

REPORT ON EVALUATION OF PILOT ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Project Partners



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within the project CE1308 Healing Places - *Enhancing environmental management capacities for sustainable use of the natural heritage of Central European spa towns and regions as the driver for local and regional development.*

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1. Background and introduction

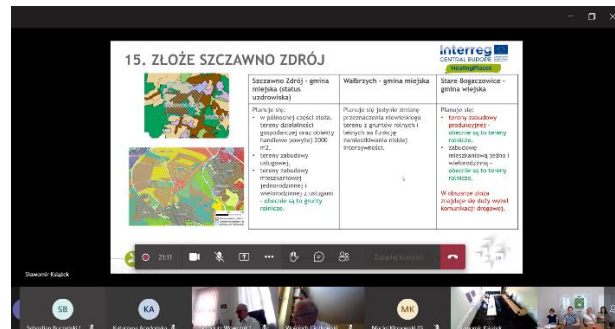
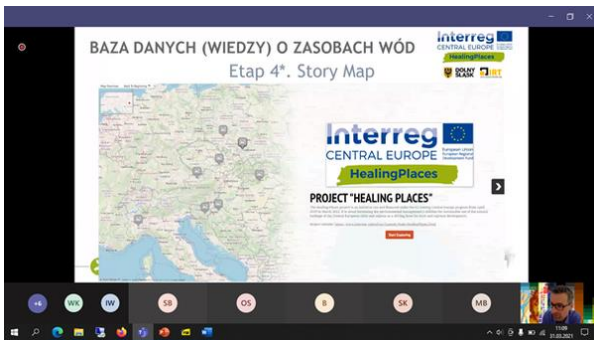
The project HealingPlaces - *Enhancing environmental management capacities for sustainable use of the natural heritage of Central European SPA towns and regions as the driver for local and regional development* is funded by the EU Interreg Central Europe programme and running between April 2019 - June 2022. The project is run by Central Mining Institute (Katowice, Poland) as a lead partner, together with 9 Central European partners:

LP	Główny Instytut Górnictwa - Central Mining Institute	PL
PP2	Dolnoslaskie Region - Institute for Territorial Development	PL
PP3	Hajdú-Bihar County Government	HU
PP4	Business Upper Austria - Upper Austrian government's location agency	AT
PP5	BORA 94 Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Development Agency Nonprofit LLC	HU
PP6	City of Krizevci	HR
PP8	DEVELOPMENT CENTRE NOVO MESTO, Counseling and Development, Ltd.	SI
PP9	Mendel University in Brno	CZ
PP10	LAMORO Development Agency	IT
PP11	Upper Adriatic Technology Park Andrea Galvani SCPA	IT

The project consists of three different work packages:

- WPT1 “Environmental Mapping and Assessment” has the goal to develop common tools for an integrated assessment of present-day and expected threats and pressures on mineral and thermal water resources in SPAs. Another WPT1 results have been the state-of-art assessment concerning legal status and environmental and socio-economic aspects of SPAs development. It has developed also a common methodology and ranking criteria for assessment of impact strength on mineral and thermal water resources.
- WPT2 is focused on the practical implementation of sustainable thermal water use in SPAs, throughout the development and implementation of different pilot actions on SPAs system located in the different regional territory of PPs. The main objective of WP2 is the practical implementation of sustainable thermal water use in SPA-regions, understood primarily as ensuring effective & rational use of identified resources & protection of ecosystems while realizing social & economic functions.
- Finally, WPT3, starting from the WPT1 tools and from the Pilot Actions implemented in the WPT2, aims to provide an Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Management of SPAs system.

The present report is a part of WPT2 and is intended to evaluate the development and the implementation of the pilot actions in the various countries and to summarize recommendations for WPT3.



LP and PP2 have collaborated in the process of testing the tool with local stakeholders in the selected two SPA municipalities in Poland (Łądek-Zdrój, Polanica-Zdrój), where project pilot activities are carried out. Testing of the tool was conducted in three working groups in parallel:

- an internal one composed of GIG and LP experts responsible in the project for the development of the tool,
- a project group with international experts responsible for pilot actions and tool testing with regional stakeholder groups in each country,
- external with local stakeholders in the two selected SPA municipalities in Poland where the pilot actions are carried out.

Overall, in frame of PA1 the process of tool for impact assessment of SPAs development's updating and tool testing included 4 main phases, from the draft tool to the final version, during which the tool was constantly evaluated and changed, responding to the emerging needs and suggestions of the testers. The main changes related to the functionality and content of the tool for impact assessment of SPAs development were: (1) updating and verification of the database, (2) security and verification of algorithms, (3) addition of new functionalities in the visualisation and benchmarking, and land cover index, as well as improvement of the visual layer and intuitive use by potential users.

The key consultation with local decision makers was the testing of the tool during workshops in Łądek-Zdrój and Polanica-Zdrój in September 2021. During these workshops, the assumptions and the operation of the tool for impact assessment of SPAs development were presented to local and regional stakeholders.





Overall, the partners intend to provide the region with knowledge to use the underlying tool for land use policy in order to create assessment of legal regulations for the protection of mineral and thermal water resources and recommendations for the improvement of the Polish legal system (at national level). The on-going activities focus on development of common protection strategy on local level and integrated action plan and specific recommendations dedicated for all administrative units. Another aspect being undertaken is assessment of stakeholders and general public awareness, which is being done by survey. The stakeholders more direct involvement in Action Plan finalization took place through regional workshops . The letter of intent for adopting prepared Action Plan planned to be signed by key actors during final conference.

