COMMUNITIES FOR CLIMATE

50 COMMUNITIES FOR CLIMATE

Contents

Nature and biodiversity

Adapting syntropic agriculture to the French Mediterranean climate

Catfarm, a community-based educational centre, is pioneering regenerative agriculture on its 1.5 hectares of land. Inspired by syntropic agriculture, the project aimed to replicate natural ecosystems to create productive, sustainable farms while engaging local farmers and the community. This approach, known for transforming degraded lands into biodiverse rainforests, was adapted to Mediterranean climates and local grape production.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

At *Catfarm*, the journey to adapt syntropic agriculture (a method inspired by natural forest ecosystems) to the French Mediterranean climate is well underway. Since the project's start in the summer of 2024, the team has designed and initiated the first phase of a syntropic garden, beginning with careful crop selection and planting the initial rows of fruit trees in collaboration with local associations such as La Forêt Globale. Compost sourced from neighbouring horse owners reflects the project's commitment to circular, community-based practices.

Although final results are still emerging, the early signs are promising; trees are taking root, herbs are beginning to grow, and the soil is responding well, testament to both the preparation and expert guidance received. The structure of the forest garden (a food-producing garden that mimics a natural woodland ecosystem) has been defined, and spring marks a critical moment of emergence to blossom the results.

A growing number of volunteers and trainees are joining these efforts, thanks to other European projects and community initiatives. These newcomers are not only supporting the garden but also contributing to *Catfarm*'s broader regenerative vision, spanning topics from medicinal herbs to internal democracy and decolonial practices.

While balancing multiple activities remains a challenge, the team has found a rhythm that supports steady garden development. The syntropic garden stands as a cornerstone for future training and ecological engagement.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Catfarm is demonstrating how regenerative agriculture, when rooted in a local context and backed by strong values, results in reimagining farming and community life in the Mediterranean. By adapting syntropic agriculture to grape cultivation and other crops, the project is transforming its 1.5 hectares into a biodiverse landscape. Expert support through the C4C initiative proved essential, not only in guiding the syntropic design but in helping the team navigate the complexity of such an ambitious system.

The project's success rests as much on social resilience as on ecological methods. Balancing long-term goals with limited resources has required constant reflection and a shared vision of building a community that challenges extractive systems and embraces degrowth, antiracism, and ecological justice. This clarity of purpose has helped the team avoid burnout and remain rooted in their mission.

One crucial takeaway is the need for projects to be supported technically, financially, and also ideologically — by both recognising and amplifying the alternative vision for living and for land use. Regenerative models need visibility and networks to thrive. Investing in training, online tools, and community exchanges can multiply the reach and impact of such local projects.

According to the project team, the Common Agriculture Policy should fund regenerative land management practices rather than monocultures, so as for agricultural ecosystems to flourish.

Agroforestry centre in German Sieben Linden Ecovillage

Since its inception, *Ecovillage Sieben Linden* has embraced agroforestry, creating an impressive forest garden that sustains its 150 inhabitants. The ecovillage has expanded its efforts, integrating alley cropping on a 17-hectare field, planting fruit trees, and hosting events to promote agroforestry. With the support of the C4C experts, they managed to start a consultation centre to inspire regional adoption in collaboration with the German Agroforestry Federation, and to establish two demonstrator fields in the region.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The *Agroforestry Centre in Sieben Linden* has scaled up, from local innovation to regional influence. Thanks to C4C support, the 'Agroforst Impuls-Büro' was launched with two dedicated employees, marking a key shift from volunteer-led activities to project professionalisation. The team has already planted over 500 trees and initiated two agroforestry systems (integrated tree and crop farming for enhanced biodiversity and soil health) on local farms, laying the foundation for a broader network of ecological land use.

This transition from ecovillage-scale efforts to regional outreach reflects a deepened commitment to transforming agricultural landscapes through tree alleys, biodiversity enhancement, and carbon storage. Monthly roundtables now

bring farmers, experts, and stakeholders together, reinforcing the Centre's role as a regional driver of agroforestry adoption.

Though formal funding procedures posed early challenges, the project team managed to overcome them with the help of the C4C community facilitator. They now aim to influence land management well beyond Sieben Linden, building relationships with farmers and spreading knowledge on sustainable practices. Over the next 2-3 years, the goal is to expand the network and inspire widespread agroforestry implementation throughout the region.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Building on decades of experience in forest gardening (a food-producing gardening technique that mimics the structure and functions of a natural woodland ecosystem), the project has grown into a regional hub for agroforestry. In fact, the German Agroforestry Federation (a Germany-wide agricultural entity) is now the legal body hosting the *Agroforestry Centre in Sieben Linden*, bringing together a wide range of actors around the project. And monthly regional roundtables now engage farmers and other stakeholders, helping to seed agroforestry beyond the ecovillage.

One standout practice is the development of demonstrator fields. Inspired by a study visit, the team came up with the idea of setting up a 'Müsli Field', where oats, hazelnuts, and fruits can grow together. Thanks to the same visit, the team also discovered that some common beliefs, like the idea that nothing grows under walnut trees, are actually myths. They realised that walnut leaves suppress germination (the early sprouting of seeds), but not plant growth, making them ideal for fields planted with seedlings and effective for natural weed control.

A key lesson from the project is that to scale nature-positive practices, small-scale initiatives must be empowered, growing into meaningful, paid roles. A suggested policy innovation is a Europe-wide volunteer-based scheme, enabling skilled individuals of all ages to work on ecological projects.

Aranda Ambassadors: Local Climate Action for a resilient future in northern Spain

Aranda Ambassadors is a local replication of the EU Climate Pact programme. Supported by the community, working groups of local ambassadors would identify key challenges related to energy, mobility, and rewilding, and plan actions around them. Monthly meetings would foster collaboration, while quarterly sessions with city representatives would align efforts and secure support. This initiative aimed to inspire similar projects across Europe, promoting best practices and ecological resilience.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

While initially structured around multiple thematic working groups, the project evolved into a more flexible format focused on inclusive and practical activities. This shift allowed for broader participation and more consistent engagement, particularly valuable in a context with a limited civic participatory culture.

Notable outcomes include collaborative clean-up campaigns and public greening efforts such as planting flowers in street tree pits. A particularly impactful

development has been the foundation of a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiative — now running as an online marketplace and weekly food collection point — connecting local residents with ecological, seasonal produce from small-scale farmers. This not only supports local agriculture and food sovereignty but also fosters healthier, more sustainable lifestyles.

The project has also sparked interest in forming a regional energy community, inspired by another C4C-supported project (#EnergiaParaElPueblo), and has begun reaching new demographics, including migrants and youth.

Although run fully by volunteers, the project's potential alludes to the need for structural support and resources to ensure its long-term sustainability. The experience reinforces key lessons: lasting change takes time, participation thrives on simplicity and inclusivity, and small, consistent actions can collectively lead to systemic transformation.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY IMPACT

Aranda Ambassadors offers a compelling model for localising climate action through citizen engagement and city collaboration. What made the project especially impactful was its focus on low-barrier, high-impact activities, such as beautifying tree pits along city sidewalks. These simple, tactile actions helped residents reconnect with nature and one another, demonstrating that climate action can be both joyful and transformative.

C4C's expert facilitation and peer exchanges catalysed new thinking and the cross-pollination of ideas. The initiative also succeeded in forging an informal but effective partnership with the City Council, an outcome that tends to be quite slow or even stuck. From a policy perspective, removing unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles and allowing informal citizen groups to operate more freely can unleash widespread civic energy.

Another key takeaway is the value of starting with "low-hanging fruit", such as affordable, accessible activities that build trust and traction. People in urban settings are eager to contribute when action is tangible and meaningful, and people in rural areas are looking for an engaged and responsible consumer base. Connecting them is essential to achieve resilient, inclusive, and climate-ready communities.

Biodiversity in the South of Finland: Increasing knowledge and participation

This project engaged local residents in climate action by supporting species sensitive to climate change through tree planting and creating pollinator-friendly areas, promoting environmental awareness and preservation in villages and towns. This led to a total of ten local communities drafting and beginning to implement their own biodiversity plans.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Launched as a catalyst for local climate action, this project exceeded its original ambitions by transforming community interest into concrete biodiversity improvements across ten rural areas, more than three times its initial target. Local groups have developed actionable plans, secured basic funding, and collected tools like seeds, seedlings, and construction materials to begin implementation.

Though the project faced challenges, particularly due to seasonal timing, it proved to be an effective launchpad. Community engagement events, including a successful study tour, sparked new collaborations and helped expand networks across the region. Several groups, not originally part of the planning, joined the initiative after being inspired by early results.

Meaningful connections made during the C4C networking event in Brussels have sparked new transnational ideas and exchanges, with collaboration brewing between partners in Estonia, Poland, and Sweden.

The project embraced a flexible and slow-paced approach. As a LAG (Local Action Group), *Sepra* offered expert guidance, peer support, and financial assistance without imposing rigid timelines, which proved essential too for volunteer-led efforts.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

A pivotal moment was the visit to Kurjen Ekokylä, which inspired local representatives to explore the creation of forest gardens, now being replicated in several communities. This experience reinforced the value of peer learning and seeing successful examples firsthand.

Lessons from this initiative underline the importance of timing and cultural context, highlighting, for instance, the limitations of nature-related activities during Nordic winters, and the need for local-language expertise to facilitate meaningful community dialogue.

Policy recommendations call for stronger, more direct financial support for local-level activities and events, especially those led by grassroots actors. Safeguarding and expanding the LEADER approach across EU funds should be encouraged, ensuring that community-led actions genuinely benefit local people, not just on paper, but in practice. On top of that, there is a need for environmental sustainability and climate action to take a centre stage in CLLD (Community-Led Local Development) policies, which is not always the case.

Biodiversity storytelling in the South of Romania

This project aimed to raise awareness about local biodiversity in *Turnu Măgurele*, focusing on traditional seeds and bird species. By identifying and preserving local seed varieties, encouraging their use, and exploring cross-border best practices, this project sought to enhance local efforts and empower the community to value and sustain their biodiversity assets.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The project sparked a renewed interest in local biodiversity in *Turnu Măgurele*. A highlight was the local biodiversity conference, which gathered over 50 participants, including city officials, and turned a typically formal setting into an open, heartfelt exchange of ideas, aspirations, and community hopes for nature. This milestone helped strengthen relationships with the local administration and laid the foundation for future collaboration.

Driven by local interest and expertise, the initial focus on bird species shifted toward a broader biodiversity narrative, which made the initiative more accessible and impactful. Tangible results include an invigorated community garden

showcasing traditional seed varieties and biodiversity corners, which have sparked local curiosity and conversation.

A cross-border collaboration with a new partner in Bulgaria, Open Mind, is offering promising avenues for continued knowledge exchange. Though constrained by time and financial resources, the team leveraged strong internal communication and local support, such as in-kind donations for events, to deliver meaningful activities at an affordable cost.

In the long term, the project is expected to contribute to increased peer-to-peer awareness and gradual adoption of biodiversity-friendly practices, from public spaces to private gardens. Perhaps most importantly, it reaffirmed that community-building around nature takes time and diversity, but when rooted in joy, celebration, and shared values, it plants the seeds for lasting change.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

The project highlighted the power of direct, immersive experiences in nature to foster deeper environmental awareness. Outdoor activities such as nature walks, gardening sessions, and creative workshops proved especially effective in helping people, particularly children, connect with biodiversity in tangible, memorable ways. By engaging one's senses and sparking curiosity, these practices made learning more impactful than traditional indoor settings.

The project also surfaced the challenge of communicating the complexity of biodiversity. Many equated it simply with "nature" or scenic landscapes, overlooking its systemic role and the need for protection beyond aesthetics. One key takeaway was the importance of clarifying this distinction and anchoring biodiversity in people's everyday surroundings.

Support from C4C and the Climate Pact Secretariat brought credibility, new connections, and educational tools that broadened outreach and boosted participation. Institutional backing made a significant difference in mobilising community interest.

From a policy perspective, the experience underscored the need to better implement existing environmental policies before introducing new ones. Financial support for small, local biodiversity initiatives is vital, but so is political will. Incentivising regenerative practices over conventional agriculture and ensuring that biodiversity is not diluted in long legislative pieces and vague narratives, would go a long way.

Casalina - Building social resilience in Italian Puglia

Through the *Casalina* project, an abandoned farmhouse in Puglia was revitalised, transformed into a green oasis through reforestation, permaculture, and sustainable agriculture. The project then intended to level up its hands-on experience by expanding the organisation and the area of the farm. Engaging the local community through events and supporting migrant workers, it fosters solidarity and environmental stewardship, creating a model for sustainable rural development.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Casalina has grown into a vibrant example of grassroots resilience, with tangible results in ecological regeneration and community engagement. The transformation of degraded land into fertile soil, now supporting fruit-bearing trees and biodiversity, is a clear marker of the project's environmental impact. Workshops with local schools and public events on biodiversity have extended their reach, helping to forge lasting connections within the community. The support to and involvement of migrant workers, despite limited resources, demonstrates the project's commitment to social inclusion.

Although *Casalina* had not originally intended to collaborate with educational institutions, the spontaneous partnerships that emerged proved invaluable, enriching the project and broadening its network. The continued support for and involvement of migrant workers reflects a strong commitment to social inclusion, even in the absence of institutional and financial backing in tackling the seasonal worker housing crisis. Despite these obstacles, the enthusiasm of participants, inspired in part by C4C, has sparked new ambitions for the future.

The group's decision to implement syntropic farming (a regenerative agroforestry approach) marked a key evolution in its agroecological approach. A crowdfunding initiative and regular coordination calls now support this direction. Looking ahead, Casalina aims to inspire neighbouring farmers and to contribute to regional reforestation.

Despite financial hurdles, the project showcases that bottom-up action, rooted in care for the land and solidarity, can drive meaningful change. With the right people and shared motivation, even abandoned soil can flourish again.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

By revitalising an abandoned farmhouse into a thriving site of reforestation, permaculture (agricultural ecosystems sustainable and self-sufficient), and community engagement, the project fosters resilience in both landscape and people. A key takeaway has been the value of nature-based solutions, such as terracing, vegetative strips, and swales (shallow, broad, and vegetated channels designed to collect runoff water), to counteract desertification and improve water retention. Though their full ecological impact may take time to materialise, early lessons underline the importance of tailoring solutions to local conditions and ecosystems.

Community participation has been central to *Casalina*'s success. Events codesigned with locals and the inclusion of migrant workers not only strengthened social ties but also grounded environmental stewardship in daily life. C4C facilitators' support resulted in both technical insight and a broader perspective, enhancing local efforts.

Looking ahead, sustaining such initiatives requires more than just passion. It demands stable financial support and long-term structural backing. Policy frameworks should recognise and empower local actors, offering funding mechanisms to encourage cross-border learning and exchange. *Casalina* reminds that with the right mix of local energy, ecological wisdom, and institutional support, rural regeneration can be both socially and environmentally transformative.

Croatian Grassy Perspectives

Grassy Perspectives is revolutionising Osijek's city parks by promoting sustainable practices and community engagement. By addressing issues like unnecessary tree cutting, over-mowing or the introduction of non-native species, it enhanced biodiversity conservation. Additional activities included educational activities, artistic collaborations, and public events to ensure a deeper connection between residents and their natural spaces, inspiring collective action for a more resilient urban environment.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Grassy Perspectives is setting a new standard for urban ecology in Osijek by bridging grassroots activism with institutional change. While the original focus was on reducing excessive mowing and protecting native biodiversity, the team strategically adapted their approach, prioritising the introduction of urban flower meadows (fields of grasses and wildflowers) as a more tangible, visually impactful entry point.

