

Environment

A strong focus on preservation of the environment is an important part of the development strategies of both countries.

Slovenia has largely extended the **areas which are subject to protection and nature conservation**.

A large share of the territory belongs to the NATURA 2000 areas. An important protected area is the Triglav National Park. In the eastern part the trilateral nature park Goričko-Raab-Örseg was established, while the Kozjanski park was established in the Savinjsko region. There are several initiatives for establishment of regional and nature park areas along the whole border: regional park Kamniško – Savinjske Alps, regional park Pohorje, the Drava and Mura parks, nature park Ljubljansko barje.

On the other hand, attention should be paid to considering development potentials and interest of the people living in those areas.

In Austria some nature parks should be expressively highlighted at this point: Naturpark Dobratsch, Naturpark Grebenzen, Naturpark Südsteirisches Weinland, Naturpark Pöllauer Tal and the Weinidylle Südburgenland. Additionally, the initiatives along the Ramsar-area Lafnitztal regarding a European model of a river-region should be mentioned.

Biodiversity of the programme area is rich. Initiatives for the preservation of biodiversity have also been supported in the last programming period. The concerned Austrian provinces have established quite a wide area of nature and landscape protection, including specific protection programmes for species and biotopes. Steiermark has already nominated 39 Natura 2000 sites, Kärnten 29 sites and Burgenland 15 sites.

On the other hand, there is a constant process of land take by housing, industrial and commercial zones and transport infrastructure both in Austria and in Slovenia, while the area used as pasture land is rather decreasing. Additionally, the ongoing fragmentation of landscapes and habitats as an associated problem could be observed. Suburbanisation is a problem in Slovenia, which results in inefficient infrastructure and unsustainable transport system. An additional problem lies in the fact that cultivation land and pastures are being overgrown by the forest, which leads to the altering of landscape.

Joint management of protected areas, improvement of the systems of nature protection, joint water management and risk prevention are the areas of common interest for cooperation.

In the Eastern and South Eastern border areas of Steiermark and Burgenland, close to the Slovenian border, there is a significantly higher rate of soil erosion, compared to the other areas within Austria. The dominant reason must be seen in agriculture.

The programme area is rich with **water**.

In Southern Austria, the karst groundwater of the Southern Limestone Alps and the groundwater in basin landscapes represent the most important groundwater resources. The problems with quality of surface waters (running and standing waters) have largely been dissolved. However, the problems with nitrate contamination of the groundwater caused by intensive agricultural production must be stated in particular in the regions along the Southern Mur and the Feistritz valley.

In the period between 1992 – 2000 an improvement of the water quality was achieved in Slovenia, especially as far as the waters of lower quality levels are concerned.

Moreover, in Slovenia a number of the water treatment plants are in construction, therefore an improvement of the sewage treatment can also be expected.

Noise in the nature, in the living environment and at work is, however, growing. In Steiermark and Kärnten nearly one third of the population feels disturbed by noise, in Burgenland one out of four. The most important factor is road traffic, especially in the urban areas and along the transport routes.

In Austria, a separate collection of **waste** contributed to reducing the waste streams from households and similar establishments. Nonetheless, the more recent years saw an increase in the level of waste. The share of population included in the system of regular **waste collection** in Slovenia increased from 76% in 1995 to 94% in 2001. Separate waste collection has been introduced by 70 % of the public companies. There is an ongoing trend of increasing the amount of waste per capita. Further processing of the separately collected waste has become a problem, while another burning issue is illegal waste dumping, which often presents a great threat to underground water.

There is an ongoing decoupling process of economic growth and **material consumption** – in line with the movement to the tertiary sector, with increased trade and outsourcing of material intensive production processes. However, so far we have not been able to consider an absolute reduction of material consumption.

In terms of sustainability, there still exist high challenges and many opportunities for an innovative and resource oriented economic and technology sector.

The quality of **air** has also improved partly, in particular, the pollution by suspended particles and SO₂ has been decreased.

The SO₂ emission in Slovenia decreased by 47 % from 1990, the most in the energy sector.

On the other hand, the **problem of fine dust** (PM₁₀-pollution) has emerged and started to be tackled. Due to specific climate and topographic conditions, the problem is particularly focused on the agglomeration and along the major transport roads in the plains of the cooperation area. Thus, a high rate of the total population is affected in terms of health and quality of life. Additionally, the framework regarding the permissions for location development, (industrial and energy) investments and major events could also be influenced.

Though the European institutions are dealing with the fine dust problem, there are also cross-border aspects to be tackled jointly, in particular regarding the co-ordination of measurement, the exchange of data and the co-ordination of measures.

At a more local level, in particular in the area of Klagenfurt, relevant know-how was generated regarding the PM₁₀ problem. In the framework of the European LIFE III, cooperation with neighbouring regions was also carried out. This practice could thus be applied to a wider region in the cooperation area.

Furthermore, the GHG emissions increased particularly in the Austrian regions, in Kärnten and Burgenland mostly due to the transport sector, in Steiermark primarily due to the industrial sector. The share of CO₂ in the total of the GHG emissions is constantly increasing up to a share of 82 %.

Due to increased traffic, the CO₂, Nox and dust emissions have increased in Slovenia, too, additionally, other sources of pollution are emerging as well.

In the field of natural hazards, the risk of flooding remains the major risk in the considered regions, however, attention must also be paid to avalanches and mudslides (in the Alpine regions) and droughts in the South-Eastern areas with intensive agricultural production.

Many challenges and initiatives exist in the field of preserving the natural resources and improvement of the environment, which can be supported through the programme. Moreover, innovation and technology development support will be required in this field.