

What lies behind the RSC?

The RSC is a partnership of 12 organisations from eight EU member states. The partners share a common cause: to promote an EU-wide shift to low-carbon economic development. The three-year RSC project was launched in October 2008 and is co-funded by the EU programme INTERREG IVC, part of the European Territorial Cooperation Objective of the Structural Fund policies for the period 2007–2013.

Since the project start-up the partnership, through various working groups, has focused on the preparation of the baseline report, which is the first step in the RSC project. Work has also begun to:

- develop a set of criteria and indicators for low-carbon regions;
- conduct a macro-economic analysis of three partner regions to identify structural changes required to achieve low-carbon status; and
- investigate the use of strategic environmental assessment and sustainability assessment to integrate climate change and low-carbon objectives into regional planning.

Signpost

On theatre, quantum physics and RSC

Critics have long been sceptical of the European project cycle trap: expensive projects absorbing attention and resources for three or four years, only to be forgotten in the scramble for the next EU funding round. The RSC project can avoid this trap by building on the solid foundation of its forerunner, Greening Regional Development Programmes (GRDP), and extending the GRDP's philosophy to low-carbon regional development. But the risk remains of the final RSC report being delivered in 2011 to a European theatre from which the audience has long departed in the rush to be at the INTERREG VC party.

I hope that the RSC learns another lesson from GRDP — that the process of project delivery is as important as the end result. Too often we are like actors delivering our pre-approved project scripts as though “All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players”; as though the audience doesn't matter until their applause after the final scene. Like many a post-modern production we must break through the imaginary fourth wall at the front of our metaphorical proscenium stage and engage our audience in every scene.



BRIAN SHIPMAN: Cornwall Council's RSC project manager until the end of October 2009.

Meanwhile, the low-carbon debate is moving fast, and the future of regional programmes based on GDP growth criteria is under challenge. As in a good play, the imagery and language of the RSC will be as important as its final destination if it is to participate in the debates. It may be heresy to some, but we know that the interregional strand of INTERREG is tainted by political fashions. Early and concise presentations should take precedence over long-delayed, densely written scientific treatises. In a parody of Schrödinger's cat, the existence of the RSC should achieve the desired outcome even before the project's end.

The RSC has already produced the Regional Climate Confidence Index, an innovative means of positioning regions in the multi-dimensional carbon space. It is time to revive the “evangelical” RSC, envisaged in the project design, reaching out through that fourth wall and communicating with other regions, the EC and all who will listen — that the regions are a vital partner in Europe's efforts to achieve truly low carbon development, and that the RSC can show how — even if we haven't yet written the final scene.

It's time for me to shuffle off the RSC in the first act to take up new challenges, but I leave knowing that RSC has the potential to demonstrate the pivotal role the regions can play in the delivery of sustainable growth in Europe.

Brian Shipman

The views expressed in this guest editorial represent those of the author and not those of the RSC.



First project output: the Regional Climate Confidence Index

How confident are the European regions in facing a changing climate? Do they have what it takes to reduce their carbon emissions while maintaining sustainable economic growth? How do regions compare with one another and with average European benchmarks? What are the challenges still to be overcome?

The Regional Climate Confidence Index (RCCI) developed by the RSC partnership is an innovative tool that empowers the regions to answer these questions. The Regional Climate Confidence Index evaluates and scores regions on seven key issues:

- 1. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions:** includes GHG emissions per capita and GHG intensity (ratio of GHG emissions to GDP).
- 2. Energy consumption:** includes final energy consumption (FEC) per capita and energy intensity (ratio of energy consumption to GDP).
- 3. Renewable energy:** in terms of energy production capacity and consumption.
- 4. Policy frameworks:** policy and planning processes for climate change.
- 5. Institutional capacity:** the effectiveness of regional authorities in managing climate change issues.
- 6. Socio-political aspects:** the awareness and readiness of the population and key stakeholder groups for climate change-related actions.
- 7. Financial instruments:** for financing climate change-related measures.

The index combines subjective assessment with an evaluation of data against EU averages, allowing regions to learn more about how other regions perform. Like most composite indicators, the RCCI is not a definitive scientific tool. However, it does help regions to look critically at their capacity to deal with the changing climate. Regions completed a simple questionnaire about their energy production and consumption, GHG emissions, policies, institutions and other related factors, and the answers were then assessed and scored. The results, accompanied by detailed analysis and conclusions were presented in the RSC Baseline Assessment Report. An executive summary of the report's results will be available at the project website (www.rscproject.org) at the end of January 2010.



