

### 3<sup>rd</sup> CORE Thematic Seminar held in Flanders 14-16<sup>th</sup> of may 2024



Within the Interreg Europe project [CORE](#) ('COMposting in Rural Environments; 2023-2027) coordinator [COOPERARI](#), lead partner [RSUSA](#) and the other 8 partners focus mainly on promoting high-quality (small-scale) composting in sparsely populated areas in the EU. Central to this project is exchanging experiences ('Good Practices') on prevention of food loss/VFG-waste, home composting, neighbourhood composting and (pre-)digestion (with post-composting) of biowaste.

The CORE project aims to be a kind of accelerator thereby helping partner regions to better collect and treat their communal biowaste-fractions and thus to reduce the economical and ecological burden of the current (bio)waste scenarios. Moreover, the compost produced would serve local and regional parks and gardens and potentially other specific applications. By focusing more on (small-scale) processing methods in rural regions, organic-biological waste should no longer be incinerated and the biological cycle can be closed more optimally. The aim of this CORE project is to make use of the knowledge from partners and previous projects to, on the one hand, apply in practice or pilots, and, on the other hand, to improve the policy instruments in the CORE partners' regions. To disseminate and make use of existing knowledge from the partners and previous projects CORE organizes every semester a Thematic Seminars with several study visits. In the first semester (mid 2023) a seminar and study visits took place in Ciudad Real (Castilla La Mancha, Spain) and in the second semester it was in Bolzano (South Tyrol, Italy).

Recently, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thematic Seminar hosted by [Vlaco](#), the CORE delegation came to Flanders (Mechelen). The 3 day-event (14-16/5/2024) was centred around various site visits and other exchanges of experience via presentations of good practices originating from all CORE-

regions: Castilla La Mancha (E) (RSUSA), Brandenburg (D) (LfU State Office of Environment), Świętokrzyskie Region (P) (Marshal Office of Swietokrzyskie Voivodeship), the Central Transdanubian Region (H) (KDRIU), the Province of Bolzano (I) (Environmental and Climate Protection Agency), Söderhamn (S) (Municipality of Söderhamn), Western Macedonia (G) (CluBe), and Vlaco. Partner European Compost Network (ECN) fulfills the role of good practice-evaluator and central communication.

### First day (14/5/2024)



After welcoming all participants and laying out the 3-day program Vlaco introduced ECN in order to start moderating all the good practices that were to be presented by the CORE-partners. The first part of the day allowed 8 regional experiences to be shared:

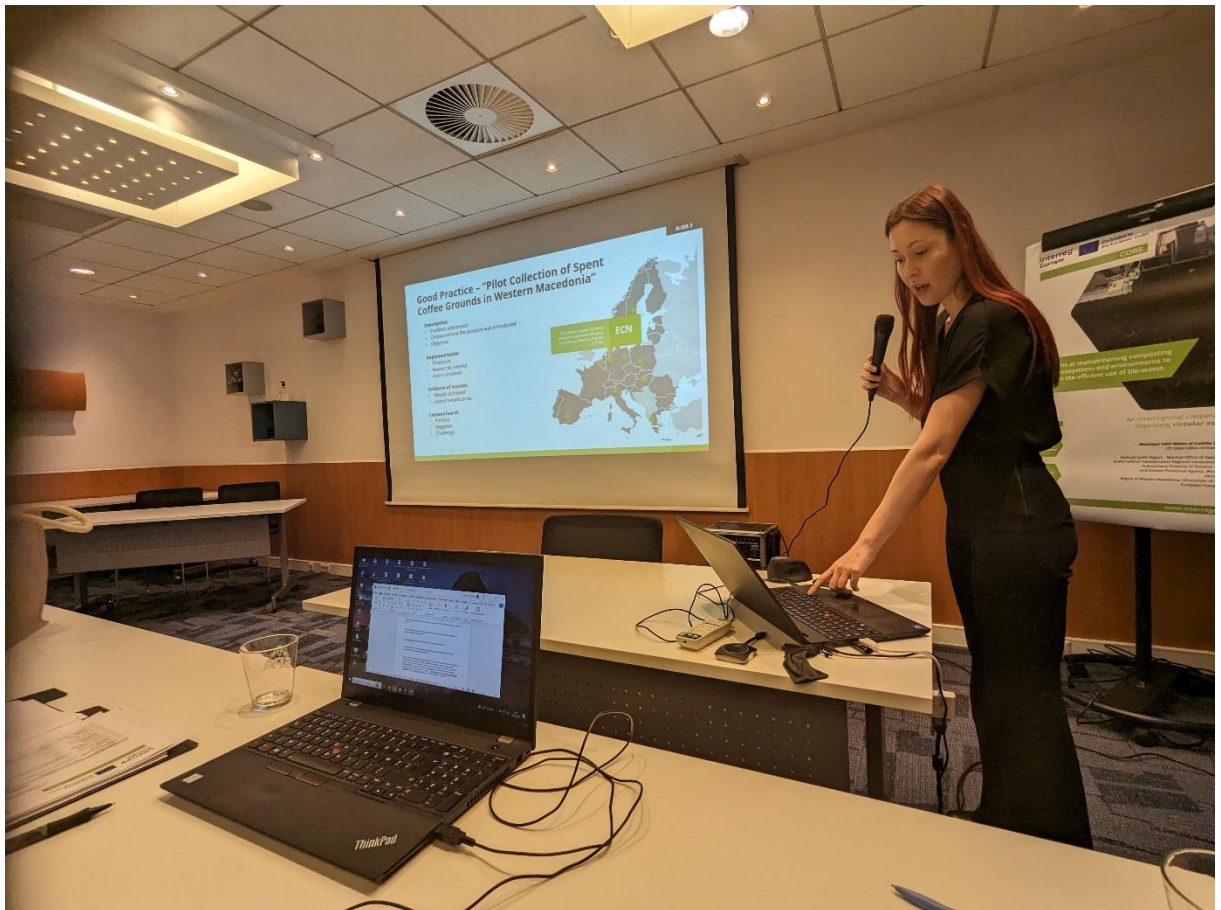
- **1) Retraining master composters to closed loop garden management advisors (IDM/Vlaco)**



