

WELCOME PLUS_Capitalization Achievements

Project identification

Project title: **WatEr LandsCapes sustainability through reuse of Marine litter PLUS**

Project acronym: **WELCOME PLUS**

Project number: **ITALME-559**

Name of the lead partner organisation/English: **National Interuniversity Consortium for Marine Sciences**

Project duration: **01.11.2022 - 31.05.2023**

The project **WELCOME PLUS** focused on the capitalization of the results of **WELCOME** (WatEr LandsCapes sustainability thrOugh reuse of Marine littEr), a 2018/2020 IPA CBC project aimed to promote the sustainable management of **marine litter (ML)** over the long term through a) development of transnational guidelines, b) adoption of a nature-based method for coastal dunes consolidation (using reclaimed wood from ML), and raising public awareness about sustainable development.

In this framework, **WELCOME** was planned as a reference instrument for local authorities in implementing a sustainable ML management system, a way forward to be adapted for other coastal regions. The outcomes of the **WELCOME** project included the establishment of comprehensive initiatives to prevent coastal environmental risks and preserve biodiversity, as well as the development of a sustainable value chain re-using natural ML (stranded wood) for creations by artists and architects. Implemented actions were beach cleaning operations, simulation of transport and accumulation of floating marine litter, dune restorations, and the definition of a cross-border marine litter management plan and legal framework for ML issues in the Southern Adriatic.



The planned achievements for WELCOME PLUS were the realization of **two integrative workshops**, one in Montenegro and one in Italy, to promote advanced knowledge, skills, and competencies on marine litter pollution, and to identify gaps, issues, and state-of-art methodologies to generate advanced understanding, awareness, recommendations, and solutions.

The WELCOME PLUS workshops

The first workshop was realized in Kotor (Montenegro) on the 13th of March 2023, with a focus on two modern methodologies for the integrated coastal management: **bioremediation and habitat restoration**. The workshop involved the participation of 45 representatives of the research sector, representatives of coastal municipalities (e.g. Municipality of Kotor), national agencies (Ministry of Tourism and the Environment of Montenegro, Environmental protection Agency of Montenegro, Ministry of Agriculture, forestry and water management of Montenegro), public companies (Public enterprise for coastal zone management), associations of fishermen and mariculturists, representatives of national contact persons, IPA CBC Joint Secretariat and Managing Authority) representatives of NGO sectors (dealing with environmental protection, marine litter and marine aquaculture sector) and other interested parties. Thanks to WELCOME and WELCOME PLUS, the University of Montenegro accelerated the national policy actions leading to the ban of the single-use plastics.

Two months later, on the 16th of May, the second workshop took place in Lecce (Italy) when leading research organization and scientific coordinators of international projects across Europe came

together to discuss the main achievements, the current gaps of knowledge and the future perspectives of research and policy to address marine litter and plastic pollution issues.



The WELCOMe PLUS workshops offered the opportunity to raise awareness on sustainable development of coastal communities in the involved territories, to improve the conditions for future cross-border initiatives to take actions against marine pollution, to strengthen transnational collaborations across regions, and to bring together key players in the creation of new project proposals.

The Italian event involved 46 scientists and managers (18 males, 28 females) from 23 different organizations (Universities, Research Bodies, NGO Associations) that acted or are currently acting as lead partners in specific projects on Marine Litter and microplastics, including Universities (Politecnica delle Marche, Ancona; University of Siena; University of Bari; University of Salento; University of Padova; University of Parthenope; University of Tirana; University of Montenegro), Research Bodies and institutions (CoNISMa; ISPRA; ARPA PUGLIA; CNR; CMCC, e-Geos, HCMR, IWRS, CIHEAM, Museo e Stazione di Biologia Marina Porto Cesareo), stakeholder associations (Lega Navale Italiana; Legambiente), as well as the Programme Representative organization (JDCProgramme, Interreg IT-AL-ME Officer).

The overall goals of the two workshops were to increase knowledge, skills, and competencies on marine litter pollution and marine habitat degradation, and to identify gaps, issues, and state-of-art methodologies to generate advanced understanding, awareness, recommendations, and solutions.

The activities implemented in WELCOMe and WELCOMe PLUS provided evidence of and support to the management and restoration activities that could be implemented by beach operators using standardized protocols. Our field activities demonstrated that the amount of stranded marine litter on the selected beaches is far more the thresholds set by EU, therefore preventing the full achievement of the Good Environmental Status requested by the MFSD. Capitalization events, such as those implemented by WELCOMe PLUS, would support networking of local and regional authorities and maritime operators of the tourism sector, as well as other sectors of the civil society

(including educational) to set up an operative Citizen Science framework for the delivering of long-term information on the Marine Litter, and to support coastal spatial planning, national policy interventions, and awareness-rising in the public at large.

WELCOME PLUS has contributed to the achievement of the INTERREG programme result related to “common interventions aimed to improve the cross border framework conditions in which the facilitators of competitiveness operate”, particularly by 1) assessing of the current state of art achieved at transnational level by multiple research and cooperative programmes on the Marine Plastic Pollution, 2) establishing an international network of experts to support the management of ML and the development of coastal communities in the Mediterranean and to identify a shared technical and policy strategy to address gaps and needs at regional level. Finally, the project contributed to the environmental quality criteria of the EUSAIR strategy, rising awareness and providing good practices on marine litter management, to improve the quality of life on the common seacoasts by protection of marine resources and ecosystem services and integrated coastal zone management, and specifically by rising awareness on plastic pollution issue.