**Project Idea for Potenza for the first Call of the 2021-2027 Interreg Europe Programme**

1. **Participatory biodiversity governance**

**The challenge**

Participatory governance refers to the process to empower citizens to participate in public decision-making. It is seen as a tool to tackle issues related to the disillusionment of democracy and to improve public accountability and the provision of public services. Even though it is not an innovative phenomenon on its own, as many governments and projects have experimented with a range of innovative practices to expand mechanisms for citizen participation in governance that go beyond voting in elections, overcoming public apathy towards involvement in decision-making is a challenge that requires further attention. There are toolkits available for participatory governance, including means of active communication, education, public dialogue, public involvement in budget planning and monitoring, and accountability measures.

The same applies, although to a lesser extent, to biodiversity and ecosystem services governance, including a dedicated Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform. According to its findings, good governance measures are a catalyst and an enabling condition for the implementation and enforcement of biodiversity protection and conservation policy, delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, and social benefits. It is well accepted that the inclusion of stakeholders through multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP) is key for good biodiversity governance. Despite toolkits and frameworks adapted by Interreg projects, these inclusive measures still lack tools and resources on the part of organisations and individuals to fully participate. Moreover, there is still a comprehensive lack of involvement structures for citizens themselves outside of organisational structures. Moreover, there is a weakness in the availability of reliable and robust biodiversity data needed for effective governance, despite a few initiatives on creating digital platforms for compiling data through scientific research and citizen science. With regard to financing, Payment for Ecosystem (PES) schemes have become increasingly popular among policymakers, for the reason that a user of an ecosystem service provides payments to communities whose management decisions influence the provision of such services. The implementation of innovative PES schemes, therefore, is still an important and influential task still relevant for many regions.

**The Policy Instrument**

The Province of Potenza (IT) has proposed the policy improvement of its *Provincial Territorial Coordination Master Plan - TPC* (Piano Strutturale Provinciale di Potenza - PSP: http://psp.provincia.potenza.it/).

The TCP is a planning tool developed at provincial level under the normative framework of the Basilicata Planning law (L.R.23/99) defining the territorial link between Municipal Planning (100 Municipalities in the Province) and the regional and national ones by integrating policies in several strategic domains including biodiversity

Relevant objectives of TCP:

* enabling the reorganization of territorial governance, effective local development policies and services
* encouraging the protection and promotion of the natural resources ensuring sustainable development
* protecting the biodiversity of forest ecosystems and their connectivity

The TCP identifies the *provincial ecological network* (“HABITAT Directive” 92/43/CEE) as main focus of its strategic approach towards biodiversity, ensuring protection, promotion and planning of an otherwise fragmented distribution of natural areas owned by municipalities and national parks, connecting it to the rest of the territory and with the urban areas, offering occasions also for recreational activities with low environmental impact.

Moreover, following the *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030* adopted in May 2020 in line with the European Green Deal, which sets targets of legally protecting a minimum of 30% of the EU land and sea area, this network is set to increase substantially in the next years.

Successful participatory decision-making and governance of the natural areas and the provincial ecological network as well as enhancement of ecosystem services are the keys policy improvement of the TCP that are expected.

**The project idea**

Increased citizen participation in policy and decision-making is one of the main strategic goals of Potenza. Overall, increased citizen participation in biodiversity and ecosystem services provision provides an innovative approach to biodiversity governance. Research suggests that this should include a shift from a top-down administrative understanding of policy-making to a flexible range of bottom-up approaches, together with a shift towards enhancing biodiversity-related public discourse through developing a framework for bridging communicational issues among policy-makers, scientists, and citizens, and with a shift from a sole conservation focus towards a goods-and-services approach based on ecosystem services and nature protection. These measures may narrow the gap between the rhetoric of public participation and actual implementation of participatory biodiversity and ecosystem services governance. Research on the obstacles to the large-scale public participation in biodiversity and ecosystem services governance points towards the issue of power relations, a lack of a deliberative rationale, and instrumental reasons constituted the main drivers of the changing patterns of participation. Using existing research, decision-makers can build on the existing knowledge and tools to overcome these barriers.

