



HuMUS - WP4 pilot projects

Pilot Number 16 - Soil Health Dialogue in Eastern Styria

Publishable summary

The HuMUS pilot project number 16 “Soil Health Dialogue in Eastern Styria” in East Styria (Oststeiermark) focused on strengthening soil health through a multi-stakeholder approach involving farmers, municipalities, schools, universities, and civil society. At the heart of the project was the co-creation and implementation of a Territorial Management Agreement (TMA), which defined specific, locally tailored soil health measures and their financing and monitoring strategies.

The project followed a participatory process, engaging over 100 stakeholders across the quadruple helix (practice, science, policy, civil society) in a series of regional workshops and a final online multiplier event. Central tools included a SWOT analysis of regional soil conditions and the development of a shared vision for regenerative agriculture, agroforestry, water retention, and awareness building.

Key regenerative actions included the expansion of cover cropping, no-tillage and composting on over 100 hectares, the integration of agroforestry systems across 20 hectares, and the development of water retention basins, terraces, and keyline designs. The project actively involved agricultural schools and HUMUS+ farmers, who acted as ambassadors for sustainable land management. Public awareness and education were promoted through over 20 events and workshops targeting schools, kindergartens, and local communities.

A critical innovation was the development of a soil health monitoring dashboard in partnership with the University of Graz. This tool will visualize ecosystem services and long-term improvements in soil quality, supporting adaptive management and funding applications.

The project also addressed threats such as climate change impacts (e.g. droughts, erosion) and the decline in traditional farming. By linking local actors and creating funding networks, the TMA ensures the long-term viability of the measures. Financing efforts included LEADER, ELER, ÖPUL, LIFE and Horizon Europe calls, as well as regional and municipal funds.

Notable outcomes:

- Over 50 stakeholders signed the TMA.
- Pilot measures are being implemented by more than 25 land managers and institutions.
- Specific implementation tables were developed for areas like water retention, soil improvement, tree integration, awareness raising, and financing.

Challenges identified included knowledge gaps about soil threats and the limited administrative capacities of small municipalities to pursue complex funding procedures. Nevertheless, the project demonstrated the effectiveness of participatory approaches to environmental challenges



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and highlighted the importance of continuous collaboration and shared learning.

The HuMUS pilot has laid the foundation for a replicable model of soil governance, combining scientific monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and a practical action plan.

More details, visuals, and workshop documentation can be accessed via the project website:

⇒ <https://www.humusplus.at/humus-healthy-municipal-soils-unser-boden-unser-wasser-red-mit-pack-an>



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