This pivot led to productive meetings with key municipal actors, including the Deputy Mayor and Unikom (the organisation in charge of garden maintenance). This paved the way for the first-ever urban flower meadow to be incorporated into Osijek, an important milestone for PLANTaža and the city. Also, by embedding ecological care within cultural events like PLANTida and Culture on Asphalt, the initiative fosters a deeper connection between citizens and nature.

Challenges exist, particularly in navigating slow institutional communication, but the team remains undeterred, leveraging timely political opportunities to move the agenda and plans forward.

A C4C study visit to Vienna reinforced the value of participatory urban design, where citizen-led initiatives actively shape climate-positive cityscapes. Inspired by the Vienna Climate Team's successful integration of community input, the *Grassy Perspectives* team returned with renewed motivation and concrete examples to inform local strategies.

This first breakthrough marks an important milestone in shifting Osijek’s approach to park maintenance, from mowing and cleaning to enhancing biodiversity. Educational panels accompanying the meadows aim to challenge outdated perceptions of mowing and highlight the role of biodiversity in climate resilience.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

By reducing over-mowing, promoting native species, and embracing wildflower meadows, the project restored neglected park areas while sparking local curiosity and pride. A key success factor has been its partnership with biology faculty and students, who brought scientific rigour to monitoring biodiversity and lent the initiative academic credibility. Involving young people also ensured fresh energy and future ownership.

The recognition by an EU-level programme like C4C has boosted the project's visibility and legitimacy and has eased communications with city officials, illustrating the value of international validation for local efforts.

One strong lesson is the importance of perseverance and team support. Leading community-based projects alongside daily responsibilities can be exhausting, but

shared enthusiasm and trust within the team kept the project going. Projects like this also benefit from cross-sector collaboration. Connecting artists, ecologists, students, and citizens through inclusive events helped transform environmental advocacy into a shared urban experience.

Municipalities could do more to actively engage in such initiatives. Even minimal hands-on involvement from local governments could unlock a deeper impact. *Grassy Perspectives* proves that biodiversity can thrive in cities, when communities are trusted, equipped, and given room to lead.

C4C KEBAP: A German communal hub

KEBAP (KulturEnergieBunkerAltonaProjekt) would transform a World War II bunker in Hamburg into an urban relic, where members could share an open space for art, culture, and neighbourly interaction, uniting diverse generations and social classes. Everyone would be welcome to use these spaces, including the rooftop garden and the neighbourhood kitchen. *KEBAP*'s innovative economic model would finance cultural spaces with green energy sales, a great example of urban regeneration and social commitment.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

While *KEBAP*'s envisioned rooftop garden — central to promoting biodiversity, education, and climate adaptation — is still in the planning phase, substantial progress could nevertheless be made. Collaboration with a key partner resulted in a detailed development plan for the roof, and an exposé was prepared to secure funding for implementation from 2027 onwards.

Although no planting occurred, expert consultations and site visits to existing rooftop gardens informed the design and helped translate the project's ambitious vision into a series of actionable steps. A temporary roof access is planned for the summer of 2026, paving the way for educational activities and community involvement. Additionally, a university-led course is to further support the planning process in summer 2025, creating synergies between academic insights and grassroots initiatives.

One challenge remains, namely, turning a vision into tangible results, especially within the constraints of timing, funding, and legal frameworks. Nonetheless, the project exemplifies how innovative urban regeneration can foster social cohesion, inspire civic action, and model sustainable development — starting from the roof downwards.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

The transformation of a former bunker rooftop into a multifunctional space, supporting a seed and plant bank, enables a community-based approach to preserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable urban agriculture, while also enhancing local ecological resilience.

Participation in the C4C programme proved a turning point for the project team. The study visits to other rooftop garden initiatives across Europe (such as Energiekas, Volle Grond and Dakakker) offered valuable technical inspiration and boosted confidence. Just as importantly, the support sparked deeper collaboration with other local groups, strengthening the social fabric of the

initiative. C4C also encouraged strategic planning and governance. For instance, one project collaborator is now serving on the *KEBAP* board, helping shape its long-term vision.

On a policy level, *KEBAP*'s journey underlines the importance of accessible micro-grants with minimal bureaucracy to help grassroots projects move from vision into action. A clear recommendation is to allocate dedicated funding from EU programmes like the Green Deal and Cohesion Policy to bottom-up, community-led regeneration initiatives. Local support hubs offering assistance with legal, administrative, and communication tasks can unlock further potential. Most importantly, local actors must have a seat at the table in shaping climate and land-use policy. With the right support, communities can lead the way in regeneration, not just sustainability, embracing equity, creativity, and ecological healing.

El Campillo de la Felicidad: Regenerative biodiversity in southern Spain

El Campillo de la Felicidad sought to enhance biodiversity in private gardens and communal areas while reducing the use of biocides and synthetic fertilisers. Community involvement was central and fostered through permaculture practices, such as the composting of organic waste. Participants received social currency rewards, fostering mutual aid networks and collective garden maintenance.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

El Campillo de la Felicidad has grown into a vibrant model of regenerative urban biodiversity, grounded in collective action and permaculture principles. A central achievement has been the consolidation of composting toward processing household and commercial organic waste, and converting it into valuable fertiliser.

The innovative use of the local social currency has linked participation in composting and workshops with access to seedlings, fertiliser, and training, creating a strong incentive system that now engages a committed group of ten active residents. Through hands-on training and personalised support, more neighbourhood gardens are being transformed with biodiversity-enhancing practices, contributing to healthier soils and microclimates.

Though community mobilisation was initially challenging in a low-participation context, the project evolved, particularly through the C4C framework, from a promoter-led initiative to a shared, resident-driven process. Technical hurdles in waste management were met with experimentation, expert guidance, and peer learning. The initiative now aims to become a local benchmark for circular, low-carbon living, with the potential to replicate the model through the Algarbía en Transición network.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

One standout practice was the implementation of a community-led composting and vermicomposting systems (composting with earthworms), converting organic waste into natural fertiliser for regenerating urban gardens. This approach not only enriched the soil but also served as a powerful educational and community-building tool.

The project team's participation in C4C enabled them tools, visibility, and legitimacy. Accessible, inclusive formats like hands-on workshops and peer learning enabled participation from residents, who were previously rarely involved in environmental projects, fostering a diverse, caring, and empowered community.

Key lessons include the importance of starting small with everyday actions, such as composting or garden regeneration, which can yield profound impacts for biodiversity and social health. The project also highlighted the value of flexible, accessible public spaces for experimentation and co-creation.

Policy recommendations include supporting community-scale initiatives through simplified, recurring funding and adaptive regulations. Public policies should acknowledge care, biodiversity, and circular and regenerative economies (systems that reuse, recycle, and regenerate resources) as pillars of the green transition. Strengthening horizontal networks between local communities across Europe will further amplify these regenerative efforts."

Fresnedillas por el clima: Participatory mapping for climate change adaptation in central Spain

The aim of the project was to strengthen the *Fresnedillas por el clima* initiative through community and intergenerational action focused on maintaining biodiversity and local knowledge in Fresnedillas de la Oliva. With the support of the Polytechnic University of Madrid, a participatory mapping of watercourses and ecosystem services in the municipality was be carried out, which will serve as a basis for future interventions for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The *Fresnedillas por el clima* initiative has sparked progress toward climate adaptation by blending ecological knowledge with community-led action. One of its most tangible results has been the participatory mapping of watercourses and biodiversity-rich areas tied to traditional agroforestry, conducted through an intergenerational process that reconnected residents with their land and each other. This work not only documented valuable environmental data but also revitalised local knowledge and fostered deeper ties between long-time inhabitants and newer community members.

Collaborations with local schools and landowners further grounded the project in place-based learning. A dialogue event with experts and residents initiated promising discussions on land stewardship, paving the way for future regenerative practices. Though funding constraints and reliance on volunteers had the potential of limiting capacity, the project nevertheless achieved a strong foundation for lasting change.

Study visits and exchanges, particularly with Resilience.Earth, offered critical inspiration, highlighting the role of social gatherings, community resilience, and the importance of a bioregional, systemic approach. As a result, the project vision expanded to include potential partnerships across regions.

The initial actions undertaken — both symbolic and practical — lay a foundation upon which a more stable model of environmental management and rural collaboration could be built. Although there is still much to be done, these small steps toward collective forms of territorial care offer positive indications of the transformative potential of community action in the face of climate challenges.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

By engaging elders and youth in the participatory mapping of local watercourses and biodiversity hotspots, the project bridged generations and anchored environmental stewardship in local identity. Insights gained from fieldwork with ecological experts, especially around riparian vegetation and water-related risks, were transformative, fostering a stronger understanding of the interdependence between water systems, biodiversity, and landscape resilience.

C4C played a pivotal role by bridging knowledge gaps and connecting the community with advisors in bioregional planning and sustainable water management. This external input not only sharpened the technical side of the local project but also helped lay the groundwork for future, more integrated climate actions. Access to professional networks and shared experiences across regions enabled the community to evolve from isolated efforts to a more strategic, collaborative approach.

One of the clearest lessons is the value of embedding a bioregional outlook in local decision-making, grounded in traditional knowledge and ecological realities. Land stewardship, when shaped by the people who live and work in a place, becomes a powerful tool for climate adaptation. To scale this kind of work, public policies must ensure stable, long-term funding and recognise coordination time as being essential. Strengthening community autonomy and simplifying funding access will empower local actors to become lasting agents of climate resilience.

Heritage community garden in the Lake Peipsi, Estonia

The *Peipsi Centre for Transboundary Cooperation*, in collaboration with the Peipsimaa Museum, aimed to preserve and promote heritage plants along the shores of Estonia's largest lake. By creating plant beds featuring Peipsi onions, chicory, turnips, and wildflowers, this project sought to conserve local biodiversity and highlight the significance of traditional species. The community was involved in cultivation and education, which fostered a deep connection to the region's natural and cultural heritage.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The *Heritage Community Garden* in Lake Peipsi successfully created plant beds featuring heritage varieties such as Peipsi onions, chicory, and turnips, and thus advanced its tangible aim to conserve traditional plant species. In collaboration with the Peipsimaa Museum, old varieties of berry bushes were planted, and educational gardening activities involved a growing number of local children, deepening intergenerational learning and awareness.

Participants gained practical knowledge about the significance of heritage plants and traditional cultivation methods. This has sparked greater community interest

in biodiversity, with plans underway to expand the garden in the spring of 2025, reinforcing its role as a public space for learning, recreation, and connection to place.

However, sustaining momentum remains a challenge. The local community is still in what Estonian community experts call a “white spot” phase, lacking active leadership, or a tradition of grassroots organisation. Nonetheless, the community is culturally, ethnically, and linguistically rich and diverse.

Despite this, the project has demonstrated that practical, hands-on work can meaningfully connect people to their environment and each other. As more residents engage and future plantings take place, the garden holds promise not only as a conservation effort, but as a seedbed for stronger, self-organised communities.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

This project proposes a compelling model for conserving biodiversity through cultural traditions and local engagement. A key takeaway was the value of combining traditional knowledge with sustainable techniques, evident, for example, in using raised beds inspired by permaculture (a design system mimicking natural ecosystems), and applying environmentally friendly pest control and fertilisation methods. The community learned both about in situ (on-farm) conservation and seed-sharing among home gardeners, showing that biodiversity preservation can be a living, participatory practice.

C4C proved particularly valuable in connecting the project team with like-minded initiatives across Europe. Peer learning and thematic expert advice helped generate fresh ideas, secure inspiration, and identify new funding paths. This support also encouraged deeper reflection on how to integrate educational, recreational, and heritage values into one vibrant public space.

Crucially, the project highlighted that youth often lack opportunities to connect with local environmental heritage. Engaging youth through hands-on gardening and storytelling resulted in a sense of place and stewardship. The project learned that documenting the community-shared plant histories would be meaningful and more impactful.

One policy recommendation includes the need to strengthen local capacity by allowing communities to identify sources of support based on their needs, enabling more resilient, rooted initiatives.

Hungarian Auróra Climate Garden

Auróra Climate Garden in Budapest's 8th district is a green infrastructure model based on reforesting and green composting. This inclusive urban space is open to all, from youth and surrounding minorities to local businesses, visitors or civic groups. Run by volunteers, the project boosted community engagement through the provision of ecosystem services, workshops and tailored advice. Thanks to an inspiring film, the project increases local awareness and collective commitment toward climate resilience.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The completion of a short documentary film and the successful organisation of a 3-day Pocket Forest festival marked key milestones, bringing together residents, youth, and local policymakers around themes of climate resilience and reforestation. Participation has more than doubled, with a strengthened volunteer base and growing visibility. Members are now being invited to speak at conferences and have been consulted on two new community garden initiatives.

While the original mission focused on demonstrating sustainable green infrastructure, growing threats of real estate development have shifted the team's focus toward climate policy advocacy. The project now plays a more active role in calling for a robust municipal climate strategy. Despite time constraints, especially for volunteers, the team used C4C's support to better structure internal roles, leading to a more sustainable model of community-led action.

Looking forward, the project aims to build on its growing influence to protect the garden long-term and serve as a model for urban climate adaptation.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

By combining hands-on ecological solutions like food forests with permaculture designs (ecoforestry systems that are sustainable and self-sufficient) with storytelling and civic dialogue, *Auróra Climate Garden* demonstrates how even small urban plots can play a significant role in cultural and environmental planning at the municipal and city scale.

The project has created a welcoming, multifunctional green area that engages youth, minorities, and civic groups through biodiversity, composting, and education.

With support from C4C, the garden implemented a tailored management plan for its invasive species already present to rehabilitate the highly degraded area without disrupting nearby ecosystems. A 20-page expert report and site visit by the C4C expert equipped the community with a long-term strategy to build soil health, enhance biodiversity, and protect the rare tree species present. The learning process included a visit to the expert's own forest site, enriching community knowledge through peer exchange.

A key lesson is how climate action in cities requires "forever green" spaces. Local environmental land-use plans may provide vital ecosystem services, but can also become significant resources in climate strategies, when land is dedicated to

securing sequestered carbon from the atmosphere indefinitely using fully nature-based solutions. Waste recovery and community effort reduce costs.

On the policy level, supporting these efforts means recognising the unpaid work of local leaders. Providing stipends or grants to committed volunteers would stabilise long-term stewardship. *Auróra*'s experience shows how community-led green infrastructure can build both climate resilience and social cohesion in urban spaces.

Little Wild: Sustainable living models in the French Pyrénnées

Little Wild is a home and a learning centre that models an ecological lifestyle connected to nature. Through experiential education and gatherings, it helps people reconnect with nature and work towards supporting biodiversity and ecological living. The project aimed at fostering ecological rewilding, sustainable lifestyles, ancestral crafts, and cultural shifts away from exploitative systems.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

A key success has been the co-creation of a shared vision for sustainable living grounded in values of ecological integrity and resilience. The team has translated these principles into action by implementing low-tech solutions like swales (shallow, broad, and vegetated channels designed to collect runoff water), forest gardens (food-producing gardens that mimic natural woodland ecosystems), and natural ponds, while building community governance systems and hands-on learning programmes. Over the past months, multiple participants have returned to deepen their involvement or began replicating similar models elsewhere.

The site's careful selection, based on rich biodiversity and local openness to alternative living, has enhanced its capacity to act as a demonstrator model. While the project's core mission remains intact, climate variability has challenged timelines, with erratic winters and heat waves affecting planting and ecosystem rhythms.