Pilot Action 2: Improvement of sustainable management of thermal natural resources within protected area of Colli Euganei Natural Regional Park (IT)

The pilot action in Veneto region (Italy) starts from adaptation and testing of the common tool for integrated assessment of threats & pressures on main SPAs' resources (previously realized during the project) for the local SPA district inside a natural protected area (Regional Park of Euganean Hills), in the territory of the municipalities of Montegrotto Terme and Abano Terme.



Map of Veneto and Padova province and Montegrotto Terme³

An in-depth analysis of environmental resources & impacts is going carried out by using this tool, including a monitoring system of water quality, characteristics, pressure and quantity. Environmental capacity of the area will be analysed.

The mobile App, developed in the project, is be adapted to local conditions, including information on thermal water conditions and characteristics of sites around SPAs (biodiversity, geology, landscape, relationship man-environment, etc) for use of technicians or tourists /visitors.



¹ Source: <https://www.enchantingitaly.com/ita/regioni/veneto/provincia-padova/> and <https://www.visitabanomontegrotto.com/de/about-us/>



The same App is be used for the training for local SMEs and stakeholders, by providing interactive information, awareness, guide to both technicians and users of thermal sites in order to better understand the environment around them and the impacts of thermal activity on it.

Also linked to the App is the realisation of an Immersive room (initially planned with ICT, audio-video & kinetic systems), to be prepared as a training, information and awareness centre in a space inside the thermal area of Abano-Montegrotto Terme.



It will provide experience on SPA sustainable management and its links with surrounding environment and resources, in order to train and raise awareness among users, operators and managers, but also to raise awareness and increase knowledge about environmental sustainability of thermal areas in tourists, visitors and citizens.

11 VR sets has been bought for target of public policy makers and 300 cardboards were purchased to reach students, policy makers, families and tourists etc. Now the virtual experience is developed as a storyboard, that narrates the evolution of thermal water history from Romans to nowadays.



The main goal is to create awareness on stakeholders of the territory of Abano-Montegrotto by showing all potentials of the area as the largest area for preventive health in Europe.

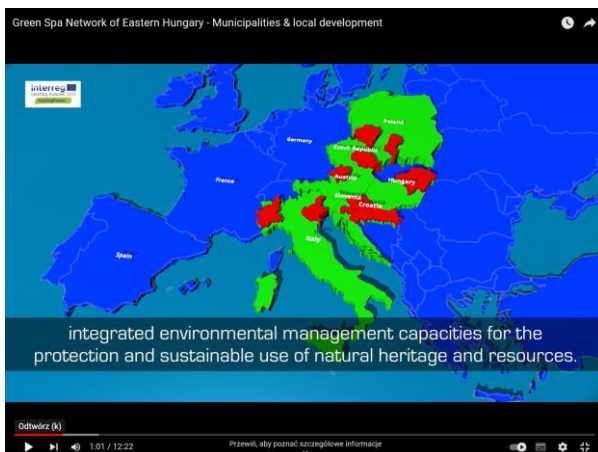




Pilot Action 3: Building sustainable partnership on shifting towards nature-focused development of spa water potential strengthening health industry (HU)

Following numerous informal bilateral and multilateral discussions with relevant actors representing the spa municipalities, spa management bodies, spa cluster members, university and research institutions, thermal tourism experts and regional planning professionals, the main structure and content of the Sustainable Spa Development Concept have been set up. This draft and the methodology developed strongly define the formulation of the conceptual document. External expertise is hired to fully develop the Concept that will serve several goals: on one hand, the document will lay down the principles of “how to ensure responsible and sustainable spa management and development” and on the other hand, provide guidance with tools and methods how to achieve such larger scale objectives.

It was very important to make all actors understand the significance of such approach. This process was strongly strengthened by the development of two pilot action videos in both Hungarian partner counties.



The two Hungarian partner institutions (PP3 HBCG and PP5 BORA94) have consciously committed to producing two separate but complementary films. While PP5 interviewed the municipal leaders of the 6 spa municipalities of the Green Spa Network of Eastern Hungary about the role of spas in the development of the municipalities and their future plans, PP3 explored the plans and ideas for institutional developments, especially technological developments, with the help of the spa leaders. The result is a complex and comprehensive movie-based document covering the two counties, outlining both the present and the future of spa development, which provides a sound basis for the professional elaboration of the Sustainable Spa Development Concept.

It should be stressed that the short films are available both on a county-by-county basis (containing the material of 3 selected spas in both counties) and in a combined format for the 6 spas and their municipalities, thus helping to provide an overview of the municipalities and the spas' own concepts.

The videos are available on Project YouTube channel:

- 1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjD3GymJlKM>
- 2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWm4Ndc4d6A>

The Concept is expected to be finalised in May 2022. It will, of course, include a detailed theoretical and practical presentation of the WPT1 tool, which will allow the development of a long-term, highly applicable development plan, with a strong focus on sustainability and the protection of the green and natural heritage.

The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding of the Green Spa Network of Eastern Hungary (expected at the end of May 2022) and the adoption of the Concept will follow the development of the Concept.

