

DATA CARD

“At the School of OpenCohesion”: the results of the European civic monitoring project and the numbers of the starting second edition

The 24th January is marked as [International Education Day](#): the United Nations celebrates its key role in setting up the conditions for peace and sustainable development. In 2021, International Education Day takes place during the COVID-19 pandemic which has led to the closure of schools, universities and other learning institutions and the disruption of many literacy and lifelong learning programs, negatively affecting the lives of 1,6 billions of students in over 190 countries as reported by the UN.

On this occasion, OpenCoesione publishes in a Data Card the response to the emergency and pandemic dedicated entirely to the **At the School of OpenCohesion (ASOC)** project: launched in 2013 in Italy, it involved over **30 thousand secondary school students** from **6 European countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal)** in civic monitoring activities on projects financed by cohesion policy. In the school year 2020-2021 there are over **240 classes in Europe actively involved** in the framework of the ASOC project.

“The ASOC model”

Cohesion policy aims to bridge the economic, social and territorial disparities in the EU. The European Regulations set as a priority for all EU Managing Authorities to enhance the transparency of information on opportunities and on outcomes from the use of funds, including and encouraging the use of open data. At the same time, greater citizens’ engagement promotes a better understanding of politics and the impact it has on citizens' lives as well as offering feedback that can improve the implementation of the policies themselves.

[At the School of Open Cohesion \(ASOC\)](#) contributes to this objective, promoting the engagement of high-school students. The educational programme is organized as a hybrid model of the methods foreseeing the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) and project-based working groups using technologies, online sharing tools, blogs and social networks, with the objective of actively involving students in monitoring the effectiveness of cohesion policy operations in their own territory, starting from the open data.

The educational challenge is coupled with a competition: participating students will produce a communication product to illustrate the results of their work and compete with their peers nationally and at European level.

The European pilot project At the School of OpenCohesion (ASOC EU) wins the challenge of digital education in the middle of the pandemic emergency

“At the School of OpenCohesion should be spread all over the EU Countries to improve citizen engagement” - Sanjay Pradhan, CEO Open Government Partnership

With the aim of implementing and transferring innovative practices of active and responsible citizenship, strengthening knowledge of cohesion policies and promoting the acquisition of

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digital skills among students, **starting from 2019 the European Commission** has launched a pilot action aimed at testing the replicability in other Member States of the At the School of OpenCohesion initiative, already consolidated in Italy. **5 Countries** replied to the call for proposal, through their central coordination bodies for EU funds and the managing authorities for national or regional operational programs co-financed by the ERDF (or the Cohesion Fund).



The European pilot project [At the School of OpenCohesion](#), is completely in line with the Italian ASOC model comprising, in addition, all necessary integrations and adaptations of contents and materials according to the peculiarities of each country. Thus ASOC was launched in the school year 2019-2020 in **Bulgaria (6 schools)**, **Croatia (5 schools)**, **Greece (Regions of the Ionian Islands, Peloponnese, Thessaly, for a total of 11 schools)**, **Portugal (5 schools)** and **Spain (Autonomous Region of Catalonia, 5 schools)** in parallel with the **200 Italian participating schools**, all having the same objective: promoting the culture of active citizenship and increasing knowledge of cohesion policies among high school students in Europe.

The **staff of OpenCoesione** and the Communication Unit of the **DG REGIO of the EU Commission** have provided the necessary support to all the applicants, by the means of the sharing of materials, tools and methodologies, as well as by the organization of continuous training and coaching activities also in the final evaluation and organization of closing events. At the same time, the managing authorities of the participating countries have joined the initiative with great enthusiasm and commitment, increasing the values of civic monitoring and active citizenship among their school communities, thus giving a significant boost to the **promotion of cohesion policy values in several territories**.

ASOC never stopped during the pandemic emergency. On the contrary, ASOC managed to **strengthen the common sense of belonging to the school communities participating** in the educational programme in the most difficult moment. The **"digital" focus of the project**, together with the **model composed in modules, steps and progressive objectives** (and the