Looking ahead, the team aims to expand access to more land, replicate successful biodiversity solutions, and support neighbours in doing the same. With continued care, *Little Wild* is proving that change begins with practical action and develops into a cultural shift that coexists in harmony with nature.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

By transforming their site in the *French Pyrénées* into a hub for sustainable living and rewilding, they have implemented simple solutions such as gravity-fed water systems, swales, dead hedges (natural sustainable structures created to provide habitat for wildlife), and biodiversity ponds, that both reduce environmental impact and inspire replication. The project has already influenced neighbours and strengthened ties with local authorities, who now seek their input on sustainability initiatives.

A key lesson is that local ecological action is most effective when rooted in strong community relationships and mutual learning. The importance of geographic and cultural proximity in support structures was highlighted as a result of the project. Additionally, localised facilitation, both linguistically and logistically, significantly enhances impact and engagement.

According to the team, EU programmes like LEADER and Erasmus+ should create dedicated, flexible streams for community-led sustainability work, designed with and for local actors. Simplified, recurring micro-grants and decentralised administration would better meet the needs of these agile initiatives, allowing them to thrive.

Little Wild shows that when communities are empowered to lead with creativity, care, and connection to place, they can become catalysts for a more regenerative and inclusive future.

Manas Garden: A Hungarian habitat conservation project

Manas Garden is a 90-hectare space dedicated to ecological restoration, including the creation of a natural water dam, controlling for invasive species. Involving residents, school groups, and volunteers, different events would be hosted, such as music festivals, educational programmes and eco-architecture camps. Overall, the project sought to enhance biodiversity and preserve valuable wetlands, making it a model for community-driven ecological resilience.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Manas Garden has made tangible advances in ecological restoration through the successful creation of a natural water retention dam. This intervention, achieved with the support of local volunteers and experts, has already slowed water flow across the site, enhancing the wetland's capacity to retain moisture and helping to safeguard the alder marsh habitat from drying out. Though originally focused on a specific area, the project evolved to incorporate wider water management strategies, thanks to valuable input from thematic experts.

Community engagement remained central to the project, with the involvement of local and external water management professionals during site visits, whose expressed interest in continuing community-based efforts marks a promising sign for future collaboration. Despite some internal tensions that were resolved thanks to facilitation to maintain focus and cohesion, the team successfully implemented core interventions and strengthened community resilience.

As Hungarian laws currently limit communal land ownership, and existing funding mechanisms often overlook small, diverse, community-led initiatives, there is a need for more flexible and inclusive funding schemes (such as the LIFE programme). Still, the project demonstrates that with local commitment, expert support, and facilitation, meaningful restoration is possible.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Manas Garden exemplifies how low-tech, community-driven approaches can yield meaningful results in habitat restoration. One standout practice was the use of simple water management techniques, like natural dam creation, which not only improved local conditions but also became a hands-on learning opportunity. These solutions proved highly engaging for young volunteers, showing that when restoration is tied to purpose and place, participation follows.

The project also embraced systems thinking, turning a local biodiversity issue into an opportunity for wider ecological learning. As a result of C4C's expert support, the community was introduced to Nature-Based Solutions (interventions that work with natural processes to address environmental challenges) and encouraged to view their land within the larger watershed. This shift to a holistic perspective considering water, soil, carbon, and biodiversity cycles laid the groundwork for more resilient, long-term stewardship.

From a policy perspective, *Manas Garden* highlights the importance of supporting bioregional networks, and collaborative platforms that connected and empowered smaller initiatives. Such networks need tailored funding, technical guidance, and visibility. Initiatives such as the Habitat Restoration Programme

should expand their scope to better include and elevate grassroots actors. With the right backing, these local stewards can become powerful agents of landscape regeneration and environmental education across Europe.

Native orchard and wetland creation in Hungary

The *Hungarian Agroecology Network Association (HANA)* focuses on practical solutions in response to the ecological crisis, using methods like permaculture and regenerative development. In Kerkakutas, the plan was to plant native fruit trees and create wetlands, engaging the municipality, local NGOs, and residents. HANA aimed to foster a sustainable human-nature relationship and inspire regional participation in their health promotion efforts and environmental and educational transformative projects.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

In Kerkakutas, the Hungarian Agroecology Network Association (HANA)'s pilot initiative has taken meaningful steps toward restoring ecological balance and fostering local engagement through regenerative practices. Initially focused on planting native fruit trees, the project evolved into the creation of a more diverse forest garden, integrating exotic species and small wetlands to increase biodiversity and demonstrate resilient land use strategies.

By involving young people, the project not only expanded its outreach but also sparked growing interest among the next generation. Collaboration with local authorities and residents laid the groundwork for long-term partnerships, while new ties with the Biovrt permaculture and educational farm in Croatia and the Austrian Forest Garden Institute brought valuable knowledge and regional inspiration.

The project's evolving vision reflects both its adaptive approach and strong community backing. While access to specialised plant species proved costly and logistically complex, this challenge highlighted the importance of diversifying activities. Educational initiatives are now positioned as essential components to the forest garden, enhancing social value and financial viability.

In the coming years, the maturing garden is expected to yield both literal and educational fruits, providing food, learning opportunities, and a replicable model of sustainable living. The project also helped reinforce a growing network of alternative agriculture projects in Hungary.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

This project highlighted how small-scale, nature-based interventions, like planting native fruit trees and creating micro-wetlands, can spark broader environmental awareness and community cohesion. Selecting biodiversity-enhancing species also revealed ecological benefits previously unknown to the community. Even non-native plants were carefully introduced to increase adaptability in local gardens, balancing ecological goals with practical outcomes.

What made the project truly impactful was the way knowledge transfer and community involvement were woven together. Thanks to the external facilitators and thematic experts provided through C4C, the project team gained crucial organisational and planning skills that elevated their capacity to act. Beyond

technical input, the external support gave credibility to local efforts and helped foster trust among stakeholders.

One of the strongest takeaways is the need to invest in grassroots coordination. While expert input is essential, many communities struggle to find time and funding to plan and implement projects. Small grants, especially when paired with mentoring and local facilitation, can unlock a wave of creative, meaningful action led by local communities. More flexible support schemes, including training in grant writing and network-building, would thus amplify such efforts. Even modest investments can lay the foundation for long-term environmental stewardship at the local level and, at the same time, empower communities to steer the process themselves.

Nature-based solutions in Romania to build climate resilient local communities

The *Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve* is highly vulnerable to climate-induced droughts and floods. In response, local communities have developed ecological restoration projects, turning agricultural lands into wetlands, thus bolstering biodiversity, sustainable tourism, and fisheries. This successful model would be applied to develop financial mechanisms, governance adaptations, and stakeholder engagement, driving a shift towards a climate-smart economic framework.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

In *Romania's Danube Delta*, efforts to restore former wetlands and build climate-resilient communities gained traction through C4C. The project supported the transition from drained agricultural lands back to biodiverse, community-managed wetlands. This shift enhanced local livelihoods through sustainable tourism, fisheries, and conservation, while improving resilience to climate-induced droughts and floods. The project team published a study assessing the implementation of Nature-Based Solutions (NbS, using natural processes to address societal challenges), helping anchor the case for broader policy reform and new governance models at the regional level.

One major challenge identified was the tension between EU subsidies promoting agriculture, including land drainage, and the EU's own climate and biodiversity goals. Addressing this lack of coherence became central to the project's advocacy efforts. Lessons from similar forestry-based NbS in Europe were valuable for adapting governance and financial strategies suited to the Delta's unique conditions.

Progress was made in developing tailored financial mechanisms to incentivise wetland restoration, though, wider institutional support is still needed. Community engagement remained strong, supported by inclusive discussions and facilitated through the C4C network. Looking ahead, the project aims to scale this model, supported by climate-smart governance and EU-aligned incentives that reflect the ecological and economic value of wetlands.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

By restoring former agricultural lands into wetlands, the initiative is enhancing biodiversity, supporting sustainable fisheries and tourism, and creating a model for climate-smart development that is both ecological and community-led.

One of the most valuable practices was aligning ecological restoration with local identity and long-term economic interests. The vision is clear: transform drained lands into community-managed, resilient ecosystems. Drawing inspiration from forestry-based NbS models elsewhere in Europe, the project adapted strategies to fit the unique wetland dynamics of the Delta.

A key lesson is the importance of designing financial mechanisms that reflect local realities. Current EU subsidies often incentivise intensive agriculture, counterproductive in this fragile ecosystem. Policy must evolve to support wetland restoration through targeted funding, reducing subsidies for harmful practices while promoting regenerative ones.

The project also underscored the value of stakeholder engagement and cross-sector governance. Regional endorsement of new governance models showed that change is possible when driven from the ground up. With the right policy support, the *Danube Delta* can become a flagship for nature-based climate resilience in Europe.

School in the Orchard – In Romania we work with nature!

School in the Orchard – We Work with Nature! is an exciting project connecting urban Bucharest and rural Buzau through holistic ecological education. With a history of promoting plant-based local food, it involves creating community gardens and compost stations in schools. Through its focus on education and practice, the project aims to train 150 eco-leaders and engage 900 children in hands-on activities, fostering healthy habits and regenerative practices to strengthen community bonds.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

School in the Orchard – We Work with Nature! connects urban Bucharest with rural Buzău through ecological education rooted in practice and community. Originally centred around school gardens and composting, the project has evolved with a stronger focus on the management of their rural social garden.

A key result has been redesigning the Zoriza social garden using climate-resilient, drought-tolerant species sourced from nearby regions.

The team has succeeded in fostering a stronger sense of purpose around the social garden and engaging local stakeholders in both urban and rural sites. A growing network of committed volunteers, educators, and partners signals a shift toward lasting collaboration.

While the vision for inclusive, regenerative agriculture (a farming approach that aims to improve soil health and restore ecosystems) remains strong, sustaining this work posed some challenges, especially the financial burden of staffing the garden to grow healthy food for vulnerable children. Relying largely on voluntary efforts, the project team now seeks consistent funding and broader community engagement to ensure a longer-term impact.

Looking ahead, the project aims to install nature-based infrastructures in both Bucharest and Buzău, redesign the garden with resilient species, and engage over 3,000 children and adults in hands-on eco-education.

The initiative demonstrates how civic-driven, small-scale projects can regenerate landscapes and minds: one garden, one child, one season at a time

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

This initiative demonstrates how nature-based, low-tech, and science-informed solutions like school gardens and composting are both effective and scalable when rooted in community collaboration.

By combining practical education with ecological restoration, the project fosters hands-on learning, builds resilience, and nurtures healthier food systems. The creation of a clearer long-term vision for the Zoriza garden was developed with expert input and cross-border inspiration. This knowledge exchange not only enriched local biodiversity but also inspired future design plans.

Thanks to C4C, valuable partnerships with schools, experts, and municipalities emerged, while volunteer-driven efforts expanded capacity. The guidance of national and thematic experts helped refine goals and encouraged deeper community building. The purchase of edible trees from Bulgaria marked a symbolic and strategic step in realising the project's regenerative vision.

Policy recommendations include prioritising funding for regenerative, low-tech solutions, embedding community participation from the start, and recognising the educational value of hands-on ecological work. Longer-term funding (3-5 years) is needed to grow, validate, and scale up such projects. Recognition tools, like badges or status for successful initiatives, could further boost visibility and support. National and EU-level actors should actively connect with and help scale community-led models. Moreover, these initiatives could serve as future resilience hubs, preparing for climate impacts through education, infrastructure, and community care.

Skyttorp: A Swedish public forest garden

This project focused on agroforestry and forest gardening, offering locals free learning opportunities to plant and propagate but also to learn about nature and biodiversity. Involving local schools and the church, it connected children with nature from an early age. The *Skyttorp* garden is a community-created space for social gatherings, biodiversity, food production, resilience and education.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Initially aiming to create a forest garden (a food-producing garden that mimics the structure and functions of a natural woodland ecosystem), *Skyttorp*'s approach evolved to better suit the peatland soil. The focus instead shifted toward nature conservation, with plans to restore and manage the land's natural habitat.

Local involvement has been key, with residents contributing through small but meaningful actions, offering spare materials, transport help, or taking responsibility for specific areas on the site. The community has been involved in workshops and planning sessions, creating an inclusive space where even those less obviously connected to environmental efforts have felt valued and included. Additionally, creative

funding solutions like small grants and tree sponsorships were proposed as a means to help the project move forward.

While challenges remain, especially in securing more time and funding, the project has made notable progress. The next steps include formalising a management plan for the land, with hopes of consolidating *Skyttorp* into a site for local learning, environmental education, and as an inspiring example of community-led climate action.

The main lesson learned has been the importance of flexibility and making the process enjoyable, ensuring long-term resilience even when the project evolves or encounters setbacks. The enthusiasm and sense of ownership within the community remain a driving force for its success.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY IMPACT

Expert advice encouraged a more ecologically sensitive approach, adapting the plan to protect the area's delicate peatland. This flexibility has opened the door to exploring new opportunities, including wildflower meadow restoration (restoring fields composed of grasses and wildflowers) and workshops in ancient woodland crafts like coppicing and hedge-laying (traditional methods of managing trees and shrubs to promote biodiversity).

Activities ranged from habitat planning and soil analysis to community celebrations and ecological skill-building, creating a deeply rooted 'connection to place' among locals of all ages. A key lesson was the importance of expert guidance and dedicated time to move from idea to implementation, something made possible through the support of C4C.

Skyttorp underlines the need to support environmental action at the grassroots. Recommendations include reducing taxes on locally produced organic food, integrating this food into public institutions like schools, and offering structural support, such as local guides and administrative aid, to free community groups from bureaucratic burdens. Above all, long-term funding for local changemakers (not just projects) could unlock lasting impact and creativity.

The Green Collective for Plant Resources: Community composting in Northern Romania

In Malin, Transylvania, where traditional small-scale farming coexists with rich natural ecosystems, the *Green Collective for Plant Resources* sought to promote sustainable waste management practices by transforming plant residues into valuable resources. Through educational workshops, community engagement, and simple practical solutions (shared composting spaces, expert guidance), the initiative seeks to encourage composting, reduce harmful waste burning, and foster regenerative agriculture.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

This project has laid important groundwork toward transforming plant waste management in Malin and beyond by initiating a network focused on building relationships with local administrations, farmers, companies, and waste management actors. Tangible results such as shared composting spaces or widespread behavioural changes are ongoing, but the early connections mark a significant step forward in a region where open burning of biomass remains a common practice.

As the project unfolded, the focus naturally evolved from purely technical or logistical concerns toward a broader engagement with local communities and authorities. Study visits and informal exchanges allowed participants to explore concrete examples of agroecological practices, particularly those involving composting and low-tech solutions. These experiences inspired several individuals to consider new approaches and strengthened links with practitioners who share similar cultural and environmental contexts. This shift — from top-down planning to community-rooted learning — has helped foster a sense of shared responsibility and increased the project's potential for long-term impact.

Challenges persist, particularly in gaining legitimacy and effectively communicating with both residents and decision-makers. Yet creative, community-friendly approaches, such as organising events around shared meals, are helping to bridge these gaps.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

By promoting composting and sustainable biomass use, the project is encouraging a shift away from harmful practices like open burning of plant residues and toward regenerative agriculture, a farming approach that aims to improve soil health and restore ecosystems. What makes the initiative stand out is its focus on practical, community-led solutions, such as shared composting spaces, and its emphasis on co-learning through workshops and expert guidance.

Support from C4C helped elevate the collective's visibility and connect it to a broader European framework. Although navigating the project came with challenges, it nevertheless became a stepping stone for deeper engagement with regional institutions and sparked new collaborations, including with waste management authorities and local governance. These relationships laid the foundation for longterm community resilience.