Pilot Action 4: Strengthening regional partnership in selected SPA regions in Upper Austria in order to secure and capitalise the location factor "natural heritage" (AT)

The main goal of the pilot action of project partner number 4 (Upper Austria) was to strengthen regional partnership in selected SPA regions in Upper Austria in order to secure and capitalise the location factor “natural heritage”. As a starting point, the Austrian partner elaborated regional and national offers, where the capitalisation of the factor “natural heritage” has already been successfully implemented. The analyses showed, that the offer of health services in Upper Austria is quite wide and that health tourism has developed very positively in recent years². In 2019, more than 1.4 million overnight stays - that is almost 15 percent of the total overnight stays in Upper Austria - were achieved in health destinations.³ The main focus of the pilot action in Upper Austria was placed on the two regions around the spa communities of Bad Zell and Geinberg, which are briefly described in the following.



Figure 1: SPA Lebensquell Bad Zell and SPA RESORT Therme Geinberg⁴

The spa in Bad Zell is not based on a thermal water depot but rather on the Hedwigsbründle - a natural spring containing radon. The roots of the spa municipality Bad Zell as a healing place therefore go back to the 1950s. Today it is an established tourism municipality with consistently decent numbers of overnight stays and arrivals. What is special about the pilot region 1 (Mühlviertler Alm Freistadt) is, that there are different springs, the so called “Augenbründle”, all over the entire region.

² Corona has changed the tourist statistics significantly, which is why this statement relates to the years up to 2019.

³ Oberösterreich Tourismus GmbH, not published materials.

⁴ <https://www.lebensquell-badzell.at/> and <https://www.therme-geinberg.at/>

Within this pilot region an analysis of 8 so-called “Augenbründle” has been conducted. In addition to a science-based water analysis, the study also included the collection of historical records and mythical stories about the springs. Also in this pilot region, a chance was given to get a better understanding of the possible (economic) importance of natural heritage to a region. With the existing offer of the Johannesweg - a hiking trail in the region - an analysis of the indirect profitability of the last 10 years was carried out.



Figure 2: Augenbründl Kaltenberg, Johannesbrunnen Pierbach, Bründl im Badgraben Tragwein⁵

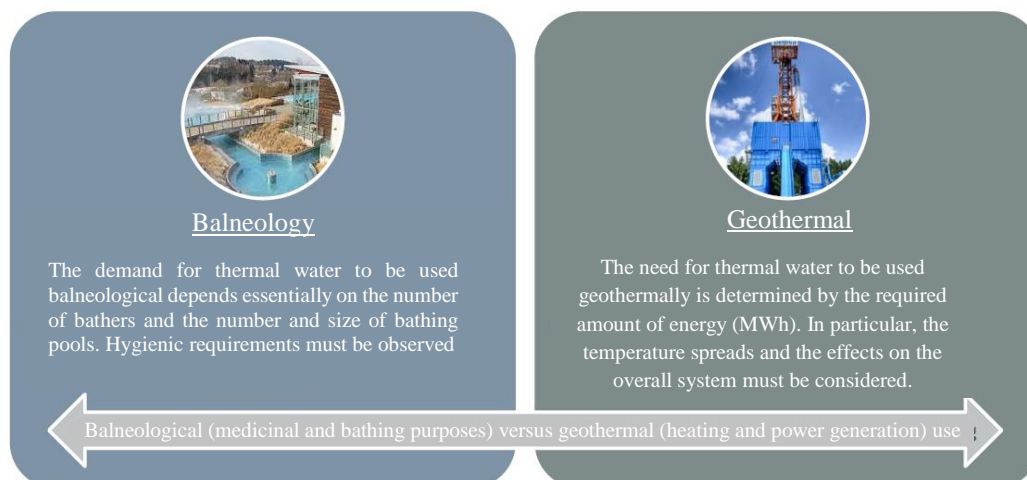
As part of the pilot action of PP4 also in Pilot Region 2, the SPA municipality of Geinberg in the tourism region S’INNVIERTEL were carried out several activities. The Spa Resort Therme Geinberg, which bases its offer on thermal water, is located in this region. The figures in the S’INNVIERTEL region also make it clear that the natural heritage can have enormous appeal for the location. Around 40% of the overnight stays in the area of the association are in Geinberg and thus largely through the thermal SPA. This brings both awareness and added value to the entire tourism region.

The situation in this region is also very interesting, since the Innviertel is located on the water depot of the Molasse Basin. What is special about this pilot region is that there exists already a contract between Upper Austria and Bavaria for the common use of the joint water depot.⁶

Since the conditions in this region were completely different to the region of Mühlviertel, other measures were chosen within the pilot action. A study was commissioned in the tourist region of S’INNVIERTEL to analyse the existing actors in the field of water use. In addition to tourist use, special attention was paid to non-tourist use in order to be able to identify possible harassments and synergies.