- Kathleen Ongena (IDM) told the story of the reorientation of Master Composters and “Kringloopkrachten” to Closed Loop Garden Management Advisors. Over the years, Vlaco-trained volunteers incorporated an increasingly broad pallet of home recycling techniques and messages at their intercommunal and community interventions/-events: besides several Closed Loop Gardening techniques and food loss prevention tips, information on climate-robust and biodiverse gardening was also provided. For several years though Vlaco has seen 2 new trends, namely the need for comprehensive 1-on-1 advice on future-proof gardening and garden design, and, on the other hand, a lower use & number of

Master Composters while at the same time a clear (inter)municipal demand for a solution to this decline. That's why Vlaco decided to offer its volunteers a new communication and practical training and redirect them towards 'Closed Loop Garden Management Advisors'. This approach caught on: today there are 35 Closed Loop Garden Management Advisors, trained by 5 trainers, active in 4 waste intermunicipalities and another 4 who want to start this in their region! [More info.](#)

- **2) New valorisation scenario's for spent coffee grounds (CluBe)**



- This Western-Macedonian initiative was introduced as a proactive measure to tackle the challenge of spent coffee grounds (SCG) generated primarily by the HoReCa sector. More specifically CluBe wants to prevent this waste from being landfilled and explore the potential for creating new products or applications. This initiative began with engaging stakeholders from the HoReCa sector through stakeholder meetings and collaborative discussions. This helped to raise awareness and secure participation in the SCG collection program. For the collection of the SCGs, DIADYMA used electric vehicles to minimize the footprint and thus promoting the concept of sustainability. The next step is to exploit the collection of the SCGs in the entire Region to achieve the collection of a big quantity and to reach the target that was set from CluBE and DIADYMA for valorisation of the coffee residues. The characterization of the SCG's is ongoing

and focuses on polyphenols as the chemical derivative to be valorised. [More info.](#)

### - 3) Organisation of Compost festivals (Humus/KDRIU)



- The Compost Festival was initiated by the Humus Association in 2011. Since then it has been held every autumn. Its aim is to promote composting and encourage community participation to reduce waste and promote sustainable living. A call for proposals is launched to encourage communities (NGOs, nurseries, kindergartens, schools) to carry out and report on composting-related activities during a given period. Activities related to composting include: composting, organic waste collection, awareness raising, organizing a family day on the topic, training for children, compost recycling. The festival has been helpful in not only raising environmental awareness and practical knowledge but also community building. Its challenges however are a lack of organizational public/intermunicipal support and expert support which endanger the festival's turnout and future. [More info.](#)