PICTURES FROM THE PARTNER REGIONS: (clockwise from left upper corner) Malta; Central Hungary; Cornwall, UK; La Rioja, Spain; third Steering Committee Meeting, Sofia, Bulgaria.

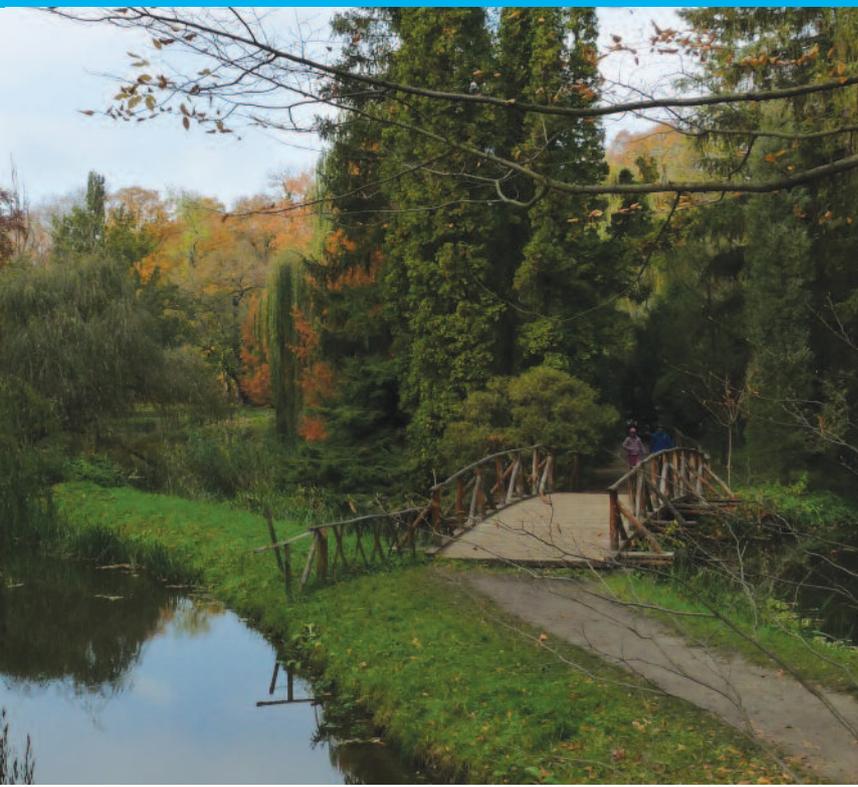
"The Marche Region is implementing several projects on energy efficiency and renewable energy and is working for the adoption of the final document of the Regional Plan for Climate, ensuring the coherence of mitigation and adaptation actions. Participation in the RSC project allows the Marche Region to share experience, improve knowledge on regional and local impacts, and work towards a low-carbon future."

Silvia Catalino
Environment and Landscape Department,
Marche Region

The fight against climate change is a vital necessity and at the same time an economic development opportunity for a change in lifestyles. In this sense, the RSC project is an important initiative for sharing knowledge and practical experience with other European regions towards shared sustainable development goals.

Christian Ballaro
Environment Department,
Piedmont Region





Climate change in Liguria

According to the recent report on global climate change and its impact at national level, published in September 2009 by the Climate and Atmospheric Science Institute of the National Research Council (ISAC-CNR), the effects of climate change are evident in Italy and the Mediterranean region in general (tropicalisation, rare and intense weather events, and an increase in summer droughts).

Situated in the coastal region of north western Italy, Liguria is especially vulnerable to climate change. The ISAC-CNR report estimated an increase of about 1°C in average temper-

atures over the last 50 years in north western Italy. In the Alpine region a significant reduction in the extent of glaciers has been noticed, caused by higher summer temperatures and less snow in winter. In the Mediterranean Basin, current data indicate an annual rise of about 1.3 mm in average sea level, while models predict a temperature rise associated with a decrease in river flow.

Fifteen cities in the Liguria region have signed the Covenant of Mayors. In the framework of this EC initiative, cities from Liguria will hold the conference “Energy

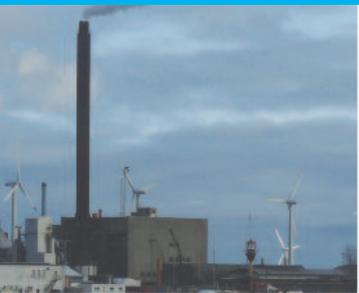
and Atmosphere of the European Union: Strategies and Instruments to Support Private and Public Agencies in Liguria” on December 16, 2009. Local, regional, national and international participants will discuss possibilities for the deeper involvement of local agencies in reaching the 20-20-20 objectives.

