

International workshop COHEIRS

The international workshop of the the project COHEIRS – Civic Observers for Health and Environment, Initiative for Responsibility and Sustainability – took place last 13-15 March 2014 in Mesagne, in the Apulia Region. The event brought together more than 60 international participants and 50 locals to debate on environmental and health issues. It was an occasion to share common issues and to exchange good practices on how local authorities and civil society organisations can work together to tackle such violations.

The international conference on Europe, Health & Environment – Bottom up approaches for environmental and health policies – kicked off the session. Renowned European, national and regional public figures took the floor and addressed the issue under different angles. In particular, Mr Raffaele Baldassarre highlighted EU's environmental and health policy and provided up to date information on European programmes that citizens can make use of in order to promote the environmental protection of their territories. His presence was also key to call on participants to be active citizens in their territory and to act not only at local level but also at the European one. He stressed the importance of participating in the European elections to be held next 22-25 May as a further tool to impact on Brussels' policies on health and environment.

Institutional figures such as Mr Franco Scoditti, the Mayor of Mesagne and Mr Fabio Romito, the Provincial councillor on EU policies contributed to the session by showcasing the framework of regional and local policies in Apulia region. Key inputs were also provided by environmental and health experts such as Prof. Alberto Basset and Prof. Ferdinando Boero, from UniSalento, Prof. Alessandro Distante, President of ISBEM, Mr Prisco Piscitelli, from the Italian Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE Italy) and Mr Maurizio Fogar, President of the MIANI Circle. The conference was also an opportunity to debate on the key role of citizens. Significant contributions were brought in by Mrs Biljana Zasova and Mr Marco Boaria who highlighted ALDA's programme on active citizenship with special focus on the ladder of citizen participation as well as by Mrs Larina Venezia, delegate of Cittadinza Attiva in Taranto who showcased the association's work on environmental issues in southern-east Italy.

The visit to Taranto was a key moment of the three day activity. Participants had the opportunity of being informed on the several diseases caused by the ILVA plant. The in-field visit led to the meeting between international participants and representatives of local associations as a moment of exchange of experience.

The local and European recommendations being the final outcome of the event, specific sessions were dedicated to showcase the environmental violations affecting public health in partners' territories. The presentations were key inputs in order to identify common problems, exchange experience and good practices and draft recommendations to be submitted to the European institutions. Six working groups were set on the following topics: 1. enhancing citizen participation in the environment and health field, 2. urban sustainable development, green spaces and public

health, 3. waste management and public health, 4. agriculture and public health, 5. air pollution and public health, 6. water pollution and public health. The results were presented and further discussed in plenary and a coherent set of recommendations was the final outcome of the session.

Based upon the previous working groups, participants brainstormed on the follow up of the project. Four main topics were analysed: 1. Developing an environmental friendly formal and formal education, 2. Institutionalisation of the civic observers, 3. Communication campaigning and 4. Enhancing networking activities of environmental stakeholders. The outcomes were collected both from ALDA and ISBEM and will be the inputs for future project proposals and actions.