⁵ Source: own pictures

⁶ Policy papers on thermal water use: <https://www.land-oberoesterreich.gv.at/26264.htm>



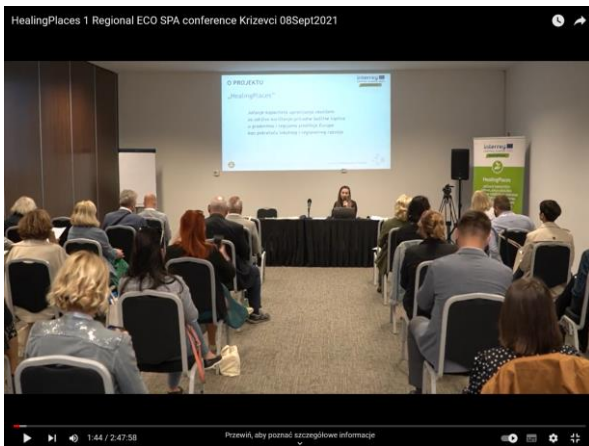
The literature⁷ and also the analysis clearly indicate that the competing use of thermal water for geothermal reasons (heating, energy generation) can pose a major challenge in the sustainable management of the resource, since several different (and above all uncoordinated) actors can influence e.g. the pressure and temperature in the water depot. Precise agreements and regular measurements therefore seem absolutely necessary here.

Altogether, the two pilot regions in Upper Austria have been quite different in natural realities and framework conditions. Nevertheless, in both regions the possibilities of a sustainable capitalization of natural heritage could be considered. It became clear that the partnerships between the different players in the region play an immense role, since the sustainable management of the resource can only take place through mutual coordination and regular exchange. Therefore, the role of the tourism associations as a hub and anchor point is an important one in order to be able to coordinate the partnerships in the region and keep them alive.

Pilot Action 5: Eco-friendly SPA management in region and guidance for sustainable use of local thermal and mineral groundwater resources (HR)

The Croatian partners organised the 1st regional ECO-SPA conference in the beginning of September. The main issue was to discuss about how to use resources of thermal & mineral water in ecological way and how to do green business in SPA management.

⁷ https://energieinstitut-linz.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Industrielle-Nutzung-von-Geothermie_Endbericht_EIJKU_2018.pdf



Link to the recording of the conference is available on HealingPlaces YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIPJv5eMNA4>

Besides that the partners are working on management plan of using mineral-thermal water resources in City of Križevci in sustainable and ecological way. Several key elements and insights were being shared among the attendees. The most important are:

- local government should cooperate more efficiently. There is a lot of administration that is slowing down investors and prevents them to invest and develop all SPA potential in North West Croatia. The process of obtaining concessions and different permits also need to be shorter.
- Renewable energy is the best answer to climate change.
- “Green Thermal Spas” (Terme Sveti Martin) is good example how all of SPA should work on sustainable development together with local community and local government.

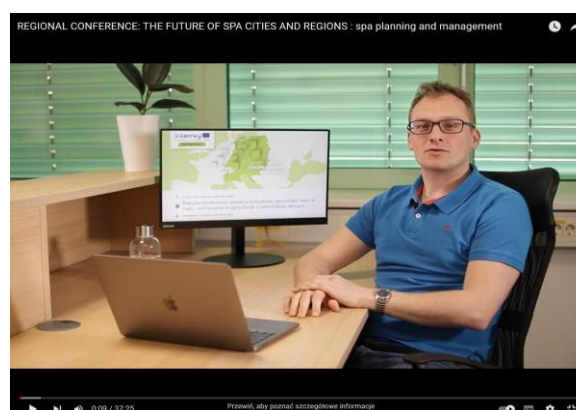


Pilot Action 6: Sustainable management plan of thermal water uses (re-use of thermal water & solutions for water outflow problem) (SI)

Pilot action in Slovenia revealed that the planning and management of natural healing resources is dispersed among various national sectors and often characterised by outdated legislative framework or legal framework which is not being implemented. Within its pilot action Razvojni center Novo mesto carried out several activities with the intention to identify status quo and elaborate development policies for a more sustainable management of use of natural healing resources, which includes thermal water use. Specific attention was paid also to the re-use of thermal water and finding solutions for water outflow.

Razvojni center Novo mesto used personal and public communication about the whole project, while the progress in the pilot action was based on a case study in NUTS 3 region Jugovzhodna Slovenija. Among others, project activities led to the question of integration of strategic decision-making tools, such as the environmental impact assessment, land use management and environmental management in spa areas. Tools and methods developed in the project (mostly in WPT1) were tested and discussed with local and national stakeholders who operate in management of natural healing resources on different vertical and horizontal levels (e.g. the ministries, municipalities, regional bodies). It is expected that the elaborated tool for environmental impact assessment will be able to support the strategic development of spa areas and spa municipalities in the Republic of Slovenia, as tested and resulted on the case of spa areas in Jugovzhodna Slovenija.

One of the main findings of the pilot action is that the content and jurisdiction of involved sectors must be communicated privately and publicly. Besides personal meetings Razvojni center Novo mesto organised 2 thematic events (2021 - a conference and 2022 - a consultation) which revealed the scope and interests of sectors involved in planning and management of natural healing resources (such as for example tourism, nature protection, health institute, research organisations, business support organisations, agriculture, spa resorts). The goal was to identify views (confrontation of speakers) and a list of possible solutions of compromises, synergies, and conflicts in spa areas. Such activities are recommended on international levels (organisation of international conference for example).



The recording of the regional conference is available on HealingPlaces YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHYL94gLpGo>



After such or similar strategic assessments are made it is necessary to integrate its findings and conclusions into legislative framework on relevant territorial levels, while ensuring financial stability of such operations in public interest, especially those related to the topics of healthy environment, sustainable use of natural resources and participatory planning, which are the final components of HealingPlaces project Pilot Action 6.