### - 4) Composting in a home composter (Świętokrzyskie Region)

- In the agricultural region of Świętokrzyskie, the biodegradable municipal waste in rural areas is mostly managed by residents themselves. Every resident is estimated to compost 130 kg of this biowaste at home. The quality though of this 'compost' may not always be good and on the other hand still too much biowaste is collected with the residual waste and transported to landfills. To increase the

residents environmental awareness and to achieve better levels of municipal waste and home compost quality the Marshal Office of the region invested in several campaigns (educational lectures, fairs, workshops, press articles, and financial incentives). This CORE-partner testified that the amount of home composters is increasing, just as the average quality level of the compost, thereby reducing the mass of waste being landfilled. It is nevertheless a non-stop work to inform and stimulate rural residents to compost properly and as such avoiding smell and presence of rodents. [More info.](#)

- **5) Vermicomposting (RSUSA)**



- The main objective of performing composting through worms in small or medium-sized recipients – i.e. buckets or community vermicompost-bins – is to allow self-management of the majority of the biowaste generated in predominantly apartments and homes without garden, on the one hand, and urban gardens, occupational centres, nursing homes, special education centres, associations and/or school gardens on the other hand. Mostly vegetal kitchen-biowaste can often not be composted (thoroughly) on these locations due to lack of space and time and/or due to the difficulty to reach thermophilic (hygienisation) conditions and monitor the process. Through the digestion of the worms and microorganisms associated to the process pathogens for humans and plants are destroyed leading to a sanitized compost. For households several videos are provided by RSUSA to show how to build a vermicomposter, and a worm population is given to start composting with. Vermicomposting also serves

as an environmental education tool in schools and associations to increase citizen engagement, to learn about the recycling work of organic matter cycle and to reuse the compost in the own or adjacent gardens. The project is already implemented in an urban garden and an agrocomposting project. Potential further set-up of community vermicomposting will be determined after a year of vermicomposting-data. Meanwhile RSUSA helped the development of quality, pathogen-free vermicompost with a shorter 'production time' than compost from a regular home composter. [More info.](#)

- **6) Aktion Biotonne info-campaign (28-day challenge) on better VFG-waste sorting) (LfU Brandenburg)**

- Brandenburg wanted to tackle the impurities that complicate the composting process. To improve the quality and the quantity of organic waste separately collected the city council of Brandenburg an der Havel relied on the German "Aktion Biotonne" – providing pre-produced materials and formats – more in particular to inform its residential population via social media & press and to challenge them (gamification) during 28 days in 2022 to better separate their VFG-waste from other waste fractions. Brandenburg learnt that awareness raising has to be continual – e.g. intent to launch another, longer 'challenge' (1 y!) in 2024 – and broader than just via press and social media to reach all types of household waste producers (also people less motivated to separate). [More info.](#)

- **7) Compost-promotion campaigns (Bolzano)**

- In the province of Bolzano, biowaste and green waste has been processed into compost for over thirty years. At first Bolzano attempted to promote home composting (in rural areas), but later favoured predominantly the separate collection and professional composting of VFG-waste. In a later stage the waste management of Bolzano focused on trying to raise awareness of the importance of composting and compost through informational events for households at professional composting sites in the Bolzano region. Finally Bolzano regarded that more necessary awareness raising campaigns (local action) were to be held in/via the municipalities with a focus on a better separation and collection kitchen-waste and thus improved end product. To this effect amongst others a free paper bag (with information and the 'CORE'-logo printed on) for the weekly biowaste bin collection was developed and distributed for example in the Silandro community through various events. Also a short motivational video (explaining the biowaste treatment process in the municipal sites) and a map detailing the biowaste & end product streams were produced and distributed. The waste management office of the Bolzano Province has noted an increased recognition for compost and at the same time the need to continually inform and promote compost as a quality product. [More info.](#)

- **8) Awareness-raising campaign on food waste reduction (Söderhamn)**



- The city of Söderhamn's objective was to improve the sorting of food waste and collect a greater proportion of it at the level of municipal organization itself. About one quarter of the municipal's own residual waste consisted of food waste. Söderhamn invested in an information campaign by tasking two municipal environmental educators to inform all municipal services and employees about waste sorting. The municipality also made an inventory to show where brown bins for sorting food waste were missing. A new sample analysis (2024) will determine the level of success of the actions. Further detected challenges were to reach durable behavioural change and to collect the municipality's spent coffee grounds in recipients that allow consequent composting. [More info.](#)



## 6 study visits (14-16/5/2024)

Throughout the 3 days of the Thematic Seminar several visits were made at a total of 6 sites (one anaerobic digester could not be visited due to last-minute technical issues). Each one of the visited locations corresponds or has a direct reference to the good practices that Vlaco defined and described at the beginning of the CORE-project:

- **Compostwerf (14/5):** this municipal composting site in Sint-Niklaas composts around 7.000 tons of green waste stemming from private gardens and public spaces. Compostwerf has worked dearly to steadily increase the amount of tons treated and the quality, the price and the trustworthiness of its compost. A fairly high share is purchased by a potting soil producer.