A key takeaway is the need for clear legal frameworks and accessible infrastructure to support decentralised composting systems. Shared ownership models, policy alignment with ecological realities, and practical, context-specific training are essential. To truly empower rural communities, funding must be long-term, accessible, and supported by simplified procedures. A more participatory form of governance, where local actors help shape decisions, could unlock the full potential of grassroots environmental action.

Circular and resource-efficient economy

Agoras Climáticas: Engaging communities through climate assemblies in southeastern Spain

In Alicante, Murcia, and Malaga, *Climate Assemblies* are being set up to educate and train various actors. A number of workshops aimed at targeting the administration, trade unions, NGOs and citizens across sectors such as education, health, transport, food and tourism to generate specific recommendations. Civic engagement is ensured through random participants' selection and deliberative processes, which will translate into community-driven, scientifically informed proposals that can influence policy.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Ágoras Climáticas began with the ambitious goal of fostering democratic climate dialogue through citizen assemblies across Alicante, Murcia, and Málaga. What started as a concept under the C4C framework has since evolved into a recognised and expanding movement, grounded in community participation and deliberative processes. The project successfully launched a series of Climate Assemblies, which is increasingly perceived as a credible method for shaping local climate policy.

Though financial constraints and organisational hurdles posed initial challenges, the team navigated these through personal contributions, strong facilitation, and strategic partnerships. The initiative's name is now widely recognised beyond its founding associations.

C4C acted as a springboard: the Assemblies have inspired spin-off initiatives such as La UA va al cole and Social Lab with the University of Alicante. The project continues to evolve organically, adapting to changing audiences and societal needs while staying anchored in its original mission: raising awareness and enabling just, community-driven climate action.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Ágoras Climáticas has demonstrated how deliberative democracy can be a powerful engine for climate action. By bringing together citizens, local administrations, and sectoral actors through Climate Assemblies, the project has strengthened civic participation while building scientifically grounded, community-driven climate proposals.

With support from the C4C initiative, the project adopted innovative facilitation, mediation, and participatory tools tailored to address climate challenges. The role of the C4C facilitator proved especially transformative, helping the team refine audience targeting, connect with experts, explore different funding opportunities (including alliances with the University of Alicante and EU-funded projects), and expand their vision through strategic partnerships. As a result, *Ágoras Climáticas* not only deepened local democratic processes but also helped lay the groundwork for future assemblies and broader participatory frameworks.

The experience highlighted the need to move beyond symbolic participation. For climate action to be truly effective, local communities must be empowered to co-create solutions alongside their municipalities, particularly in areas such as circular economy and climate adaptation.

Policy lessons emerging from this project include institutionalising Citizens' Assemblies as a channel to translate grassroots insight into national policy, linking expert advice with lived local realities. *Agoras Climáticas* reminds us that informed, empowered communities are key to a just and resilient transition.

Ai 300 scalini: Cultivating community and culture in an Italian public garden

Ai 300 Scalini is an 'agri-cultural' space in the hills near Bologna. This community-driven area intertwines cultural and social activities and sustainable agriculture. It presents a regenerated vineyard, community oven, performance stage, greenhouse, orchard, apiary, rainwater harvesting system, and renewable energy production among other features. Visitors are encouraged to reach the space on foot, and by promoting shared practices, the project thrives on community care, participation and social interaction.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Originally envisioned as an integrated urban hub promoting biodiversity and social participation, the project took a significant leap forward thanks to C4C's support.

One of the most meaningful outcomes was the internal strengthening of the community itself. Through dedicated time and expert facilitation, the group collectively revisited its values, structure, and future direction, resulting in a renewed charter, clarified internal processes, and a more cohesive team. This groundwork is expected to help ensure sustainable development, as both current and future members share a clearer vision.

While the initial focus included expanding physical systems like composting areas and renewable energy, the group shifted towards foundational planning and water management. A comprehensive regeneration plan for the community space's water systems, designed with expert input, is now underway with funding through a New European Bauhaus call already secured for its initial implementation.

Looking ahead, the team expects to bring these designs to life over the next two years, further reinforcing the site's ecological and educational potential.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Ai 300 Scalini illustrates how a community-led approach can regenerate urban spaces by blending culture, ecology, and social inclusion.

A key achievement has been the collaborative design of a comprehensive water management system, created with support from C4C. Though not yet implemented, the process nevertheless proved essential; it resulted in shaping a solid proposal that secured funding through the New European Bauhaus –

Connect 2025 call. This outcome underscores the importance of dedicating time to participatory design, even when resources are scarce.

C4C provided expert guidance and opened new networks for learning and exchange. The thematic expert's visit offered practical insights, and the project's involvement in a community pathway process (a collaborative, community-based approach to address social needs) exceeded expectations, revealing strong public interest and resulting in clear, actionable ideas for future development.

Lessons learned include the value of investing in environmental education, particularly for youth, and recognising that sometimes, what may seem like a bureaucratic process can be a catalyst for innovation. Policies should prioritise collaboration with bottom-up initiatives, offering flexible frameworks and meaningful support. Projects like *Ai 300 Scalini* show that when communities are empowered, urban spaces can flourish ecologically, socially, and creatively.

Bicis para todas (Bikes for everyone): A recovery project in the Spanish province of Valencia

By salvaging discarded bikes, *Bicis para todas* provides vulnerable individuals with essential transportation, promoting social inclusion and reducing waste. So far, it has recovered and refurbished over 1,000 bicycles, embodying sustainability, solidarity, and sustainable mobility. The project is run by volunteers, and it includes a social workshop in the Xenillet-Torrent neighbourhood, addressing broader community issues such as education, social exclusion, and environmental awareness.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Bicis para todas is a compelling example of how circular economy principles can be translated into impactful, community-driven action, transforming waste into opportunity for individuals facing economic vulnerability. What began as a circular economy initiative has evolved into a community project addressing mobility, inclusion, and social resilience. The Xenillet-Torrent workshop has become more than a repair space: it hosts a children's programme that has become a crucial entry point for mothers seeking connection, mutual support, and a safe community environment.

While originally focused on sustainable mobility, the project has had to adapt to complex social realities. Through direct dialogue with participants and a growing network of collaborators, it has developed creative ways to meet these evolving needs. A key shift has been the realisation of the importance of consolidating operations structurally, such as hiring local staff and expanding workshop capacity, to sustain and scale its impact.

Though official data on social impact is still limited, the project's social footprint is increasingly being recognised. Nevertheless, challenges persist, particularly the insecurity surrounding the workshop's physical space, provided by the municipality, but not guaranteed. Despite this, the team remains committed to the project's long-term consolidation.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

By recovering and refurbishing over 1,000 discarded bicycles, the project has not only provided sustainable mobility solutions to vulnerable groups in Castellón, Spain, but also fostered social inclusion, skill-building, and environmental awareness.

The project's strength lies in its integration of repair, reuse, and solidarity. Bicycle repair workshops, run with the help of local staff and volunteers, provide both practical services and a platform for deeper engagement, from schools to social inclusion workshops. Valuable lessons were drawn from exchanges with similar initiatives, including strategies around waste management, logistics, and the creation of strong project narratives. Ideas like 'repair cafés' and 'libraries of things' (shared community spaces for borrowing tools or appliances) were also brought up during a study visit to Biciclot and Caixa d'eines i feines.

A key lesson is that circular economy projects can bridge multiple policy areas — social, environmental, and economic — and must be reflected in holistic, connected public frameworks. With proper support, community-led initiatives like this one not only fill critical gaps, but they also embody what effective public policy can look like when rooted in real lives and local knowledge.

Circle Centre: An engaged Swedish Library of Things

In Lund, *Circle Centre* has blossomed into a vibrant community hub, offering a 'Library of Things' where residents can borrow rather than buy infrequently used items, such as tools and outdoor equipment. They are in the process of creating a resource bank and toolkit to help communities share tools and resources. This project supports a sharing economy, encouraging sustainable consumption and reducing waste at both neighbourhood and municipal levels.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Circle Centre began with the aim of supporting the growth of Libraries of Things (LoTs) and cultivating a culture of shared resources. Over the course of the project, the team not only laid the foundation for a Europe-wide network and resource bank but also made significant strides in strengthening their own organisation.

Participation in C4C offered a transformative boost. Expert guidance and study visits helped the team clarify what a sustainable LoT needs, from operational tools to partnerships. This process allowed them to better define what a useful tool bank for others ought to include. They have since applied for funding to support the creation of an online resource hub and are developing an international network for LoTs, with the ambition of establishing a formal umbrella organisation within the coming years.

Internally, the project marked a turning point: *Circle Centre* transitioned from a volunteer-led initiative to employing its first staff member. This new resource, supported by local partnerships and expert input, signifies continued growth and stability.

Initially focused on helping others, the team discovered how much development they needed themselves; a learning journey that highlighted the value of shared

knowledge. Time constraints remained a challenge, but the experience reinforced a core belief, that collaboration and mutual support are key to thriving circular communities.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

A Library of Things is a practical and engaging model where residents borrow rather than buy tools, equipment, and other infrequently used items. This simple yet powerful approach encourages sustainable consumption, reduces waste, and fosters a culture of sharing.

Circle Center wants to expand their current local scale by developing a pan-European network and toolkit to support the creation and growth of similar initiatives. By sharing not only material resources but also operational models and knowledge via virtual means, the project promotes a holistic vision of the sharing economy.

With the guidance of C4C experts, the team refined their organisational model, increasing the potential for both local impact and long-term sustainability. A key takeaway is the importance of building strong support systems for grassroots initiatives. Many community organisations bring significant social and environmental value, yet face financial and logistical challenges, particularly around access to space and long-term stability.

Policy recommendations include encouraging municipalities to provide access to underused public buildings, creating tailored local grants, and investing in infrastructure that supports circular, community-driven projects. One concrete idea would be to establish dedicated municipal grant lines earmarked solely for supporting local NGOs and social enterprises. These funds would ensure municipalities have the means to directly invest in community innovation and resilience.

Empowering such local initiatives through funding, space, and supportive policies strengthens a circular economy, but also builds more connected, resourceful, and sustainable communities

EcoFashion 94: Pioneering French sustainable fashion

Born from the REconomy initiative, *EcoFashion 94* aimed to reduce pollution and greenhouse gases from excessive clothing consumption. This project engaged citizens through a network of repair shops, second-hand stores, co-design workshops, and sustainable fashion clubs. By involving the local community in prototype testing and awareness-raising activities, EcoFashion 94 is fostering a culture of sustainable fashion in Val-de-Marne.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Reinvigorated by the involvement of local and thematic experts, this project gained traction through awareness campaigns such as the "Sustainable Dressing Challenge" and "Become an Ambassador". These initiatives reached seven groups of high school students, using interactive tools to highlight the impact of fast fashion.

A turning point was the study visit to Paris-based initiatives — Plateau Fertile, Les Secondes Mains, and La Textilerie — which offered hands-on inspiration for both managers and recycling centre volunteers. Experiencing real-world

models deepened participants' understanding of the potential and scalability of local action, fostering renewed motivation across the network.

Prototypes for repair, resale, and awareness are now being tested locally, with the ambition to expand successful models across the county. While core objectives remain unchanged, strategic adaptations were necessary, for example, shifting awareness group strategies toward more dynamic outreach, and acknowledging that word-of-mouth alone was not sufficient to promote repair services.

Challenges persist, notably in mobilising members consistently and refining project components such as fashion makeover expertise. However, these hurdles have clarified where external support and communication must improve.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

EcoFashion 94, by embedding design thinking throughout the project, prioritised empathy, user needs, and continuous learning, ensuring that solutions remained relevant and community-rooted. Such a reflexive approach, though demanding, resulted in more durable and meaningful outcomes.

The initiative showed that small-scale actions such as clothing repair, secondhand fashion clubs, or co-design workshops can have a big social and environmental impact when backed by trust and local engagement. However, such grassroots innovations need better systemic support. The project's experience highlighted a common shortfall: a lack of flexible small-scale funding and deeper cooperation within local political structures.

A key lesson is the importance of treating social innovation not just as an idea, but as a process that requires space, time, and resources. Funding mechanisms should adapt to the needs of non-commercial initiatives, with simplified procedures and recognition of applicants' unique value. Stronger links between European institutions and local associations, bypassing overly business-oriented regional structures, could accelerate this shift.

Les Immersives: Guiding French youth towards green careers

Les Immersives aims at helping young people from vulnerable neighbourhoods find a career in the green sector. Through meetings and immersive experiences at Bordeaux's creative reuse centre, youth explored professions in ecological transition, sustainable development, and the circular economy. Supported by a network of social players and local professionals, this project addressed the need for career guidance amidst global environmental challenges, aiming to boost self-confidence.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Despite a hesitant start, *Les Immersives* quickly gained traction, far surpassing its own initial expectations. Thanks to strong collaboration with local youth organisations and a growing network of partners, the project successfully involved a diverse group of young participants, including youth with disabilities and NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) through immersion experiences in green jobs and sustainable practices. Demand for participation

exceeded capacity at times, with waiting lists forming during peak phases, demonstrating the project's relevance and appeal.

The initiative not only broadened career horizons for youth from vulnerable areas but also enhanced their self-confidence and employability. Early successes prompted deeper engagement from local professionals and sparked renewed international collaboration, including an Erasmus+ application with a Spanish partner that may expand the project's impact.

While funding gaps pose a significant challenge requiring the team to stretch internal resources, the commitment and adaptability of the organisers ensured that all planned activities were implemented. Recruitment in high-priority districts remained difficult, yet stronger partnerships proved key in reaching additional and deeper into local communities.

More than just a guidance initiative, *Les Immersives* has become a model of grassroots resilience and collective effort. The project reaffirmed that lasting change often stems from strong community ties and shared determination.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Les Immersives demonstrates how hands-on, community-rooted initiatives can unlock green career paths for young people often excluded from traditional employment pipelines. By focusing on practical experiences in circular economy, craftsmanship, and sustainability, the project helped the youth involved discover meaningful professional direction while boosting their confidence and self-worth.

One key insight was that environmental awareness often followed, rather than led, their interest in career exploration. This finding highlights the importance of starting with youth aspirations and integrating ecological values gradually. Tangible engagement, working alongside professionals and exploring real workplaces, proved far more impactful than abstract education alone.

Support from the C4C network offered strategic benefits: an external perspective on the project's ecosystem, expert advice toward long-term planning, and crucial visibility among youth-focused networks. The project's success also underlines the importance of strong local partnerships and ongoing communication — working closely with public institutions, youth services, and local councils created a supportive framework that ensured deeper reach and continuity.

For future policy development, community-led centres, like Bordeaux's creative reuse centre, offer a highly adaptable model delivering across multiple fronts: job creation, ecological transition, social cohesion, and education. Streamlined funding access, operational support, and tailored expert guidance could further scale up their impact significantly.

Urban(eat)a: Turning urban waste into delicious food in Spain

In Barcelona, a project called *Urban(eat)a* empowered citizens to harvest edible fruits from urban trees, collaborating with local governments and community groups. Gleaning events and transformation of fruits into products like marmalade and olive oil, not only contribute to alleviating food waste by making

use of unwanted food but also foster community engagement and sustainable practices.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Urban(eat)a has rapidly evolved from a grassroots initiative into a structured, scalable model for tackling urban food waste in Catalonia. The project has expanded both its reach and impact: Two local councils have already secured funding to continue gleaning activities, while the core team has guaranteed support to extend operations for at least three more years. 10 additional municipalities have joined the network, and 2025 marked the launch of the 'Urban(eat)a Community', a platform aiming to bring together councils across the region around food loss prevention and circular economy practices.