Pilot Action 7: Product Environmental Footprint Testing in the Thermal District of Acqui Terme (IT)

Originally designed to directly involve the managerial authority of Acqui Terme Spas in order to test PEF methodology on spa products and services and to suggest methods and strategies for a more sustainable management of Spas natural resources, the PA7 has had to be redesigned, due to the profound crisis that Acqui Terme Spas Cluster is passing through. Indeed, the worsening of the Covid-19 health emergency and its strong economic repercussions on the spa and tourism system (at the moment, the thermal facilities are all temporarily closed), have led to the decision of managerial authority of Acqui Terme Spas to renounce the participation in the HealingPlaces project due to its inability to guarantee the necessary involvement in the implementation of planned pilot action.

Basing on this framework, the Pilot Action has been redesigned and its new focus has become the “Former Military Baths”, of which, in 2017, the Municipality of Acqui Terme acquired from the State Property the ownership. The main aim of the Pilot action has been to elaborate specific hypothesis and scenarios on the future regeneration of the “Former Military Baths” and to design future services/products taking into account the complete life cycle of them. Already in the design phase, how thermal products and services “interact” with the environment has been assessed, including the stages of pre-production (thermal water), production, distribution, use and reuse, final disposal.

Thanks to the implementation of the Pilot action, the Municipality of Acqui Terme can count on a set of mitigation measures, implementable and devoted to face the effects chemical pollution, biological pollution, water pollution, sources consumption and impoverishment with the final aim to reach a Sustainable Integrated Quality and Environmental Management of “Former Military Baths” SPA facility, that could be considered in the wider concept of Thermal Green City.

In addition, the great merit of the pilot action has been to make clear the great potential of the area, already listed among the UNESCO Heritage as “Vineyard Landscape of Piedmont: Langhe-Roero and Monferrato” and particularly engaged with the topics of sustainable tourism, light mobility and valorisation of local identity, highlighting the uniqueness of the thermal resources defining them as potential trigger of a green revolution toward a full eco-sustainability.

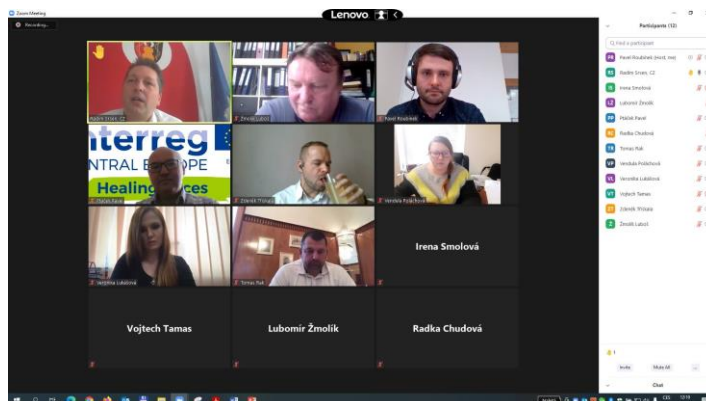




Pilot Action 8: Testing participative tool for improvement of SPAs water deposits sustainable management in Jeseníky (CZ)

The Czech partners invited the regional working group to several events and meetings either online or physically. Based on meetings in focus working groups and during individual consultations from experts from practice, the quantities and factors that enter the process of protection, respective potential threat to natural healing resources - water in spa localities of Jeseníky spa are identified. Furthermore, a regional video is produced to foster the interest of stakeholders.

Within WPT2, an important part is played by the associated partner Jeseníky - Association of Tourism (J-SCR). In accordance with the associated partner, field work was started on the identification of key actors and the definition of their roles and decision-making processes in the territory (activity 2.8.2, partly 2.8.3). The foundations of the Regional Working Group were laid and the topics of cooperation within the focus groups were defined. Within WP2 team members contributed to activities 2.8.2. and 2.8.5. In collaboration with J-SCR were arranged first face to face meetings with key SHs from the end of May (Czech Inspectorate of Spas and Springs) to the individual meetings with managers of spas (June 2020, see report at 2.8.5.). First focus group meeting for spa managers was organized July 1st at Velké Losiny. Here was discussed the plan of next several focus groups for the 2nd half of 2020. First workshop has been carried out in Karlova Studánka at September 15th on the topic of re-use of outlet mineral water together with LP - Central Mining Institute. Special online round table was held in March 2021 (online) focusing on common protection of natural healing resources and networking, under auspice of Czech Inspectorate of Spas and Springs. In June 2021 next round table meeting focused on collaboration of spas and municipalities.





Also continued works on 2.8.4. - WPT1 tools adaptation to local & regional needs. Here was elaborated by external expert ing. Kocman and his team study which evaluates the current usage of mineral water in spas in pilot area and compares it with potential of individual mineral water sources and also adapts the TOOL to the local conditions of pilot area spas. A case study for 3 spas with mineral water deposits (Bludov, Karlova Studánka and Velké Losiny) was elaborated by ing. Kocman. The last round table was hold in March 2022 and the main focus was on implementation of the TOOL into the spatial planning process. Importance of mutual consultations and negotiations was again highlighted as a tool for sustainable management of natural healing resources. Continued works on 2.8.7. - Forming the recommendations - materials from round tables are continuously collected and the list of recommendations is expanded

Forming of regional working group seems to be one of the most important deliverables of WP2.

