any conflicts arising over the different uses of the river?
Which conflicts between which groups?

5) On a scale 1-5, according to your needs and habits, how do you evaluate the accessibility to the river?

C - Environmental aspects

6) On a scale 1-5, at a glance, how do you rate the health of the river?

7) On a scale 1-5, at a glance, how do you rate the health of the river?

8) In your opinion, what are the major impacts (positive or negative) of human activities on the river?

9) Do you identify any problems related to the river? If yes, which problems? Who is responsible?

10) Do you identify any problems related to the river? If yes, which problems? Who is responsible?

11) What do you think we should do to solve these problems?

D Civic Engagement

5) On a scale 1-5 how much are you personally involved with the river?

6) On a scale 1-5 how much is your local community involved with the river?

7) On a scale 1-5 how much is your local community involved with the river?

8) In what kind of activities are you involved in taking care/protecting the river?

Personnel Level.....

Community Level.....

9) Do you combine your leisure/economic/sport activities with taking care/protecting the river?