The project idea: Influencing regional policy for the involvement of citizens into biodiversity governance and sustainable management of ecosystem services through an integrated approach

There is still room for improvement in the means and frameworks through which to involve citizens in the governance of local biodiversity and ecosystem services. An Interreg Europe project could focus on enhancing multi-stakeholder governance structures that pay intensified attention to the involvement of citizens, for example by connecting organisations, scientists and citizens. It could strive to influence policy by creating long-lasting and flexible structures of citizen involvement that go beyond sporadic, public-forum based engagement. Each participating region could influence specific biodiversity- and ecosystem management-related policy instruments by choosing one of the different approaches to and versions of citizen engagement methods, with the long-term objective of incorporating them in the enhancement of sustainable citizen participation in biodiversity governance and ecosystem services management.

Long-lasting citizen involvement structures can be influenced by a range of existing methods, e.g. the Eco Chain approach to Participatory Biodiversity Management being a useful starting point to build on. Existing alternative financing mechanisms provide a suitable platform for innovation, for example by diversifying the well-known methods of PES, and by incorporating other alternative financing methods, such as Marketed products for biodiversity conservation (MPBC), which allocate part of the revenues from the sale of specific consumer goods (e.g. local agricultural products) to conservation activities and sustainable land management, and Ecological Fiscal Transfers (EFT), which are a lesser-known method to redistribute tax revenue among government levels to compensate those municipalities that, as a result of the designation of protected areas, may face land-use constraints and missed opportunities for economic development. From another perspective, involving citizens by enhancing citizen science activities, such as gathering data on ecosystem services and monitoring biodiversity-related activities and eco-tourism, which is an ecosystem-services based form of tourism, might provide other viable examples for the channels through which to centre citizen participation. Effectively addressing inevitable trade-offs (frictions between agricultural production and water quality, recreational uses of protected areas) in ecosystem services management could provide an innovative element in the involvement of citizens as well.

Transnational cooperation may involve pilot interventions for demonstrating the feasibility and usefulness of certain project elements for the influencing of region-specific policy instruments. Pilot interventions in a project focused on citizen involvement in biodiversity governance and the sustainable management of ecosystem services could test different versions of citizen involvement, with each partner region focusing on one specific area. As an example, a digital tool for mediation methodology could be tested by one partner region to enhance communication by bridging language gaps in the lingo spoken by different stakeholders. An innovative approach would be provided by using a digital tool to foster long-term and sustainable cooperation among citizens, public institutions and stakeholders. This would provide opportunities for learning, which may increase the range of ideas and solutions available to challenges on the one hand, and citizen understanding of and competence in tackling complex environmental issues on the other. This way, frameworks for citizen involvement would go beyond the top-down dissemination of information and enhance motivation to participate in the protection of biodiversity and the strengthening of ecosystem services.

**Benchmark**

Perhaps the most well-known project for the participatory biodiversity management of ecosystem services is the one in Bankur, India. The project has successfully mobilised local communities to establish a Participatory Biodiversity Management plan for a local forest. Moreover, there have been a number of EU-funded projects on the topic. For example, the Horizon 2020 project EKLIPSE (“Establishing a European Knowledge and Learning Mechanism to Improve the Policy- Science- Society Interface on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services'') has attempted to build a flexible and light model for societal engagement for EU biodiversity issues through knowledge synthesis. The Horizon2020 project SINCERE plans to map existing knowledge and experiences at the EU scale, and will evaluate a set of innovation actions that explore novel practices in different regional contexts, focusing on a broad spectrum of forest ecosystem services.

Previous Interreg Europe projects have addressed the biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services management/governance challenge as well. IMPACT has a number of interesting practices in multi-stakeholder partnership for biodiversity, in particular cooperation between institutions and innovative methods of dialogue between biodiversity stakeholders, with a focus on citizens. BID-REX has focused on data provision for biodiversity and its importance for conservation-related decision-making processes. Delta Lady has represented a PES scheme for habitat and fishery conservation through revenues gathered through fishing and eco-tourism activities reinvested in the environmental conservation of river delta areas. BIOGOV has set out to develop and improve regional policies for natural heritage, cultural heritage and biodiversity conservation in complementary European policy contexts through new forms of participatory governance, focusing on stakeholder cooperation. It is expected to result in more effective policies due to improved governance and stakeholder support.