Rather than shifting direction, the project has matured, gaining structure, visibility, and institutional traction through continued engagement with different stakeholders. Challenges such as legal frameworks, funding gaps, and scalability have been addressed iteratively, showing the project's capacity to adapt and innovate. With barriers now being tackled around integrating gleaning into broader municipal practices, the potential for regional implementation feels increasingly within reach.

The next two to three years are expected to amplify awareness on food waste and grow participation across public institutions. *Urban(eat)a* demonstrates how community-driven initiatives can inspire systemic change.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Thanks to *Urban(eat)a*, once dismissed as waste, edible urban fruits are now being reclaimed through gleaning events that not only reduce food waste but also foster community cohesion and awareness.

A key lesson from the project is the importance of developing strong value propositions that align with the priorities of local authorities, who are essential stakeholders in accessing and managing public resources. With support from C4C, the project refined its messaging and strategy to better engage municipalities, which has proven crucial for scaling and securing long-term funding.

The project also highlights that "in-kind" support, such as expert advice, visibility, and facilitated networking, is as important as financial aid. Policy frameworks should build on this by recognising community-led climate and food justice initiatives as core pillars of sustainable development, not as complementary actors.

Long-term EU support should include flexible funding, legal clarity for food recovery, and recognition of community-led work in strategic planning. By investing in narrative change and cross-sector connections, *Urban(eat)a* shows how grassroots action can grow into a replicable model.

Zéro Déchet Troyes: Bringing zero waste to the next level in France

Zéro Déchet Troyes campaigns against organic and food waste, and advocates for CO2 emissions reduction. The association actively engages citizens through

workshops and events and lobbies local institutions to implement effective waste regulations. To enhance their efforts, they have planned a study visit to the premises of a leader in bio-waste source separation and composting in Besançon, to learn best practices, bolster their members' skills and foster community interest in bio-waste management.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Zéro Déchet Troyes is pushing the boundaries of citizen-led environmental advocacy by placing organic waste and CO_2 reduction at the heart of its work. Building on strong grassroots interests, the team organised a strategic study visit to Besançon, a model for bio-waste separation and composting. This experience enriched their understanding of effective waste management and sharpened their arguments when interacting with local policymakers.

The project flourished, evident by multiple awareness-raising events, and deepened collaborations with regional allies such as Aube Durable. The team organised a joint webinar with Zero Waste Europe and a study visit to explore further practices. A curated bank of composting videos is being curated to boost public engagement and support advocacy actions ahead of the upcoming municipal elections.

Despite limited responsiveness at the local level, the project has gained recognition on the national and European stage. The growing relationship with Zero Waste France and new links with initiatives like En boîte le plat offer promising opportunities for expansion. Crucially, the team is now exploring ways to involve citizens more directly in shaping local circular economy strategies.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Zéro Déchet Troyes is redefining what zero waste can mean at the local level, blending citizen engagement with policy advocacy and hands-on learning. Their study visit to Sybert (a national reference in bio-waste source separation) offered a powerful demonstration of how tailored, community-wide composting systems can dramatically reduce waste and engage citizens and residents of all ages, whether targeting nursery schools or apartments to address waste.

One key takeaway: Effective communication is vital. Whether targeting journalists, elected officials, or non-French speakers, visual and concise messaging proved far more persuasive than exhaustive instructions. Equally, strong collaboration between citizens, waste professionals, and local institutions helps ensure long-term success, something reinforced by the structured, yet adaptable composting models observed in Besançon.

Zéro Déchet Troyes also saw the importance of innovation through inclusion, whether it's involving children in composting, supporting reusable diaper initiatives in nurseries, or promoting reusable packaging for takeaway food.

C4C support added valuable perspectives, boosting connections with other local actors and strengthening the team's capacity to propose viable circular economy solutions to local policymakers. For greater impact, policy frameworks should include both financial incentives and accountability measures, making it easier for grassroots initiatives to flourish. With the right support, zero waste is more than just a goal; it becomes a replicable community practice, grounded in care, creativity, and collective responsibility.

Renewable energy

#EnergiaParaElPueblo: A sustainable energy model in rural western Spain and Portugal

#EnergiaParaElPueblo, in the Duero-Douro region, is one of Europe's largest energy communities across over 50 municipalities along the Spanish-Portuguese border. It focuses on producing renewable energy through community solar installations and developing an electric vehicle charging network. Driven collaboratively by local authorities, associations, SMEs and citizens, its Community Transformation Office engages locals through informative and participatory sessions.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

#EnergiaParaElPueblo successfully laid the groundwork for one of Europe's largest cross-border energy communities, spanning over 50 rural municipalities in the Duero-Douro region. Despite bureaucratic hurdles and limited institutional support, the community was successfully formalised, a proof of the power of strong local leadership and citizen commitment. Through its Community Transformation Office, the project reached a broad and diverse audience and adapted its communication strategy to highlight not just environmental gains but also the social, economic, and governance benefits of renewable energy.

Savings generated by community solar installations are already enabling reinvestment in critical rural infrastructure, while outreach activities, especially targeting high school students, are nurturing climate awareness and a new generation of energy-conscious citizens, thanks to the project. Collaborations with Aranda Ambassadors have opened pathways for replicability and peer learning.

Some key challenges included simplifying complex administrative procedures and overcoming rural scepticism toward environmental projects. Rather than focusing solely on climate narratives, the project emphasised community empowerment and economic resilience, helping to reframe renewable energy as a tool for rural revitalisation.

Looking forward, the expected impact is twofold: seeking concrete reductions in energy costs and emissions, and a cultural shift toward democratic energy governance.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

A key success factor was the project's holistic approach toward stakeholder engagement, framing renewable energy as part of a broader, shared vision for rural regeneration. The Community Transformation Office emphasised trustbuilding, personalised guidance, and participatory processes, prioritising long-term community development over quick wins. This people-first strategy, though slower, ensures lasting ownership and impact.

The project shows that meaningful change often starts small: "small people, small projects, small places" can collectively transform the system from the bottom up. Shared learning and replication across borders in a given bioregion amplify this impact.

Policy recommendations from this experience are clear: it is vital to empower local alliances of municipalities with flexible legal and financial frameworks that support cross-border cooperation and community self-governance. In addition, provide practical support (e.g. training on self-consumption, technical feasibility plans, and ongoing guidance) to enable energy citizenship accessibility to all.

#EnergiaParaElPueblo reminds us that community energy is not only about kilowatts, but also about people reclaiming the power to shape their future together, becoming true drivers of Europe's green transition.

COMMUTE Granada: COMmunity Mobility in rUral TErritories in the South of Spain

Since 2021, Granada's provincial government has championed the development of local energy communities, initiating projects focused so far only on photovoltaic self-consumption. Through new collaborations, projects and services, such as rural electric car-sharing schemes, *COMMMUTE Granada* aimed at diversifying its offer and fostering innovative, community-led energy solutions that address both energy efficiency and sustainable mobility, enhancing the quality of life in rural areas.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

COMMUTE Granada set out to reimagine sustainable mobility in rural southern Spain by supporting community-driven energy solutions beyond solar self-consumption. Since its launch, the project has created *eMoción S.Coop*, a new cooperative committed to inclusive, zero-emission transportation. Through participatory workshops, the group shaped a shared vision and mission rooted in climate justice, accessibility, and citizen-led energy transition.

While the original plan focused on rural deployment, key learnings (including the lack of precedent for non-funded rural initiatives) led to strategic change. They have drafted a business model, initiated municipal outreach, and laid the groundwork for sustainable expansion, with a goal of operating shared electric vehicles across rural territories.

With expert mentorship from Red Movilidad and advice from Coopstroom and The ClimateFactory, the cooperative developed a pilot starting in urban areas with the aim of expanding its scale to the surrounding rural areas throughout the province. Despite limited funding, the team developed professional communication materials and applied for multiple grants, including EU-funded opportunities. The cooperative's ability to adapt and grow with minimal resources underscores both the resilience of the community and the replicability of the model. *COMMUTE Granada*'s journey is far from over.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

COMMUTE Granada envisages rural territories as fertile ground for innovation in sustainable mobility and energy transition. By fostering collaboration between

local governments, citizens, and academic institutions, the project is building the foundation for community-led solutions that address both mobility and energy challenges in rural areas.

Key to this endeavour is the exposure to inspiring models such as the Coopstroom Cooperative in Belgium, where community-owned car-sharing services thrive through trust, creativity, and strong member engagement. The Coopstroom Cooperative demonstrated how practices like personalised vehicle naming, social events among members, and shared slogans helped create a strong sense of ownership and belonging. Negotiating collectively with companies - as a 1,300-member cooperative rather than as mere individuals - demonstrated the power of scale.

COMMUTE Granada also drew lessons from initiatives like The ClimateFactory, which showed how fun, controversy, and creativity can attract broader participation and deepen citizen-municipality synergies.

Support from C4C proved critical, offering not just technical tools and knowledge but also confidence and community-building opportunities through the study visits, active facilitation, and exchanges.

Policy lessons point to the need for initial public subsidies, recognition of volunteers, and calls that combine business viability with social and environmental value. *COMMUTE Granada* reminds us that with the right tools and networks, communities can lead the way in shaping resilient and inclusive rural futures.

Ecofficine: An Italian community in transition

The *Ecofficine* cooperative focused on community-driven sustainability by engaging municipalities, citizens, associations, and companies in a participatory energy transition. The aim of this project was to lower energy costs and secure reliable local energy supplies, reducing dependence on international factors and contributing to a long-term decarbonisation path, essential for environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The *Ecofficine* project made strong progress in building a citizen-centred energy transition in Northern Italy. Initially involving 3 municipalities, the initiative expanded to 11 local administrations, 16 private actors, and 4 enterprises. This groundwork culminated in the official founding in December 2024 of the *CERS del Lario, a Comunità Energetica Rinnovabile Solidale* (Renewable Energy Community with a Social Vision), with 20 founding members, including citizens and small enterprises. Its impact is expected to grow significantly. With favourable regional policies, the community aims to surpass 100 partners before Italy's 2027 energy community deadline.

Throughout the first three months of 2025, the newly established REC (Renewable Energy Community) focused on drafting and approving its internal rules, including mechanisms for power-sharing and the use of incentives. A key milestone was a study visit in April to the CERS Illuminati Sabina, a similar initiative near Rome, offering valuable insights for replication and governance.

Although stakeholder diversity made the process more complex and time-consuming, trust could successfully be achieved, thanks largely to key individuals in each administration. The collective commitment has meanwhile bore fruit: the REC operates independently now and exhibits strong organisational initiative.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Ecofficine demonstrated how the energy transition can become a community-driven process when technical complexity is replaced with inclusive, accessible language and participatory formats. By organising thematic trainings and bestpractice exchanges in non-technical terms, the initiative fostered broad engagement, from local administrations to everyday citizens. A key takeaway was the importance of tailoring legal and operational advice to local needs, particularly when establishing a REC, which allows groups to produce, share, and consume renewable energy collectively.

The expert support offered C4C gave the team the confidence to move forward, confirmed they were on the right path, and provided tailored legal assistance, from choosing the appropriate structure to defining fair benefit-sharing mechanisms. In addition, C4C facilitated valuable partnerships with other emerging energy communities.

The project also reaffirmed the power of collaboration: regular peer exchange and cooperative problem-solving with like-minded initiatives, locally and across borders, accelerated learning and fostered a sense of shared mission.

From a policy perspective, the message was clear: support long-term cooperation among grassroots energy projects. Facilitate access to expert advice, reduce entry barriers for new actors, and ensure ongoing dialogue among public institutions, civil society, and energy communities. With the right tools and connections, local actors can become the true engine of a just and resilient energy transition.

ECOINVOLTa: A Community of Practice in southern Italy

ECOINVOLTa aimed to foster a renewable energy Living Lab in rural Avellino involving citizens of ten municipalities in creating networks of local stakeholders and supporting the development of Renewable Energy Communities. By facilitating collaboration between research centres, local citizens, and green economy service providers, it aspired to bridge gaps and address challenges related to low awareness and mistrust in a region marked by small agricultural towns with high depopulation rates.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

ECOINVOLTa laid meaningful groundwork for a just and inclusive energy transition in rural Avellino, blending technical innovation with deep community engagement. Among the project's most tangible outcomes was the creation of the 'Rural Community Hub', now an anchor for participatory events, workshops, and co-design sessions. This evolving living lab fostered local agency and dialogue, while

‘Sportello Energia’, initially a pilot, began operating as a trusted resource for citizens seeking guidance on renewable energy and energy communities.

Through inclusive and often playful engagement formats, complex issues like energy transition and governance became more accessible to a diverse audience. These methods, along with cross-sectoral alliances built with farmers, associations, and institutions, enabled the co-creation of shared visions for rural regeneration.

Although initial goals focused more narrowly on energy access and retrofitting advice, the project’s scope expanded to encompass broader community-building. This change reflected a key learning: trust and shared purpose are prerequisites for systemic change. Despite challenges — including institutional resistance, resource limitations, and barriers to participation — the project succeeded in planting seeds for lasting impact.

Looking ahead, *ECOINVOLTa* envisions its hub as a permanent platform for local collaboration, the launch of a renewable energy community within the year, and a multiplier effect through young facilitators and volunteers who are now equipped to lead the green transition from within.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

A standout innovation was ‘Sportello Energia’, a non-commercial, peer-led energy helpdesk offering tailored advice on retrofitting, renewables, and sustainable mobility. Open-air consultations and informal info sessions helped build trust in communities with high depopulation and mistrust. Using role-playing games, collective mapping, and storytelling, *ECOINVOLTa* translated complex topics into accessible, engaging experiences that fostered genuine participation and ownership.

A key insight was that technical solutions alone are not enough. Social processes (such as facilitation, communication, and co-design) are vital to ensuring energy initiatives are inclusive, understood, and long-lasting. The project created a local culture of experimentation and empowerment, allowing communities to test new models in flexible, supportive environments.

Policy lessons are clear: energy transition must be recognised as a social innovation process, especially in marginalised rural areas. EU funding should support not only infrastructure but also the ‘soft infrastructure’ of community-building and facilitation. Long-term, flexible funding programmes for citizen-led initiatives are essential, alongside simplified procedures and institutionalised participation in planning. By valuing lived experience as much as technical expertise and investing in local capacity, Europe can foster resilient, inclusive energy communities.

Energía Bonita: Energy transformation on a Spanish island

La Palma is seeking to achieve significant energy savings by educating the local community about energy consumption and providing training to help members reduce their own usage. *Energía Bonita* also expected to foster dialogue on socioeconomic changes, needed to achieve 100% renewable energy, and address complex issues like energy poverty and resource distribution in a tourism and agriculture-based economy.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Energía Bonita has laid strong foundations for community-driven energy transformation on La Palma. What began as a small pilot group evolved into a permanent energy savings working group, meanwhile embedded within the local energy community of 250 individuals and organisations. This group was actively exploring creative, hands-on approaches to reduce energy use, with plans underway to translate shared learning into real, measurable savings. The project's training

sessions, particularly those on building renovation for energy efficiency, were a valuable introduction to previously unfamiliar but highly relevant topics, broadening both the skills and networks of the community.

While the initial focus leaned towards replicating external technical solutions, the initiative shifted to tap into the creativity and motivation of the local community itself. This community-first approach proved effective, fostering strong engagement among participants. Activities like a two-day retreat, with communal meals and overnight stays, deepened relationships and a shared sense of purpose. A challenge was ensuring meaningful participation, but rather than prioritising rapid growth, the team learned the value of nurturing existing engagement.