During the conference, the Regional Authority of Liguria, a member of the RSC partnership, will present project activities and initial results.

Matteo Graziani

WHERE DID RSC APPEAR THIS AUTUMN?

October 6, 2009	“Open Days”, European Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels, Belgium Session on regional responses to climate change organised by the regions of Central Italy
October 20, 2009	Conference on Opportunities for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency Action in an Economic Crisis Catalysing a Green Recovery. Center for Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Policy, Budapest, Hungary.
October 21, 2009	International workshop “Climate Change in South Eastern European Countries IV: Adaptation Strategies for Economy and Society”, Zagreb, Croatia
November 11, 2009	Second meeting of the Rio Conventions Project Advisory Board, Sofia, Bulgaria
November 25, 2009	Plenary Meeting of the European Network of Environmental Authorities, Brussels, Belgium
November 27–28, 2009	Second Urban Environment Conference, Debrecen, Hungary
December 16, 2009	Covenant of Mayors, conference “Energy and Atmosphere of the European Union: Strategies and Instruments to Support Private and Public Agencies in Liguria”, Genoa, Italy



ASPECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE: pictures from Copenhagen and the COP-15 venue.

Good COP? Bad COP? Never mind!

International diplomacy is hotting up, perhaps faster than the climate is changing. As the world gears up for the summit in Copenhagen, arguments flare up and expectations fluctuate. The 194 parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 184 parties to the Kyoto Protocol are expected to agree on commitments, targets and long-term actions to combat climate change.

Alternative climate events will gather hundreds of NGOs and thousands of protesters eager to express frustration at “political procrastination” or “capitalist greed”; and the carbon market is reacting painfully to uncertainty over future demand for carbon credits.

Whatever deal is agreed, the EU hopes that it will be legally binding and that it will lead to ambitious targets.

Meanwhile, important work is taking place behind the scenes. Many European regions have realised that the problem extends well beyond the conventional political domain. It demands responses at the grassroots policy level too.

The RSC aims to change the way regions deal with climate change. The RSC’s Regional Climate Confidence Index (RCCI) has the potential to help regions to visualise their climate performance. It may also feed into the EU policy debate on measuring progress beyond traditional macro-economic indicators such as GDP. The partnership is also working to improve the integration of climate in strategic environmental assessments.

Whatever the outcome of the COP, the project will continue with its hands-on approach to the problem.

Sergei Golovkin

Climate-proofing the Cohesion Policy

More than a third of the total EU budget for the period 2007–2013 is channelled to European regions under the Cohesion Policy. These funds represent the bulk of EU infrastructure support. In many cases these investments, especially in new member states, are allocated to carbon-intensive infrastructure contributing to GHG emissions. However, these funds can potentially catalyse the transition to a low-carbon future through investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

A report has been drafted by the REC within the European Network for Environmental Authorities and aims to encourage the integration of climate change into Structural and Cohesion Funds in order to reduce the carbon intensity of

operational programmes and projects.

Halfway through the current programming period, the report gives timely input on how to improve the climate friendliness of the remaining funds and suggests ways to shape the future climate-proof Cohesion Policy. It summarises member states’ experiences and tools for climate proofing the Cohesion Policy funds. The report gives recommendations on all levels of programme realisation, from strategic planning and programming to project cycle management and ex-post evaluation and can be a support and inspiration for managing authorities in planning and implementation. The report is available at: www.rec.org.

Ellen Baltzar

Glossary

Climate confidence – A term coined by the RSC to refer to the goal of fostering regions secure in their ability to manage climate change impacts and risks, and to benefit from the opportunities of a low-carbon economy.

COP-15 – The UN Climate Change Conference takes place in Copenhagen on December 7–18, 2009. The conference includes the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 5th Meeting of the Parties (COP/MOP 5) to the Kyoto Protocol. According to the Bali Road Map, a framework for climate change mitigation post-2012 is to be agreed there.

Cohesion Policy – An instrument of economic integration introduced by the EU for member states with gross national income per inhabitant at less than 90 percent of the Community average, to reduce their social and economic disparities compared with more affluent regions.

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Contacts:
Venelina Varbova
vvarbova@rec.org

Dora Almassy
dalmassy@rec.org
(36-26) 504-000

To subscribe to the newsletter, please send a message to: info@rscproject.org

In order to enhance the impact of the project and to make use of other work of this kind, the RSC partners would be happy to get in touch with other similar initiatives, individual regions with good practice in the field, as well as companies and/or organisations carrying out research on the topic.