To increase awareness of general public, regional video focusing on natural healing resources was taken and now is distributed in collaboration with regional authorities to schools, as well as to tourist spots (in collaboration with associated partner).

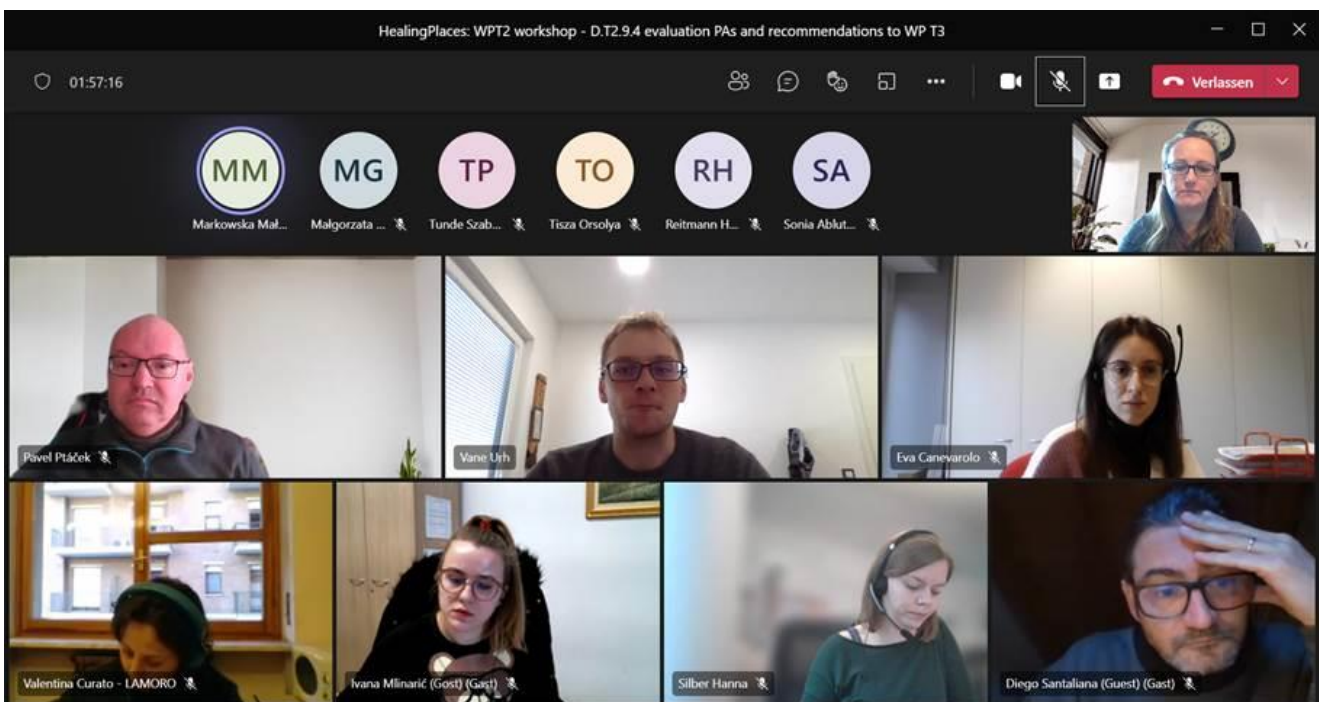
In May is planned students field work with Mendel University students to Karlova Studánka to answer the most important issues of spas - ie. overtourism, traffic problems and landscape protection.



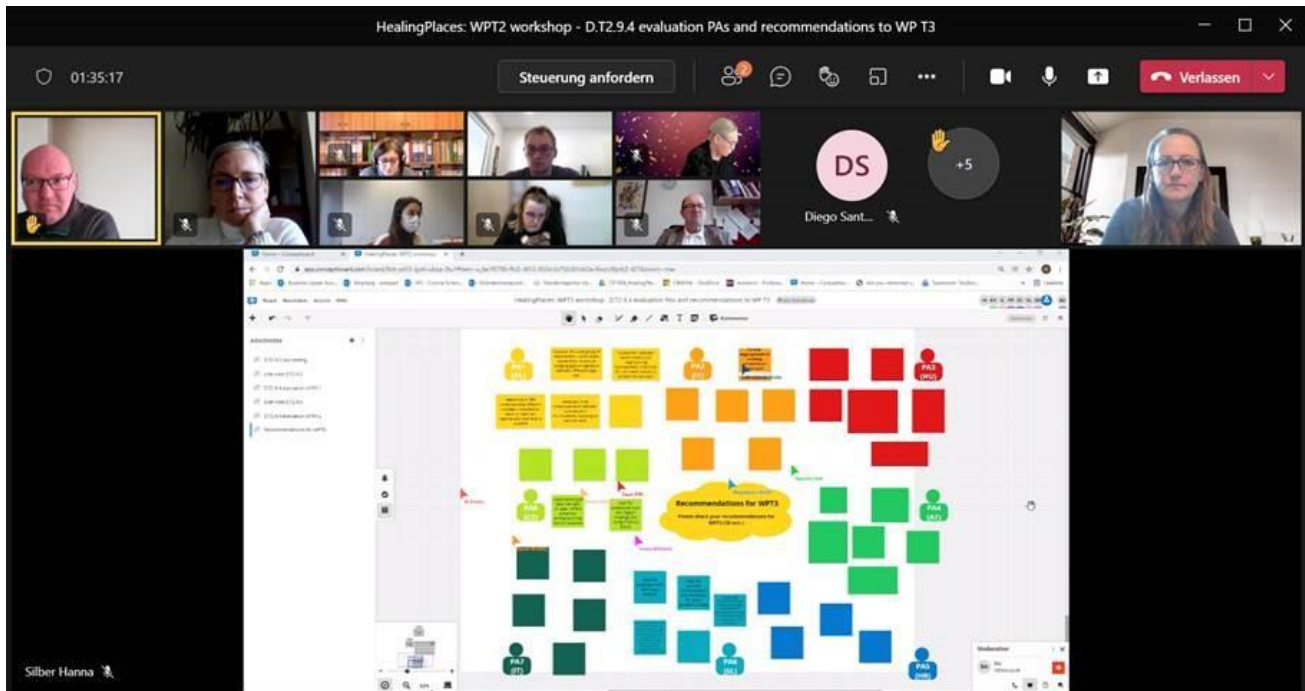
3. Evaluation of Pilot Actions and Recommendations to WP T3