Looking ahead, the project is poised to spark a longer-term impact by empowering residents to become both learners and educators in sustainable energy use. *Energía Bonita* showed that grassroots energy action can begin with a few committed individuals and grow into a broader cultural shift.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Energía Bonita demonstrated how local energy transitions can be grounded in education, participation, and the social fabric of the community. A key practice built on the existing knowledge and motivation of participants in co-designing a path

toward energy self-sufficiency. Step by step, through workshops and debates, the project team cultivated a shared understanding of energy use and its socioeconomic implications, especially in a tourism and agriculture-dependent context. The support from C4C and the exchanges with groups like Carbon Co-op provided fresh insights, opening new directions for community action.

Importantly, *Energía Bonita* fostered stronger connections across cooperatives and the social economy, showing that change accelerates when citizens are connected to a broader movement. This network-building not only encouraged new initiatives but also gave the project visibility and legitimacy, helping to mobilise both members and policymakers.

Among the most transferable lessons are that regular, in-person gatherings are essential to sustain citizen energy movements, and dialogue roundtables (spaces where all actors can co-develop solutions) and can and should be replicated widely.

Policy recommendations include simplifying access to funding for small local organisations and investing in local human resources during the early stages of new initiatives. With such support, small-scale energy projects can evolve into lasting engines of transformation.

Energia Nostra: A Renewable Energy Community in Italy

Energia Nostra, a renewable energy cooperative in the area of Cormons, aimed at start recruiting new members, reaching commercial scale, and possibly developing a crowdfunded agri-voltaic plant, which uses land for both solar energy production and agriculture. Thus, the project will be contributing to a fair energy transition by actively engaging residents and local organisations in the production and use of renewable electricity, lowering electricity bills and supporting projects with a positive local impact.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Energia Nostra has taken a significant step forward by establishing a cooperative that is now on track to become an official Renewable Energy Community (REC). Designed as a democratic and inclusive platform, the initiative empowers local residents and organisations to participate actively in the energy transition while benefiting from lower electricity costs and community-driven reinvestment.

Thanks to tailored stakeholder engagement workshops, facilitated both online and in person, dialogue was opened with city officials, mayors, and local organisations. These efforts have already sparked growing interest, with several attendees joining the cooperative's mailing list and planning to attend future meetings.

Although the project's core vision remained stable (except for the aim of crowdfunding an agri-voltaic plant), adapting to the intricacies of Italian legislation required unexpected flexibility and perseverance. Navigating a complex bureaucratic environment and covering high startup costs proved demanding, but support from Banca Etica and Confcooperative (Confederation of Italian Cooperatives) helped mitigate these hurdles. A key takeaway has been the importance of early member involvement and skill-sharing.

With its foundations now firmly in place, *Energia Nostra* is on track to become a model for local, transparent, and citizen-led energy solutions in Italy.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

This volunteer-driven renewable energy community built momentum through citizen participation, transparency, and shared ownership.

A key takeaway from the project is the importance of effective community engagement. With support from C4C facilitators, the team gained valuable tools to meaningfully involve residents, local councils, and entrepreneurs.

These skills, particularly in fostering dialogue and gathering feedback have become essential pillars of the cooperative's ongoing work.

External guidance was essential. Volunteers were able to strategically focus their efforts thanks to expert advice, ultimately securing funding from Banca Etica for a feasibility study. This support was not only technical but motivational, helping sustain the cooperative's long-term vision.

Going forward, energy transition policies must reflect the realities of community-led efforts. Simplifying bureaucratic processes, offering tailored technical assistance, and extending the duration of support programmes would help volunteers maximise their contributions. One-stop shops for energy communities and better networking tools could further accelerate progress.

Estonian farmers engaged in reducing waste and emissions

A group of farmers in *Saaremaa* wanted to find a solution to recycle farm waste from dairy and pig farms by exploring technologies for a biogas plant, which would reduce emissions and the carbon footprint of local businesses. Locals have been consulted, and their concerns about increased traffic congestion have been considered in the project's implementation from the start, thanks to planned road improvements in cooperation with the municipality.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

In *Saaremaa*, a coalition of local farmers made significant progress in laying the groundwork for a biogas plant aimed at recycling farm waste and cutting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. By uniting major dairy and pig farmers under a shared vision, the project fostered collaboration rarely seen at this scale. Technical evaluations, including detailed GHG emission calculations, guided site optimisation, supply logistics, and energy offtake plans. Importantly, lessons from both local and international biogas facilities were integrated to avoid common pitfalls.

In response to local concerns, the project team engaged local residents early on and worked closely with the municipality to plan road improvements. This inclusive approach helped reduce resistance and improve project transparency. Advocacy efforts also addressed restrictive national feedstock regulations, aligning them more closely with broader EU standards to ensure future viability.

While initial community pushback posed a challenge, sustained dialogue, patience, and education proved essential. With implementation now more widely understood and supported, the expected outcomes in the next 2-3 years should contribute to reduced emissions, cleaner farms, new local jobs, and lower reliance on imported fuels.

Meanwhile, the project team continues to explore additional revenue streams, making it not only an environmental initiative but also a model for rural economic resilience. Above all, it underscored a vital lesson: meaningful climate action begins with clear, honest communication

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

By investing in a biogas plant to recycle dairy and pig farm waste, the project team sought to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create a more circular, low-carbon rural economy. The project stood out for its emphasis on smart energy management, turning farm by-products into renewable energy, as well as its attention to co-benefits like green fertiliser production and carbon offsetting.

Early and sustained engagement with local residents signified a key good practice. Community concerns, especially regarding traffic impacts and odour, were taken seriously from the start, resulting in coordinated planning with

municipal authorities for road improvements. This inclusive approach strengthened trust and ensured local support.

The initiative also highlighted the value of technical competence and transparent communication. As farmers improved their understanding of EU regulations and emissions data, they were better equipped to lead informed discussions and align their work with broader sustainability goals.

Policy lessons point to the need for EU-wide platforms that facilitate knowledge sharing and regulatory clarity. A centralised resource hub, summarising regulations by topic and offering peer-to-peer exchanges, could contribute to empowering emerging community-led projects across Europe.

Hungarian Community-driven Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP)

A *Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP)* is being prepared in Pilisborosjenő, which is a strategic document for the local government and the population, a guideline set by the community. The key element of community planning is to activate and involve local stakeholders and communities in the development of a common vision and strategy.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

In Pilisborosjenő, the preparation of a community-driven *Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP)* marked a major milestone in participatory climate governance. A core achievement was the formation of a dedicated volunteer project group, which not only contributed to data collection and analysis but also actively co-authored the strategic document, ensuring local ownership and long-term relevance. The public questionnaire, completed by 143 residents, revealed valuable insights into energy poverty, with several respondents openly sharing their challenges, a hard-to-get but crucial data source.

Collaboration extended beyond local boundaries, fostering knowledge exchange with the C4C community in Újszentmargita and through an insightful study visit to four inspiring destinations that influenced the project's strategies. The process strengthened community ties and set a precedent for inclusive municipal decision-making.

While the lack of official energy consumption data posed limitations and general apathy slowed engagement, these challenges were partially offset by the commitment of the project team. The participatory nature of the *SECAP* increased its legitimacy and the potential for implementation, a key strength.

As the municipality prepared to adopt the plan, such co-creation signalled a shift toward shared responsibility, resilience, and impact, highlighting that even in small communities, when people are given the space and support to act, change is possible.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

The deep integration of local voices through surveys, planning events, and ongoing dialogue, shaping a plan truly aligned with residents' needs and aspirations, makes this initiative unique. By connecting energy transition goals

with social concerns like energy poverty, the project not only mobilised the community but also laid the groundwork for long-term sustainability.

Exchanges with Austrian and Hungarian projects, both successful and flawed, provided invaluable insights, highlighting what works, what doesn't, and why. These learnings helped the team craft a *SECAP* that avoids common pitfalls while drawing on best practices to foster regional synergies and cross-sector collaboration.

Expert support, particularly from Szolidáris Gazdaság Központ and TRAFÓ, ensured that the *SECAP* was both technically sound and locally relevant. Their facilitation created momentum and strengthened ties with other Hungarian communities, opening new pathways for shared learning and future cooperation.

This experience shows that when communities are empowered to co-create their energy and climate future, the resulting strategies are place-based, more resilient, and more likely to attract funding. By sharing the *SECAP* and development process regionally, Pilisborosjenő helped inspire a movement toward a more just and sustainable future.

Jalea Luz: Pioneering social and renewable energy in the South of Spain

Jalea Luz is a dynamic Renewable Energy community uniting social ecology, renewable energy and collaborative housing cooperatives in Seville. This innovative project aimed to reduce energy poverty by utilising the rooftops of public buildings for solar energy, particularly benefiting vulnerable groups such as migrants, women, and children. Toward fostering community engagement, a Social Committee was expected to be created to drive a just energy transition, supported by local social entities and community organisations.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Jalea Luz has laid crucial foundations for a more just and inclusive energy transition in a vulnerable neighbourhood in Seville. By connecting renewable energy, social justice, and collaborative housing models, the initiative advanced not only technical goals but also deepened organisational and community transitions. Although the creation of a fully functioning Social Committee remains a work in progress, priorities were clarified, and new forms of inter-cooperation began the testing phase.

This process revealed both the potential and limitations of working with a volunteer-driven model, particularly in contexts where prioritising human care takes precedence. Participation fluctuated, yet those who remained committed helped strengthen internal structures and define clearer roles, goals, and governance methods, an essential step toward becoming a stable entity capable of sustaining long-term energy justice work.

Rather than pushing forward at any cost, the team chose the opposite, to slow down, prioritising reflection and cohesion. This strategic shift already bore fruit as the organisation has become better equipped to align its actions with its values, leaving no one behind and ensuring future initiatives are more sustainable and rooted in collective capacity.

Jalea Luz stands as a powerful example of how renewable energy communities can also become engines of social change. By focusing on real, everyday needs such as childcare, migrant inclusion, and green public spaces, the project demonstrates that energy transition efforts must go beyond technology and economics to truly resonate with local communities.

What proved essential was dismantling the perception that energy is only for technical experts. Real participation required deep listening, trust-building, and a commitment to demystifying complex issues. Despite a lack of institutional support, the team managed to overcome initial barriers and empower participants to feel confident, knowledgeable, and capable of decision-making.

The guidance offered by C4C opened new perspectives within the team, allowing for more realistic planning and highlighting the value of facilitation and listening in community processes. It also showed the power of learning from peers in other contexts, and adapting insights across different social and environmental realities.

Rather than prioritising large-scale or top-down interventions, future policy frameworks should invest more in smaller, locally rooted projects that grow organically and foster a strong social fabric. Sustainable and long-term support is especially important for slower-moving social dynamics. By focusing on community-driven models, the community advanced clean energy and also cultivated more connected societies.

Köncert: A Renewable Energy Community for all in Königsberg, Italy

Köncert is a cooperative that includes citizens, SMEs, public administration, and farms. In order to promote energy culture and social inclusion, the project aimed at developing a Citizen's Desk for energy transition and funding a collective solar power plant, embodying community ambition and fostering regional sustainability. Other actions included increasing their member outreach, school projects, providing support for vulnerable groups, and collaborating with other energy communities.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Köncert set out to strengthen its energy community by promoting a culture of energy awareness and social inclusion through a Citizens' Desk and a collective solar plant. While the initial goal of building the plant proved too ambitious in the short term, the project evolved strategically to lay the groundwork for long-term impact. With expert facilitation support, the team conducted a full analysis of their Renewable Energy Community (REC) structure and defined a two-year roadmap prioritising stakeholder engagement and expansion planning.

Four public events between October 2024 and March 2025 sparked meaningful participation from citizens, local administrations, and businesses. The REC expects to engage over 500 people, expand to four primary substations within the next two to three years, and optimise access to Italy's incentive schemes for RECs, thus amplifying environmental, social and economic benefits for the local territory.

Challenges, particularly in navigating public bureaucracy and securing municipal collaboration, have tested the team. However, the trust-building efforts and participatory facilitation methods acquired through C4C proved vital in overcoming resistance and mobilising support.

Köncert's experience reinforces the fact that energy transition begins with people. By listening to local needs and working collaboratively, the cooperative steadily turned complex ambitions into practical steps.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

As one of the few truly bottom-up RECs in the country, the project cultivated an inclusive and resilient model by engaging citizens, local authorities, SMEs, and farms in a shared journey toward energy sovereignty.

What sets *Köncert* apart is its community-first spirit: working with people rather than for them. Through Citizens' Desks, collaborative planning, and open dialogue, the cooperative has empowered locals to understand energy systems and take ownership of the needed transition. Social trust, not just economic gain, has been the project's engine, mobilising collective values around sustainability, equity, and empowerment.

With support from C4C, *Köncert* gained new tools for facilitation and strategic planning, boosting both internal cohesion and external reach. One major achievement was initiating a dialogue with local mayors to map social needs and begin designing inclusive pathways for vulnerable groups to participate.

Their emerging policy recommendations include simplifying the bureaucratic process to establish RECs, creating guarantees for community infrastructure, and ensuring long-term legal stability. Additionally, facilitators should be embedded within community projects to foster collaboration and clarity.

Silvi Solar Renewable Energy Community: Empowering citizens in central Italy

Focusing on community-led local development (CLLD), *Silvi* aims to create a Renewable Energy Community. The municipality believes that centring clean energy transitions around people is crucial for effective energy and climate solutions. By directly involving citizens, Silvi plans to accelerate decarbonisation and address energy challenges such as high consumption and increased prices, especially during peak tourism seasons.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Silvi's journey toward becoming a Renewable Energy Community (REC) gained traction through C4C. Strategic participation resulted in their network expanding and catalysing strategic collaborations, most notably with the University of L'Aquila, now an invested partner.

Such partnerships extended beyond achieving just local impacts, instead contributing to an international aim focused on renewable energy education in Sub-Saharan Africa. On top of that, thanks to a C4C Networking event, *Silvi* met the Diputación de Granada, in Spain, and began working closely with their Oficina Provincial de la Energía, adapting valuable insights to their own context.

What began as a plan to establish a REC in Silvi evolved into a joint effort with the neighbouring municipality of Montesilvano, broadening the scale and potential of the project scope. Within the next two to three years, the project team aims to formalise the first REC in the area and foster broader public engagement in energy transition topics.

While legal structures and governance models remain unresolved, the municipality continues to support the initiative — balancing inclusivity, clarity, and feasibility. That said, mobilising local civil society actors remains a challenge due to limited topical awareness and due to doubts about the intentions of commercial actors' engagement.

Despite these hurdles, *Silvi* remains committed. A key lesson learned is that meaningful impact requires patience; early years must be dedicated to community building and system design. With steady progress and a growing network, the foundation is being laid for a citizen-powered energy future.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Through public assemblies, local partnerships, and inclusive facilitation methods, *Silvi Solar* has cultivated strong community engagement around the development of a REC. This approach was key in raising awareness about often misunderstood energy topics and in breaking down the technical and ideological complexities that typically turn local actors away.

Thanks to C4C's support, the project team was able to convince the municipality of the need for impartial technical guidance, leading to the establishment of a local energy helpdesk and an online portal for community subscriptions. Facilitation tools that empowered wider public participation were also introduced with the project, resulting in an innovation that resonated deeply in a region not traditionally involved in energy dialogue.

Collaboration was key. By linking up with the University of L'Aquila and engaging in exchanges with national frontrunners like the municipality of Villanovaforru, *Silvi* gained valuable insights and strengthened its strategic direction. A critical learning was the risk of overlapping RECs within the same grid zone, underscoring the value of cooperation over competition.

