



## Healthy Soil in Sesto – InTerra project Municipality of Sesto Fiorentino Short final report

### Publishable summary

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The *Healthy Soil in Sesto – InTerra* project addressed the growing issue of soil degradation in Sesto Fiorentino, caused by unsustainable agricultural practices and urban-industrial pressures. Recognizing the key role of soil in ecosystem services, food production, and climate regulation, the project aimed to promote sustainable land use and foster stakeholder collaboration through the development of a Territorial Management Agreement (TMA). This process was framed within the broader objective of establishing a municipal organic district.

The project unfolded in four main phases. First, relevant stakeholders from the Quadruple Helix—public institutions, farmers, civil society, and research bodies—were identified and engaged. Three focus groups (Dec 2024–Mar 2025) gathered representatives from the Municipality of Sesto Fiorentino, local farms, environmental organizations, and research institutions (CNR, UNIFI) to discuss challenges and opportunities for sustainable soil use. These meetings resulted in a participatory SWOT analysis and the co-design of strategic actions for soil protection and organic agriculture. A key outcome was the draft and signing of the TMA by 12 actors committed to continuing the collaborative effort.

The contextual analysis of the Strategic Environmental Assessment and a survey to understand public awareness of soil issues resulted in the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the territory and the citizens' understanding of basic soil functions but less awareness of the threats linked to conventional agriculture. The majority expressed support for organic products and favored the creation of a local organic district, despite concerns over the price of organic products.

The third phase focused on awareness-raising initiatives. Two *rural trekking* events connected citizens with local producers, highlighting agroecological practices and allowing hands-on experience with soil health assessment methods such as the spade test and observation of soil fauna. The *Underwear Test* served as a citizen-science activity to visualize soil biological activity through decomposition of buried cotton underwear in various environments. The initiative was promoted through public events, including “Mutanda Day,” and media outreach. Six sites were tested, and the results helped communicate soil quality in an accessible, engaging way.

Educational activities targeted younger generations through outdoor laboratories for primary schools (involving 75 students) focused on soil properties, and a logo design contest for the future organic district engaged 46 teams from local secondary schools.

The final phase saw the formalization of the TMA, a collective commitment to protect soil in both urban and rural contexts. The TMA outlines specific objectives and actions co-designed by stakeholders, linking ecological regeneration with food systems, landscape management, and community involvement.

*Healthy Soil in Sesto - InTerra's* key impact lies in fostering a new awareness of soil as a *common good* and encouraging integrated, cross-sectoral governance. Though a formal organic district was not established, the process built strong foundations for future cooperation. The TMA offers a flexible, evolving tool to maintain stakeholder engagement and support the transition toward sustainable land stewardship.