3.1. Workshop

On January 11, 2022 an online workshop was held to evaluate the pilot actions. Representatives of all pilot actions participated in the meeting:



In the first step, the focus of the workshop was on the question of which factors should or better could be assessed. To better structure the discussion and achieve a visual collection of ideas a digital whiteboard was used in the meeting.



A specific colour was assigned to each pilot action to be able to structure the individual contributions well. Those pilot actions that were carried out by several partners were also processed by these. Since there are two independent pilot actions in Italy, two colours have been chosen here.

In a brainstorming session, the partners collected their ideas and reported on their experiences in the pilot actions. It became clear, that the initial situations in the countries are very different. Nevertheless, common challenges and recommendations for action could be identified. An overview of the different postings can be found on the next page



PA1 (PL)	PA2 (IT)	PA3 (HU)	PA4 (AT)	PA5 (HR)	PA6 (SL)	PA7 (IT)	PA8 (CZ)
Existence of threats of natural and anthropogenic origin for healing waters, including different aims / different aspects of protection (legal aspects.)	Impact of pilot actions <-> number of stakeholders that can be reached	different stakeholders - different point of views	best practices/challenges in regional cooperations (e.g. local administration, communities, public authorities, etc.)	Types of thermal water use: what are they? competitive?	Even starting the topic about environmental management in spa areas made this project interesting for several stakeholders (Geological survey Slovenia, Institute for nature conservation, spa municipalities, Faculty of tourism)	bringing stakeholders together, involve stakeholders	legal framework good - no need to intervene
solutions - participatory planning, evaluation of legal aspects of protection / difficulties --> connecting different institutions,	Further engagement of existing thermal consortia, through workshops and meetings in the field, on new tools usability and implementation at their disposal,		thematic learnings - eg Regensburg contract, thermal water expert group		There is general resistance to change policies, especially on national level		importance of networking: bringing stakeholders together to
works on action plan for sustained management /					Need for qualified staff to manage and develop natural healing resources; need for adaptation of legislative basis		understanding of spas: wellness vs. spas - differs extremely among countries tourism pressure
Land use: legal protection only by extraction point - water depot is a different place --> Interrelation water use and land use (Agriculture, fertilizers, soil sealing...)					participatory planning --> different sectors, different publics --> bring them to one place =coordination of sectors, coordination of different point of views, find synergies/solve conflicts		need for sustainable RGW and regular meetings and rising of actual issues
Inclusion of a wide group of stakeholders - cross sector cooperation, to ensure bridging gaps in legislation between different legal acts					Environmental management of healing resources is multisector field and needs communication between mining, agriculture, water, economy sectors (establishment of working bodies, committees is potentially positive - example in Slovenian parliament, summer 2020)		



3.2. Results of discussion and assessment

The participants' statements were discussed in the plenum and structured after the workshop. The following three sub-areas give an insight into the experiences that could be gained through the pilot actions and enable first recommendations for WP T3.

Legal framework:

- Land use: The experiences in the pilot regions have made it clear that in many regions the water is only legally protected at the extraction points. Those areas where the actual mineral/thermal water deposit is located are often unprotected (or even unknown). What's more the groundwater inflow area is located often out of the commune (SPA) borders. In this way, influences such as chemical fertilizers in agriculture are not regulated. This issue should be given more consideration when defining new protected areas.
- Beyond that, however, it was recognized in most regions that the general legal protective measures (legislative framework such as acts or decrees) for spa areas are insufficient or not being implemented (case in Slovenia) and that there is no urgent need to update them. However, the pilot actions also made it clear, that there is in general a lot of knowledge in the countries, but in different and poorly networked places. Especially since the environmental management of healing resources is a multisector field and needs communication between mining, agriculture, water and economy sectors. However, the subject of thermal water is often a "side issue" and therefore does not receive enough attention. It would be important to link the different knowledge carriers and stakeholders more closely with each other, to sensitize them to the different perspectives and to support joint strategic and sustainable planning.
- The focus in the regions should stronger be placed on participatory planning⁸ and better networking of decision-makers. One assignment must be to bring different sectors and different publics to one place. In this way, the different points of view can be better understood, coordinated and harmonized with one another. A participatory approach raises awareness of other perspectives and can help to resolve conflicts and leverage synergies. (e.g. the establishment of working bodies and/or committees is potentially positive - example: Slovenian parliament, summer 2020). In addition, the effects of the efficiency of the working mechanism can also be improved. The exchange of knowledge and experience from organized round tables for example can make a significant contribution to the success of an intent.