According to the project team, such initiatives to accelerate needed climate action benefit from tailored, language-accessible expertise, low-barrier funding, and exposure to successful models. Regular financial support is key to ensuring continuity and encouraging citizen participation, especially for those balancing jobs and family life. EU-level mentorship and exchange programmes, enabling citizens to visit more advanced communities, could build a stronger sense of European belonging and inspire deeper local engagement.

Tiszamente Energy Community: Empowering local sustainability in Hungary

This energy community, uniting eight municipalities, aimed to optimise energy costs and enhance energy sharing. Formed in response to rising operational costs and energy poverty, it focuses on leveraging smart grid technologies and renewable energy sources. Led by the Mayor of Újszentmargita, the project engaged local authorities, community stakeholders, and technical experts.

Community involvement through surveys and public consultations ensured that local needs were met.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The *Tiszamente Energy Community* laid a strong foundation for collaborative, local energy resilience in Hungary. The development of a vulnerability-focused energy poverty questionnaire, completed by nearly 100 participants, and the creation of a scalable shared model designed for small municipalities are among the project's most tangible results. This led to practical, transferable frameworks for addressing energy poverty and improving access to affordable energy.

Bringing together eight municipalities and a healthcare institution, the project strengthened regional cooperation. National and international connections, facilitated through C4C, were essential, not only offering visibility and support but also helping participants avoid isolation and be able to access proven practices. Engaging energy-poor households directly also gave visibility to the local vulnerability index and led to shared formats for practical action, such as joint initiatives in water and waste management.

With the help of C4C, the project's initial planning could be improved, which reduced visible risks, particularly around communication and education actions. Additionally, some elements were adjusted and more informed components implemented, thanks to the successful practices and prior knowledge gathered through new partnerships.

The challenge of securing financing for major investments remains. However, the groundwork for a shared service provider model (a delivery model to enhance efficiency and save resources) is already underway. If adopted at scale, the community's method for tracking energy poverty could inspire broader municipal adoption within 2-3 years.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

A key success of the *Tiszamente Energy Community* was recognising the importance of sustained community engagement through clear, accessible information. As the project developed its municipal energy producer model, it became clear that public interest and participation depend on ongoing, well-structured communication. The planned development of an informative website, based on both successful and less effective examples from other initiatives, reflects their strong commitment to transparency and inclusion.

C4C support enabled both visibility of their own project and meaningful links to other similar initiatives across Europe. This broader exposure resulted in the project team refining its methodology on energy poverty and deepening its understanding of local governance. It also led to the potential for coalitions among energy communities, reinforcing the value of networking and knowledge exchange.

A lesson learned was the need for energy communities to have a formal voice in shaping policies and funding mechanisms. Additionally, establishing representative, participatory bodies across EU countries could effectively enable communities to propose new regulations, initiate financial support mechanisms, and share best practices. Such panels for exchange can empower grassroots initiatives and bring field-tested insights into policymaking.

Thus, community-driven energy transition is not only viable but essential. When paired with strong visibility, collaboration, and structured support, it becomes a powerful force for change.

UBEK Energy Community: Sustainability and sovereignty in northern Spain

UBEK is a new regional energy community in the Basque Country, which seeks to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and large grid operators. By uniting citizens, businesses, and public institutions, this project aimed to establish a sovereign, democratic, and participatory energy system, fostering a local, sustainable energy framework.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

UBEK laid the groundwork for a locally governed, inclusive energy transition in the Basque Country. While the technical infrastructure is still in development, the project already united a wide coalition of citizens, schools, cooperatives, small businesses, and public institutions around a shared vision of energy as a common good, contributing to a local ecosystem, known for generating employment, boosting local economies, and strengthening community bonds.

Significant progress was made in designing shared renewable energy schemes aimed at reducing costs, especially for vulnerable households, and increasing local autonomy. Schools emerged as vital hubs for climate education and engagement. Although navigating Spain's complex regulatory framework posed some challenges, collaboration with national networks resulted in ensuring progress toward compliant and flexible governance models.

Originally focused on technical assessments and capacity-building, the project evolved to prioritise inclusivity and cultural change. Efforts to demystify energy communities helped overcome scepticism and build trust across sectors. Importantly, vulnerable groups (such as households at risk of energy poverty or people with limited digital access) were involved from the outset, ensuring future benefits will be equitably shared.

In the coming years, *UBEK* aims to launch its first collective self-consumption installations, reducing CO_2 emissions, and creating a replicable governance model. More than infrastructure, the project's lasting impact lies in a growing movement of empowered citizens shaping a sustainable and fair energy future.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

UBEK offers a model for community-led energy transitions rooted in social governance, equity, and education. One of its key insights was that successful energy projects begin with people, not panels, for instance, by designing inclusive governance structures from the outset through storytelling, visual tools, and participatory workshops.

A standout practice was the integration of shared self-consumption (collective use of locally produced energy), with a focus on vulnerable households and public institutions, making energy equity a structural project component. Another innovative move was positioning schools as both solar energy producers and community learning hubs, embedding climate awareness into daily life and connecting future generations with real solutions.

The emerging policy lessons are clear: community energy should be treated as a critical infrastructure. Support must extend beyond technical installation to include facilitation, governance, and long-term capacity-building. Simplifying legal pathways for shared energy schemes, especially in public buildings, and creating inclusive incentives are essential for scaling such models.

Access to water and sustainable water resource management:

A Romanian climate adaptation pilot

In *Daia*, this project aimed to create a replicable model for regional water management by developing a comprehensive, nature-based water retention strategy, including rehabilitating wetlands, building swales, and planting buffer strips. In addition, it seeks to explore conservation agricultural practices like no-till farming, cover crops, and rotational grazing.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

While the original ambition targeted the entire watershed, the project strategically refocused, due to time and resource constraints, on restoring common pastures. A key achievement was the formation of a trusted circle of local stakeholders (farmers, community members, and experts) who confirmed their commitment to dialogue, cooperation, and implementation.

With the support of thematic experts and inspiration from a study visit to hydrologist Michal Kravčík (Ľudia a voda, Slovakia), the community developed a science-based concept plan that identifies practical, low-cost water retention interventions like swales, tree planting, and wetland rehabilitation. Perhaps most significantly, this process has begun to shift mindsets in a historically fragmented community, where collaboration had previously been rare.

Although the physical implementation lays ahead, growing local interest and engagement, especially among marginalised groups including the Roma population, have signalled the strong potential. Challenges remain, particularly around securing funding and navigating regulatory pathways for nature-based solutions new to the region.

Looking ahead, the project is expected to inspire gradual changes in land management and water retention, with wider ripple effects in education, youth engagement, and local economy.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

The project catalysed a shift away from large-scale infrastructure towards cost-effective nature-based solutions rooted in landscape regeneration, many of which were once common before industrial agriculture. These include swales (shallow, broad, and vegetated channels designed to collect runoff water), contour bunds (a simple micro-catchment technique for water control), tree planting, runoff harvesting, and small wooden or stone dams, forming a replicable, sustainable model.

C4C played a key role by supporting in reframing local discussions and building bridges between farmers, local government, commons managers, and national authorities. Thematic and technical experts not only brought in know-how but also helped establish a collaborative platform where

such ideas could gain traction. The project coordinator's role as an EU Climate Pact Ambassador enabled the further potential to scale awareness and outreach.

Key policy insights include the need for long-term frameworks, knowing that genuine collaboration and understanding among stakeholders take time to build, particularly when reintroducing forgotten practices. Equally important is access to seed funding to jump-start implementation through pilot interventions. Inspired by models like one implemented in Slovakia, where landscape-level water retention was deployed in nearly 500 settlements, the EU could establish a dedicated fund (either under direct or shared management), with simple application rules and guidance for regions and countries facing severe water stress, like Romania. Empowering local communities under the principle of subsidiarity, paired with supportive national authorities, would accelerate the uptake of proven, monitorable solutions to secure the future of Europe's water resilience.

A syntropic oasis to RE-connect in Italy

In the National Park of Gargano, *Syntropic oasis to RE-connect* aimed to create a resilient and biodiverse ecosystem within an ecovillage. The plan was to develop an innovative water management system, including a bio lake and swales, to retain and redistribute water in a context of reduced rainfall and karstic soil. The project addressed climate challenges collaboratively with the local community, supporting reforestation and demonstrating sustainable farming practices, such as alternatives to chemical fertilisers.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

This project set out to develop a biodiverse, water-resilient ecosystem within an ecovillage, applying syntropic agriculture (a method inspired by natural forest ecosystems) as a regenerative response to climate change.

Two well-attended courses helped deepen practical knowledge of syntropic agriculture while making space for inclusive participation, one being donation-based to ensure accessibility. Participants explored techniques to 'plant water' by improving soil and vegetative cover, leading to the planting of around 600 diverse species aimed at enriching biodiversity and restoring soil health. A public conference at the municipality expanded outreach to the wider community.

Originally focused on securing permissions for a clay bio lake, the initiative evolved into a broader ecological vision: designing agroforestry lines and building a self-sustaining, diverse forest system. This more holistic approach aligned better with long-term resilience goals and expanded the project's potential as a living demonstrator site.

A key challenge was mobilising participants, which was overcome through targeted outreach and communications. Soon, the team expects to see a transformation of the olive monoculture into a resilient, polycultural ecosystem, becoming a model for human-nature harmony and a hub for regenerative education.

The project's greatest lesson? With the right focus, collaboration, and experimentation, an idea can grow into a successful initiative rooted in local soil.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

A syntropic oasis to RE-connect is a powerful example of how regenerative practices can restore landscapes and inspire communities. The project embraced syntropic agriculture to transform drought-challenged land into a biodiverse, water-wise ecosystem. By building swales (shallow, broad, and vegetated channels designed to collect runoff water) and a clay bio lake (a natural swimming pool to purify water), and planting at high density, the team successfully improved water retention, regenerated soil, and supported plant resilience, laying the groundwork for a thriving agroecosystem.

Through participation in the C4C programme, the project gained guidance and motivation at a critical time. With renewed vision and support, the team moved from uncertainty into action, integrating climate-aware farming methods and hosting workshops to share their insights and knowledge.

A key insight was the redefinition of the farmer's role from food producer to 'ecosystem regenerator'. This shift embraced a deeper responsibility: not just cultivating crops, but cultivating biodiversity, climate resilience, and community consciousness.

Policy lessons included the need to support agroecological transitions such as syntropic agriculture through accessible, long-term funding and streamlined administrative processes. Strengthening initiatives which offer both financial backing and technical expertise is essential, as well as greater collaboration between communities, institutions, and the private sector to amplify impact. Policies that raise awareness of community-led action and foster platforms for knowledge exchange and capacity-building are vital to empower local projects and drive inclusive, regenerative change across Europe.

Agroecology School: Celebration of Water in Spain

In Velez Blanco, a diverse group of families and professionals is transforming their community through community learning: the *Agroecology School*. They learn about regenerative farming, permaculture, agroecology and circular economy, involving local farmers and neighbours to achieve resilient and drought-proof systems in the surrounding terraced mountain landscape. They hosted the 'Water Conference', an event to kick off a community-led programme aimed at ensuring the long-term continuation of the project.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The *Agroecology School* in Vélez Blanco catalysed a growing ecosystem of regenerative initiatives, blending traditional wisdom with modern agroecological practices. A major milestone was the successful organisation of the Water Conference, which gathered over 80 key stakeholders, ranging from farmers and local authorities to national experts in land management and water systems. This gathering sparked critical conversations about the ecological impact of land use and the role of vegetation in stabilising rainfall, and created a powerful platform for community activation, blending ecosystem restoration with personal development and collective visioning.

Two promising offshoots emerged, such as an ERASMUS+ Exchange proposal reconnecting youth with landscapes through ecological action, and the revival of local grain cultivation on irrigated terraces. The latter, led by a local baker and agronomist, aimed to restore the 'Espiga Negra' wheat variety, long lost to drought and monoculture, by linking biodiversity with cultural heritage. Some workshops already engaged locals, blending tradition with hands-on learning.

Although initial plans centred on education, the project evolved into supporting practical, grassroots initiatives led by local professionals. Challenges included the limited availability for theoretical activities and scepticism toward external knowledge. Still, practical workshops and visible, replicable actions (like simple water retention measures) proved most persuasive and effective.

Momentum was particularly built around grounded, community-led change. With water as both a theme and a resource, Vélez Blanco was ready to become a hub for regenerative tourism, rooted in heritage, culture, ecology, and collective care.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

The project demonstrates that rural communities can become hubs of ecological regeneration through shared learning and action. Rooted in traditional knowledge and enhanced by modern practices, the initiative championed agroecology, permaculture (designing farming systems that mimic natural ecosystems), and regenerative land management to restore water cycles and soil health in a drought-prone region.

Local agroecology research identified intercropping ancient grains and legumes on irrigated olive terraces as a way to restore perennial ground cover and improve soil health. On flatlands, the use of swales (shallow, broad, and vegetated channels) and polder hedgerows (raised earth barriers) was proposed to enhance water retention, biodiversity, and wind protection. Regenerative grazing — with well-designed firebreaks based on practices from the Chihuahuan Desert — emerged as a promising approach to manage orchard ground cover. In urban areas, the research suggested hydroponic gutter systems (sloped channels with plants rooted in a thin nutrient-rich water film), rooftop gardens, and edible green spaces to help reduce temperatures, stabilise rainfall, and recycle greywater through natural filtration systems.

The emerging policy lessons are clear: EU agricultural subsidies must support ecological and regional adaptation, not industrial monocultures. Funding should prioritise small-scale, regenerative food systems and make sustainable practices financially viable. By rebalancing the system to reflect real ecological costs, affordable, local food, thriving rural communities, and landscapes capable of withstanding climate stress could be created.

Balanced management of water resources along the Hungarian-Romanian border

This project aimed toward improving water governance of small watercourses between the *Sebes-Körös* and the *Fekete-Körös* rivers. This would ensure that during droughts, the revised cross-border agreement enables increased water flow. Yet, while in times of surplus, coordinated management would help mitigate excess water. By reducing the need for high-cost pumping, this initiative also

sought to enhance cooperation between local authorities, institutions, and businesses in agriculture and nature conservation.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

This cross-border initiative marked a significant step toward improving water governance between Hungary and Romania. For the first time, local authorities, agricultural stakeholders, and community members participated in a joint consultation on managing the watercourses between the *Sebes-Körös* and *Fekete-Körös* rivers, laying the groundwork for more balanced and coordinated resource use. A catchment community was successfully established, gathering municipalities from both sides of the border committed to collaborative water retention and resource conservation at the river basin level.

Public engagement played a vital role: residents shared insights on how water impacts their environment, livelihoods, and quality of life, fostering a deeper connection between communities and sustainable water use. While the project's concept has remained consistent, on-the-ground realities, such as Romania's own water scarcity, have shifted the focus toward retaining local water more effectively.

Several challenges emerged, particularly regarding unfamiliarity with water retention methods and local resistance rooted in past negative experiences. However, trust-building through expert guidance and community dialogue have paved the way for progress.

Looking ahead, the catchment community is set to evolve into an operational body. Plans include co-creating a landscape plan, launching pilot water retention projects, and continuing cross-border coordination. With the right funding and technical expertise, a shared vision is taking shape.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

The cross-border initiative along the Hungarian-Romanian border demonstrates how nature-based solutions and local cooperation can lead to more balanced and climate-resilient water governance. The project's strength lay in its catchment-based approach, grounded in community dialogue, including local authorities, farmers, landowners, vulnerable groups and water managers, among others.

Involving landowners and local users early in the process proved vital, ensuring nature-based solutions are feasible, accepted, and maintained. C4C support played a decisive role, providing expert technical guidance and facilitating new partnerships, regionally and across Europe, which opened doors to funding opportunities and knowledge exchange.

