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Media release on South-East Europe’s first Climate Champions

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South-East Europe’s first climate champions crowned

Climate protection across borders: on 9 November 2022, South-East Europe’s first Climate Champions were crowned in Sarajevo/BiH. From 40 projects submitted on climate protection and sustainability, an international jury of experts selected five, while two other projects received special awards.

Climate protection in everyday life, sustainable agriculture, social participation or networking for green business: the “Climate Bridges” project presents the best climate protection and sustainability ideas from South-East Europe to a wider public. Precisely because climate change does not stop at borders, a cross-border exchange of ideas and experiences is necessary, says project manager Paula Duske from CIPRA International Lab. “We were positively surprised at how many projects have already been implemented and how diverse the approaches, actors and measures are.” In addition to promotion, networking and knowledge exchange, the winners will receive prize money to support further projects. All actors who have implemented a climate or sustainability-related project in one of the following countries were eligible to participate: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia and Albania. The award winners at a glance:

**Saving energy with plays and quizzes:** the Centre for Development and Support (CRP) organised investments in greener school buildings in its Smart Schools 2 project in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Croatia, as well as creative educational measures such as a play, a quiz around energy efficiency and a big energy-saving school competition.

**Solar energy through crowdfunding:** the Croatian town of Križevci inaugurated a fully crowdfunded solar power plant in 2018. Located on the roof of a business centre, it has an output of 30 kilowatt hours and saves around 11 tonnes of CO2 per year. The solar energy generated is used to power the business centre and the surplus is fed into the grid.

**Learning about the climate:** the Slovenian-Hungarian project “Sustainaware” promotes climate literacy among young people and offers teaching materials on climate protection for out-of-school use.

**Comeback for sand dunes:** the “GO2” project team is rehabilitating sand dunes in the estuary of the Buna River on the Albanian-Montenegrin border. The planting of native species at the mouth of the river where it flows into the Mediterranean near the Albanian municipality of Velipoje is intended to protect the dunes from further erosion.

Insects as food for animals and humans: this project from Kosovo explores how insects can be cultivated on a large scale as a source of protein. It primarily targets local agriculture in order to decentralise market participation: in this way the project team aims to initiate a public discourse on the future of food production.

Two other organisations received special awards: one as a good example of transnational cooperation in the Western Balkans, the other for eco-social management.

Networking and advocacy for a green economy: NAGE is being implemented by a consortium of rural networks in the Western Balkans through the Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN). The project supports the development goals of the BRDN and strengthens the network in the region. It promotes civic participation, networking and the green economy by providing evidence-based policy solutions. The Rural Development Network in Northern Macedonia was the lead partner, while the Rural Development Network in Montenegro was one of the project partners.

Innovative products made from textile waste: Humana Nova is a non-profit, eco-social enterprise that produces high-quality, innovative products from recycled textile waste and ecological materials for the domestic and foreign markets. It promotes employment for people with disabilities and other marginalised social groups and invests all its profits in business development, new jobs and local community development.

Jury votes

Sabrija Čadro, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Agriculture and Food, University of Sarajevo:

“We can all act locally, for a positive global result. Such good practice projects implemented in certain communities represent a kind of beacon for positive change. There should surely be more of them!”

Nikola Biliškov, Senior Research Associate, Dept. of Chemistry, Ruđer Bošković Institute, Croatia: “It was a pleasure to participate in this process and learn about the interesting projects.”

Valbona Gogu, Head of Section at the Albanian Ministry of Tourism and Environment: “We can learn on a daily basis from every single project proposal, even though it may not necessarily be declared the winner. It is worth mentioning that a good environmental project proposal can serve as the basis for creating a broader concept that can perhaps be further developed in the future.”

Kora Rösler, Specialist Advisor for the European Climate Initiative Funding Programme: “Change must also come from the bottom up. We are happy to see these seemingly small-scale initiatives dream big and go out there with a ‘we can do this’ mindset. We need more of this enthusiasm and feel privileged to have the opportunity to select just a few of the many ambitious and excellent projects.”

Helen Lückge, Advisor to the Alpine Climate Board: “From my experience with the Alpine Climate Board and our current discussions on how to build new partnerships for ambitious climate action, I was eager to get closer insights into projects and experiences in the Balkan region. And it was indeed great to see the wide range of activities competing for the award of the Climate Bridges project.”

About Climate Bridges

The Climate Bridges project strengthens cooperation for transnational climate protection in the Western Balkans, from Croatia via Bosnia & Herzegovina to Albania. Together with other NGOs, CIPRA Lab is setting up a network platform for this purpose. The project partners are the Urban Research Institute (URI) from Albania, the Centre for Energy, Environment and Resources (CENER 21) from Bosnia & Herzegovina and the Association Green Istria from Croatia. The project is part of the European Climate Initiative (EUKI) of the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Climate Protection (BMWK). In 2023, Climate Bridges is planning a field trip to Austria. It is intended to promote the exchange of experience between the pilot municipalities (Pula/HR, Elbasan/AL, Novo-Sarajevo, BiH), civil society from South-East Europe and the Alpine region – on topics such as transnational climate policy and climate protection in the context of urban development.

This release and print-ready photographs are available for downloading from <http://www.cipra.org/en/press/press-releases>

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**CIPRA, for a good life in the Alps**

CIPRA, the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps, is a non-governmental umbrella organisation with national representatives and one regional representative in seven Alpine countries. It represents more than 100 associations and organisations. CIPRA works towards achieving sustainable development in the Alps; it also strives to preserve the natural and cultural heritage, maintain regional diversity, and bring about solutions to cross-border problems in the Alpine region[.](http://www.cipra.org) www.cipra.org