⁸ Participatory approaches in spatial planning enable the involvement of different actors in the planning process. According to the planning-theoretical model of communicative planning, the focus is on the discussion of options for future developments to be able to offer space for the need for dialogue and coordination between different social groups such as decision-makers, stakeholders, experts and citizens. (for more details see <https://boku.ac.at/rali/irub/fachliche-schwerpunkte/raumplanung/partizipative-planung> and <https://www.espon.eu/luxembourg>).



Thematical Issues:

- During project development, it quickly became apparent that the initial situations for SPAs in Europe are very different. This depends, for example, on the ownership situation (private vs. state) and on the (self-) understanding of spas (leisure vs. wellness vs. health). These structures vary greatly from country to country and must be considered when dealing with such issues.
- In some countries it has been learned that spa operators do not or hardly think about the finite nature of the resource that is so important to them. The operations of the spa and the competitive situation with other providers dominate the decision-making processes. There often seems to be a lack of awareness of the vulnerability of the resource.
- During the pilot actions, it also became clear that many spas only use the water for internal use. The possibilities of using the energy of the thermal water in other areas are hardly known. Above all, the very sustainable way of cascading use seems to be the exception at the participating spas. In terms of a sustainable and resource-saving approach, knowledge building and dissemination of alternative forms of use would be desirable. A stronger exchange on international best practice examples, technical innovations and already successful projects would be useful.
- However, it should not be underestimated that multiple exploitation of the same water can lead to pressure loss and heat loss of the water deposit, which is why in the case of cascading use the regulations for the use of water must be defined more precisely and monitored.

Organisational/administrative Issues:

- Covid-19 pandemic had an unforeseen impact on the course of the pilot actions for all partners. Although the planned projects could be carried out as far as possible in most countries, it has been shown that the processes have become significantly more difficult. In particular, individual meetings and confidence-building measures require a personal setting and can only be carried out to a limited extent via online media. It was particularly important for the present project, since not only the project itself, but the entire spa sector was severely affected by the restrictions and measures (some of them temporarily closed their doors and still have not recovered). Overall, it must therefore be assumed that in all countries - in some more, in others less - losses in the quality and implementation of the pilot actions had to be accepted.
- From the macro level perspective, the question should also be asked as to whether the pilot actions were able to reach enough stakeholders in individual regions. The limited means and the time frame only allowed addressing a limited group of people who can participate in the project and/or access the tool. This can also have an impact on the crucial factor of networking.
- Overall, within the project it became clear that a comparison of the situations in the individual regions is only possible to a limited extent. This results from different framework conditions (spa facility situation and interest, socio-cultural importance of spas in selected areas, municipality interest, engagement of project partners) and also lack of relevant



indicators about environmental and socio-economic statuses. It is difficult to conclusively determine whether the defined data at the desired level of aggregation are not available from all countries or whether the project participants did not have/find access to them. For cross-country comparisons, however, a standardization of existing systems is necessary.

4. Summary

Sustainable management of SPA areas is of utmost importance for development of health and tourism activities in areas where it is prosperous. Considering the learnings and contributions of each partner region and the results of discussions in different partner meetings, some points have been agreed on common learnings in pilot actions:

Legal framework:

Legal framework in Partner Countries is available, but different and fragmented. Common legal Recommendations for SPA areas, derived from experience in pilot actions have to be treated carefully due to the different legal systems. But it can be seen in all regions, that there is a lot of knowledge in the countries. However, this knowledge often is in different and poorly networked places. A multisectoral approach, a need of participatory planning and a better networking of decision makers will be necessary in the future. Altogether, the legal protection of healing water should be enhanced (not only at the extraction points, cross border protection and rules, clear regulations for shared use...). To get more basic information of best practices in Europe, the exchange of experience about existing best practices (see examples of best practices in final brochure of HealingPlaces project) could be a first step in harmonizing and upgrading European legal framework.

Thematical Issues:

As can be seen in the outcome of pilot actions, the existing differences between partner countries within the SPA sector are relevant. It is not only the ownership situation (private vs. state) but also the understanding of SPAs (leisure vs. wellness vs. health) and the connected business models that differ between the regions. Overall challenges and learnings are:

Operations and short-term goals are very often the basis for decisions of SPA operators. But the finite nature of the resource in the long run and the effective use of the energetic potential of thermal water (e.g. Cascadian use) should be much more focused on.

Organisational/administrative Issues:

One important learning has been the fact, that comparison of individual situations of regions is only possible to a very limited extent - due to the different framework conditions and connected data situation. For data-based quantitative cross-country comparison a higher level and degree of standardization of existing systems and data will be necessary. The basis for this has been done in WP 1 of this project.

The results of these learnings have been included in WPT3 *O.T.3.1. Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Management of SPAs.*