A key lesson is the need to align water retention with agricultural and climate policies. Without legal clarity and targeted funding, especially for the early project phases and staffing, community-led efforts risk stagnation. On top of that, future policy should support the creation of small-scale watershed associations and clarify land access and usage rights.

This experience confirmed that local partnerships, technical expertise, and early institutional support can together create the foundation for scalable, cross-border climate adaptation.

L'acqua si Pianta! Waterwise communities in Ligurian Hinterland, Italy

The association, already active in agroecology and environmental education through a community garden project, free nature workshops, and mapping of century-old trees, launched a new water-focused initiative. Through open public meetings and collective, free workshops on water cycles, climate change, and agroecology, *L'acqua si Pianta!* strengthened local awareness around water stewardship. It aimed to combat climate change by reforesting degraded land, enhancing hydrological cycles, and establishing a syntropic, regenerative orchard

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The project focused on rehydrating the landscape and building resilience through sustainable water management and agroecological design.

Among the most tangible outcomes, a new rainwater collection system was installed at the municipal refuge 'La Sciverna', alongside the creation of a swale (shallow, broad, and vegetated channel designed to collect runoff water) and infiltration pond to improve soil hydration. These actions, implemented with the help of 20 volunteers, sparked broader interest in permaculture (agricultural ecosystems sustainable and self-sufficient) and syntropic agriculture (a method inspired by natural forest ecosystems).

Initially aiming for large-scale reforestation, the team adjusted course to focus on strengthening community capacity first and planting fewer trees but more intentionally. A surprise spring discovery also led to redesigning some interventions in real time.

Despite some tensions, the group overcame internal issues through facilitated sessions, and is now actively seeking legal guidance and new partnerships to prepare for future collaborations. A key lesson has been the power of facilitation and communication to nurture safe, resilient communities.

Looking ahead, the community hopes to restore three artesian wells (wells that bring groundwater to the surface without pumping) and to transform the refuge into an educational hub.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

L'acqua si Pianta! shows how small-scale, community-driven water management can have a lasting impact on both people and the environment.

One of the most effective actions was the creation of a 'swhole', a simple, low-tech blend of swale and infiltration pond built entirely by hand. This solution channels rainwater from steep slopes into a natural basin, slowing runoff and allowing water to percolate into the soil. The result is improved resilience against extreme weather events and a revived local water cycle. These ancient methods, reinterpreted for today's climate realities, are powerful tools, especially when driven by local communities.

The C4C programme was instrumental in transforming vision into action. Through expert guidance and facilitation, the team gained structure, confidence, and clarity, toward implementing ideas long held but not before realised.

The key lesson? Start small, observe nature, and let the land guide you. A shovel, a pond, and shared care for the land can be more effective than large-scale interventions.

This project makes a clear case: meaningful change often comes from empowering local actors with flexible funding, simplified procedures, and support for small, distributed projects. To sustain these efforts, policies should also back diverse, decentralised economies by funding agroecological networks and community-led initiatives. Structured dialogue and long-term financial mechanisms, like basic income for local innovators, can help shift from burnout to lasting engagement and collective resilience.

Sustainable water management from a Spanish mining project

The *Alcudia Valley Local Action Group (LAG)* has initiated a participatory approach to address the environmental challenges posed by an upcoming tungsten mine in Abenójar. Through extensive community engagement, the project focuses on improving water quality, treating and reusing wastewater from mining operations for extensive farming and cinegetic species, for instance, and ensuring a sustainable freshwater supply.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The *Alcudia Valley LAG* has laid important groundwork to ensure that the upcoming El Moto Tungsten Mine contributes positively to both the environment and local development. A national conference on sustainable mining, co-organised through the project, successfully brought together key stakeholders, ranging from public authorities to technical experts and local citizens, to promote collaboration and highlight best practices in environmentally responsible mining.

A key outcome was the launch of a Strategic Plan for Industrial, Sustainable, Local and County Mining, currently under development. Meanwhile, technical studies on water extracted during excavation showed promising results: with relatively low contamination levels, the water could be treated and reused for livestock, biodiversity enhancement, and even urban non-potable uses like irrigation. A water treatment plant and an accumulation pond are already in place, offering tangible infrastructure to support sustainable reuse.

The project also sparked dialogue around mining's broader role in ecological restoration, social responsibility, and the energy transition, particularly within Europe. Community participation was prioritised through local roundtables and the inclusion of academic and thematic experts.

While debate persists within the LAG around mining's role in rural regeneration, political support and EU recognition of the mine as a strategic project offer strong momentum.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

The LAG, in partnership with local authorities and Abenójar Tungsten, piloted a model of trust-based, cross-sector co-operation that places sustainable water use at the heart of rural resilience, crystallising in the form of a public-private partnership.

A key takeaway from this initiative is the revaluation of mining by-products, specifically the potential of dewatering discharge to be repurposed for agricultural and ecological uses. With proper quality controls, what was once considered waste became a resource, turning the mine into a node of circular economy innovation. The project also embraced a broader territorial vision of water governance, integrating perspectives from agriculture, mining, and conservation through public dialogues, roundtables and events like the Sustainable Mining Day.

Several policy lessons emerged. Mining sustainability plans should systematically include wastewater feasibility studies. Targeted funding and tax incentives for circular and regenerative practices would likewise help scale such innovations in under-resourced rural areas. Simplifying access to funding through a rural one-stop shop with technical assistance would also further empower small municipalities and development groups.

New European initiatives could include direct funding lines for local sustainable innovation and the recognition of LAGs as green transition drivers, with access to thematic 'green funds'. Establishing a transnational network of sustainable rural communities and pilots for collaborative governance in key sectors like water and energy would facilitate long-term exchange and resilience. Lastly, future sustainability policies should require active local leadership and highlight community success stories, like this project, as benchmarks to inspire replication across Europe.

Talvolk, a German regional initiative to ensure water conservation in 2,000 hectares of cultural landscape

Talvolk focused on the holistic regeneration of water cycles in a valley through climate-adapted management of forests, orchards, pastures, and fields. By drafting a feasibility study and engaging the community through guided hikes and cultural events, a deeper understanding of sustainable water management and climate adaptation was fostered, while also connecting people with the landscape and its water cycles.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Talvolk laid promising groundwork for the regeneration of water cycles across 2,000 hectares. A key milestone was the work on a feasibility study, supported by growing engagement from local landowners, authorities, and academic partners. The working group expanded, bringing in fresh energy, including new collaborations with Erfurt University and local municipalities such as Tonndorf and Bad Berka.

To make water systems visible and accessible, the team developed animated visualisations of a regenerative landscape (a design system that aims to improve ecosystems), helping translate complex ecological goals into an inspiring vision. A project highlight was the participatory art workshop with 15 children from a local orphanage, fostering early environmental awareness. Encounters with an initiative in Kannawurf also proved key, offering both technical insights and motivation.

While initial land management shifts are still in the early stages, discussions are already underway to secure approximately 50 hectares of public land for pilot

regenerative practices such as agroforestry. These actions aim to demonstrate sustainable alternatives to current land use patterns.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY IMPACT

Talvolk is a great example of how community-led approaches try to restore ecosystems while reconnecting people with the landscapes they inhabit. The project blends agroecology, community engagement, and climate culture in a deeply rooted territorial approach.

Among the project's most valuable lessons to inspire like-minded initiatives is to work within a manageable bioregion, taking a holistic systems view of water, and drawing on global regenerative practices for local solutions. By mapping habitats and tailoring regenerative practices to each, *Talvolk* is not just starting to protect water resources, it's designing a future where ecosystems and people co-exist more harmoniously.

Support from C4C was instrumental in strengthening the project's strategy and connecting *Talvolk* with a wider European network. Shared learning offered new perspectives and contributed to building solidarity with other grassroots actors tackling climate resilience.

Looking ahead, the project team wish for a 'people's budget': a dedicated annual fund for citizen-led ecological projects, allocated directly in the hands of the locals implementing them. This visionary approach could empower thousands of local initiatives to take stewardship of land and water, turning care into actual climate action.

The Rainwater Legacy: The value of rainwater for future generations and biodiversity in Poland

In the districts of Gniezno and Poznan, the *Rainwater Legacy* project aimed to combat drought and promote ecological habits through educational workshops and an information campaign. By showcasing rain gardens and their water retention techniques, it sought to engage the community in sustainable practices, enhancing biodiversity and water management. This grassroots effort aspires to expand into a larger project, addressing the critical water challenges faced in the region.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

The *Rainwater Legacy* project in the Gniezno and Poznań districts made significant steps toward engagement at the grassroots level. Educational workshops equipped participants with practical tools, such as a rain garden (when a garden is planted below the level of its surroundings to absorb rainwater). This as well as design and tailored plant lists resulted in empowering the community to create their own water retention solutions at home.

One standout achievement was the creation of the private showcase rain garden, which will be publicly featured during the Open Gardens Festival. This example has already inspired local residents and strengthened community ties around sustainable water practices. The initiative also deepened collaboration between the LAG and Roślinny Kosmos (the organiser of the Open Garden Festival), laying a strong foundation for future collective efforts.

Connections made during a study visit to Wrocław Krzycki and Grabiszyński Parks continue to enrich the project, enhanced with planned follow-up webinars. The experience, however, highlighted the need for clearer institutional pathways and engagement in a context of growing population and urban development pressures. Ultimately, the project revealed a vital insight: people are eager to live in harmony with nature but lack reliable information for survival. With the right knowledge and tools, communities can lead the way.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

By collaborating with an informal group of ecological garden enthusiasts, the project tapped into existing passions and local knowledge to amplify its reach and impact. Educational workshops and an engaging field visit to the Ślęza River provided practical insight into rainwater retention, soil care, and ecosystem-friendly gardening practices. Simple actions such as compost sharing, creating rain gardens, and managing invasive species proved powerful entry points for community involvement.

The project demonstrated the importance of peer learning and accessible knowledge-sharing formats. Expert-led webinars attracted wide participation and ensured lasting access through recorded materials, laying the groundwork for a well-informed, active community.

While enthusiasm among individuals was high, the project also revealed a key insight: sustainable change demands institutional engagement. Future steps must focus on building stronger bridges between civic initiatives and public institutions. To make this collaboration truly lasting, institutional frameworks must evolve to support it. Embedding mandatory mechanisms for dialogue and joint action between local authorities and civic groups is now essential.

Rainwater Legacy is already inspiring plans for broader, systemic action. Its success reinforces the value of locally rooted, ecologically smart solutions and reminds us that when communities and institutions work hand-in-hand, they can safeguard water and biodiversity for generations to come.

Transition is thriving in southern Spain

Almócita en Transición is a community-driven project addressing rural depopulation and climate change where residents, local associations and administrations collaborate closely. Key actions included establishing an energy community, creating communal vegetable gardens, implementing a composting system, and repopulating Mediterranean forests. Although they also had plans to start working on a nursery for local species, other challenges made the project reassess its priority focus.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

Almócita en Transición began as a community-led effort to address rural depopulation and climate change by linking ecosystem restoration with sustainable agriculture and water management. While the initial focus was on establishing a nursery and preserving traditional drought-resistant species, the project took an important turn: water emerged as the central and most urgent issue. Thanks to C4C, conversations around water - once a sensitive and taboo topic in the region - are

now taking place openly, shaping a new shared understanding of the region's hydrological challenges.

This shift has already produced meaningful outcomes. Residents are now more aware of the value of traditional irrigation systems and the role of organised irrigators' communities (associations of landowners in an area who manage public water jointly). Concrete steps have been taken, including the submission of landscape restoration funding applications, scheduling community work sessions, and initiating the process of legalising irrigation associations. A study visit to a successful demonstrator project further inspired confidence and provided a roadmap for change.

While challenges remain — such as limited funding, initial scepticism, and the need for careful facilitation - the project has laid the groundwork for tangible transformation. The long-term vision includes cleaner, more abundant water, restored acequias (community-operated ditches or canals), and a revitalised local ecosystem that supports both people and biodiversity.

Through its inclusive, evolving approach, *Almócita en Transición* has not only advanced environmental goals but strengthened community resilience, showing that rural regeneration is possible through a collaborative approach.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

Almócita en Transición is a compelling example of how rural communities can lead climate and social resilience through grounded, collective action.

Thanks to support from C4C, the project team opened up new conversations around water, long seen as a contentious issue but rarely addressed collectively. Guided by thematic expertise and inspired by a visit to a similar demonstrator site, the community began exploring nature-based water management solutions and the role of strong, legalised irrigators' associations in defending landscape rights and local water governance. These actions have sparked renewed collaboration with academic institutions and neighbouring villages, improved community cohesion, and ensured that women's voices and local knowledge are valued. A key takeaway has been the importance of recognising and even compensating ecosystem services, such as municipalities paying irrigators' communities for flood prevention and water quality maintenance.

Policy recommendations include increased technical support, flexible timelines, and accessible funding for grassroots projects. Creating safer, more horizontal spaces for dialogue, like those promoted by C4C, has proven essential to unlocking community potential.

Use less water! – A project by a German community in Saxony-Anhalt

This eco-conscious project featured an innovative water management system, with dry separation toilets that have the potential of saving 100,000 litres of drinking water annually. The project focused on composting and optimising the use of faeces and urine in a circular economy. The *Vitopia* cooperative, with over 100 members, organised workshops and events to engage the community, promoting sustainable practices and environmental awareness.

RESULTS (IMPACT)

In Saxony-Anhalt, the *Vitopia* cooperative is advancing sustainable water use through a community-led initiative promoting dry separation toilets, composting, and circular nutrient systems. A dedicated group of volunteers, including refugees and international students, gained practical knowledge, built networks, and raised awareness around sustainable sanitation.

Through workshops, a study visit, and active participation in broader networks like C4C, the group explored innovations like urine recycling and composting toilets. Key connections with initiatives in Cologne, Bonn, and Darmstadt emerged, opening the door to future collaborations. The community also reflected deeply on internal solidarity, onboarding practices, and revitalising their group's values to ensure ongoing continuity and cohesion.

While balancing project work with unpaid commitments can be challenging, the team was able to strengthen its identity as a politically engaged collective. On top of that, the project evolved from focusing on composting to broader water and nutrient recycling. They also hosted a public event to further engage citizens and policymakers.

With increased visibility, stronger networks, and a clearer strategy, by the end of C4C, the community was well-positioned to scale impact.

GOOD PRACTICES | POLICY LESSONS

The initiative showcases how low-tech, community-driven innovation can support environmental sustainability and circular economy goals. By installing dry separation toilets and trialling (testing) composting systems, the Vitopia cooperative helped shift perceptions around sustainable sanitation.

While nutrient recycling from dry toilets is technically robust, the legal framework remains an issue, with current German law limiting the fertiliser application to research purposes only. In Switzerland and Austria the urine-derived fertiliser product 'Aurin' has already been admitted as a fertiliser. And in other EU countries such as France and Spain, the composting of solid material from dry toilets is allowed as 'sewage sludge' under the European Waste Catalogue (EWC).

The long-term aim is for a legislative change that enables broader adoption of ecosanitation systems and the application of recycled fertilisers in agriculture. One major goal is to adopt human excreta in the positive list of fertiliser ingredients of the German Fertiliser Ordinance and/or the Component Material Category (CMC) of the EU Fertilising Products Regulation (FPR).

Beyond the technical advances, the project fostered a culture of experimentation and mutual support. Engaging more than 100 cooperative members in workshops and events, the project boosted awareness on the value of water and nutrients generally considered as waste. Thanks to C4C support, the community not only refined its sanitation system but also gained access to funding for wider sustainability upgrades and began to change social norms about this sort of 'waste'.