- **'t Compostjen (14/5):** this neighbourhood composting site in Lokeren allows surrounding residents for a very small affiliation fee to bring their daily VFG-waste (at predefined hours and checked by a Master Composter) inside a fenced area where different large compost bins allow a monitored composting in a time span of about 7 to 9 months. This initiative has survived several forced relocations and the covid-period and keeps attracting households also for its educational (chickens and other closed loop gardening techniques) and social cohesion-function. 't Compostjen considerably decreases the kitchen- and garden waste (+/- 300 T/y) that would otherwise have to be collected by the local waste intercommunity IDM.





- **DiCa Tuinen/DJ Compost (15/5):** this visit to another relatively small-scale green composter in Lochristi allowed CORE's partners and stakeholders to get a better sense of which quality control mechanisms including sampling techniques are required in Flanders in order to get Vlaco certified/-labeled end products.





- **VERKO (15/5):** the CORE-delegation was received just before noon at the VERKO site with an aperitif, delicious appetizer snacks and a full meal out of Vlaco's leftover cookbook. The lunch served from a foodtruck thus showed creative ways to cook with (avoided) kitchen leftovers! After a general presentation on the history and current activities, feedstocks, processes and end products (compost, electricity, heat, biomethane and bio-CNG) VERKO showed all visitors around the predigestion, postcomposting and biogas-upgrading facilities.





- **ILVO (15/6):** At the end of the afternoon and before closing off the day with a tour through Ghent all CORE-partners and other stakeholders halted at the Institute for Agricultural, Fisheries and Food Research (ILVO) that has many years experience with farm-composting of farm residues and several type of vegetal biowaste. Two researchers Koen Willekens and Tommy D’Hoose offered a clear and concise view on the farm-composting process and on the (long-term) effects of compost application on soil health, leaching and harvests.







- **Comité Jean Pain (16/5):** lastly the CORE-delegation defied rain showers to arrive at the demonstration site of Comité Jean Pain (CJP). This npo – founded more than 45 years ago to disseminate the "Methode Jean Pain" was at the base of green composting in Flanders and beyond. Over the years, the visitors' centre of the CJP became a meeting place for community gardeners and for starting tests with new biodegradable materials and new ways of home and community composting. All the recycling (closed loop gardening) techniques about which Vlaco communicates are commonly applied and regularly shown via guided tours to national and international interested parties such as the CORE-delegation!







### **Epilogue (16/5/2024)**

On the last day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> CORE seminar – after the CJP visit and a lunch back at the Novotel hotel in Mechelen COOPERARI (CORE coordinator) and ECN (communication officer for CORE) elaborated on CORE's current financial and substantive state of affairs and the next inputs and tasks expected from all partners. Partners should in months to come increase their efforts in reaching their target groups in order to overcome current policy and practical barriers by applying some of already learnt lessons. These 'local actions' will in some cases consist of creating tutorial videos in 2024.

Finally a glance was cast at the following thematic seminar (TS4) which will be held in September in Potsdam (Brandenburg) in Germany. This seminar, apart from exchanging new good practices and visiting a digestion plant in Trappenfelde (D) will allow to have more in-depth discussions between the partners on pragmatic problem-solving and specific optimization of policy instruments. The Brandenburg seminar's topic is 'Good Use and different uses of compost and digestate-based products'. All CORE-partners (and stakeholders) should in the course of June-July consult and choose new good practices to submit for the 4<sup>th</sup> Thematic Seminar.

Last but certainly not least, to have a sense of Europe's policy ambitions and its funds – like the one the CORE (Interreg) project depends upon – Vlaco lead a delegation of CORE-partners to a closing visit to the European Parliament (Hemicycle) In Brussels!



More info on submitted best practices and (previous) study visits can be found at <https://www.interregeurope.eu/core-0>.