

OSDD Slovenia 5–6 March 2024

Before: interview with the host organisations Development Agency Savinja-Šalek and the Faculty of Environmental Protection

- What kind of a program have you planned for the OSDD?

At the open seminar, which will take place on March 5, 2024, as part of the 3rd interregional meeting of project partners, we would like to focus on the set challenges of the project. We wish to present to our project partners, businessmen and other interested public. ideas and plans in the field of sustainability, which represents an excellent opportunity for networking. Topic address at the open seminar will be:

- circular economy in the "plastic" sector,
- usability of collected plastic waste for recycling,
- use of recycled materials,
- challenges and opportunities when using recycled materials,
- production and use of degradable plastic - bioplastic,
- monitoring the life cycle of the materials used - plastic,
- sources of microplastics,
- microplastics in the environment,
- preventing the migration of microplastics from various environments into water and
- ways to prevent and remove plastic and microplastic from the environment.

- How many participants do you expect?

We hope that our OSDD will be visited by quite a few interested businessmen, individuals from the local authorities and other interested members of the public.

- Are all partner regions joining?

Today's review of the application form shows that all for the project partners/regions will attend the meeting.

- Are there stakeholders and/or associated policy authorities attending the OSDD?

Yes, there are companies from plastic sector such as Goreje, d.o.o., BSH Home Appliance, d.o.o., Plastika Skaza d.o.o., Karbon Clean technologies d.o.o., stakeholders as Velenje Coal Mine d.o.o., Faculty of Polymer Technology and Faculty of Environmental protection, Utility company Velenje d.o.o. and associated policy authorities such as Savinjsko Šaleška Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

- What is the one thing you are waiting for the most to present to the partners?

The topic that we are addressing at our OSDD is microplastics. We must be aware that waste plastic materials contribute to changes in natural phenomena, which further emphasizes the need for effective solutions.

The PLASTIX project aims to solve these challenges by establishing cooperation and knowledge exchange between participating regions. By exchanging best practices and innovative approaches, we aim to promote sustainable practices, promote the development of circular economy models and the growth of environmentally acceptable industries/technologies in our region. We strive to make a real contribution to a more sustainable and environmentally friendly Europe.

The thing that we are most proud to present to the partners are the results of activities regarding sampling that was made in the beginning of the project by Faculty of Environmental Protection.

- Is there a challenge or problem in your region you are planning to discuss with the partners?

Challenge

The results of using the Circular Benchmark Tool application confirmed, that there is very little circular economy in our region, or that it is poorly developed, so a lot is still to be done in this area. That represents a challenge for SAŠA region.

There is another big challenge.

SAŠA region is also involved in The Just Transition. Just Transition Fund is a new financial instrument under cohesion policy that supports areas facing major socio-economic challenges due to the transition to climate neutrality. It will facilitate the implementation of the European Green Deal, which aims for a climate-neutral EU by 2050. The main objective of the fund is to mitigate the impact of the transition by financing the diversification and modernization of the local economy and to mitigate the negative consequences for employment.

Today, a process of regional transformation or re-innovation is underway, which requires a supportive environment in which to implement the development projects that have been and are being conceived. Support for their implementation is provided by EU funds, but at the same time these projects attract other sources of co-financing to develop a greener, digitized and internationally connected region.

We certainly hope that the partnership meeting will bring new ideas, solutions and new contacts that will help with the challenges of the future.

Discussion with the partners

We want the people of our region to be informed about what is happening in the plastics sector in the region, i.e. the life cycle of plastic packaging and plastic production residues, through information and communication. In addition, they should be made aware of the national plastic collection scheme, and it should be stressed that all the efforts made by citizens over the years have not been in vain. That is issue we would like to discuss with our partners especially ones from Lombardy and Catalonia region.

From our point of view, if information could be presented on the circular economy, the recycling and reuse of plastic materials generated during production, and the challenges and objectives of companies regarding this aspect, awareness would be raised even further. It would remove citizens' doubts that all this is "no big deal" and justify the good practices that are or could be implemented in our region.

SAŠA DA has already carried out such activities, but only in the field of information and awareness raising on thermal energy saving in the Šaleška valley. A comprehensive leaflet was prepared and distributed to all households in the Municipality of Velenje and the Municipality of Šoštanj.

The good practice described could be used to inform citizens of SAŠA region about the fate of the separate collection of plastic packaging and single use plastics. This waste has been collected separately for years within the framework of the state plastic waste scheme, but there are still doubts between people about their processing or recycling. Within companies there are also many activities to achieve the goals of the circular economy which also do not reach the lay audience. We believe that a lot could still be done in raising the awareness of each individual citizen resulting in fact to get closer to a zero-waste society.