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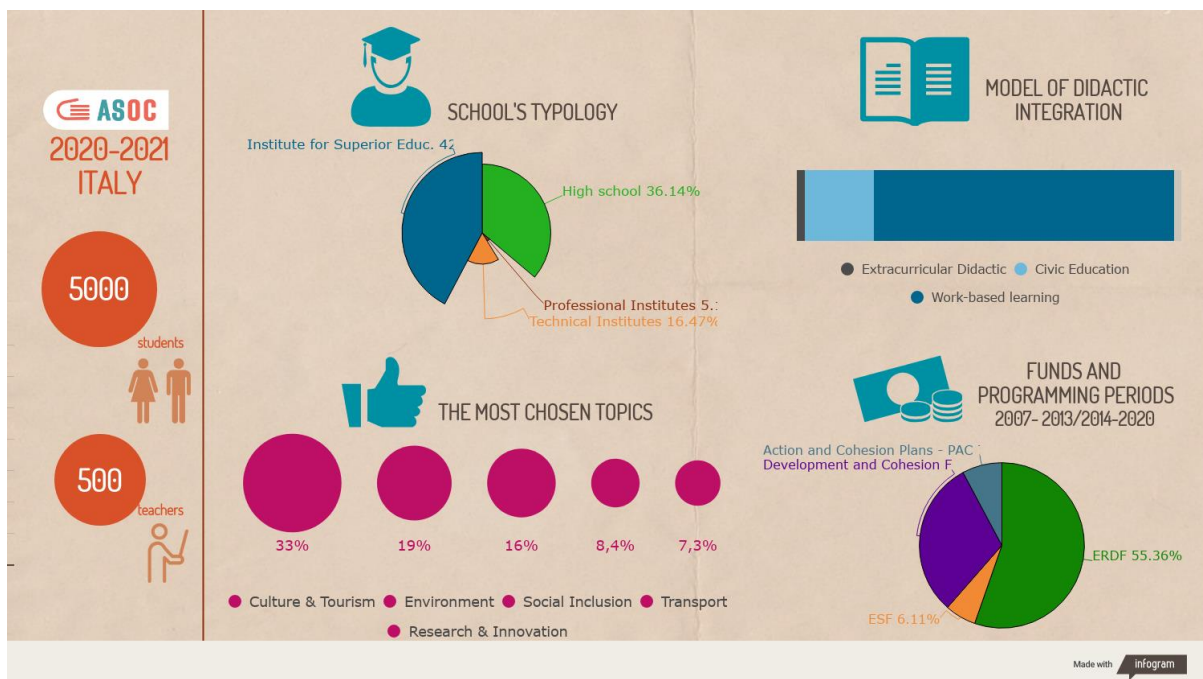
support provided by the OpenCoesione staff, including new [guidelines](#) aimed at increasing the use of digital tools for remote work), have determined and brought closer together teachers and students. In the [Data Card published last year dedicated to schools and on-distance learning](#), you can read all in details about Italian experience in connection to the past school year.

During the **2019-20 school year** there were totally over **30 schools** involved in the above mentioned European participating countries, with about **600 students and 60 teachers**. All the participating teams, with the exception of the Portuguese schools prevented by the emergency, completed the civic monitoring research outputs according to the work plan composed in **4 didactic steps** ("design", "analyze", "explore", "tell the story"), explaining all in detail the work progress and the contents of the projects monitored, all supported by the **social media activated (about 50 accounts including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter)**. All this marked the **success of the pilot initiative**, and therefore the decision of all the actors involved to continue with the educational programme ASOC EU also in the **2020-2021 school year**.

In January 2021 was launched the **second edition of At the School of OpenCohesion**. The ASOC EU educational programme has already started in **Spain**, under the supervision of the Office for Transparency and Open Government of the **Regional Government of Catalonia**. At the beginning of February the project will be launched for a second year also in **Croatia**, thanks to the commitment of the **Ministry for Regional Development and European Funds** in collaboration with the **Ministry of Education**. **Portugal and Greece** have also confirmed the continuation of the project.

The **overall number of participating classes has doubled, and in some cases even tripled, compared to the first pilot edition:** in Croatia 10 classes take part in At the School of OpenCohesion - there were 5 last year - for a total of about **200 students**; in Spain 15 classes - there were 5 in 2019/2020 - for a total of over **300 students**. Also this year, students and teachers from various European countries will join the more than **5,000 Italian** colleagues coordinated by aprox.500 teachers intended to follow the ASOC programme.

ASOC 2020-2021 in Italy (click here to see on [Infogram](#))



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The numbers confirm the strong interest in this project yet recognized as one of the **best European practices in the field of civic monitoring of public policies and digital civic education**. ASOC therefore continues its journey with the aim of involving new Member States and thus broadening the knowledge of cohesion policies in Europe, while at the same time supporting **young students to become active and responsible European citizens**.

The project stories - winners of the last school year's edition in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece and Spain are described below. Students elaborated rich and creative contents that are tackling different themes, insights and proposals.

At the following links are available in the local language all the tasks carried out in the school year 2019-2020:

[ASOC Bulgaria](#)

[ASOC Croatia](#)

[ASOC Greece](#)

[ASOC Spain](#)

> BULGARIA



The project monitored by the *School Binoculars* team from Silistra, winner of ASOC Bulgaria 2019-2020

ASOC Bulgaria was won by the *School Binoculars* team from the "Atanas Burov" school in **Silistra**, an important center in the Southern Dobruja region, on the border with Romania. The title of the presentation event of the civic monitoring research work, organized on 26 October 2020 at the City Council hall, enclosed the subject and objective of the research carried out by the students: "**European funds for education - Investing in the future of young people**".

Name of the Project: [Overhaul and complete renovation of “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” Primary School and “Zdravets” Nursery in the town of Silistra](#)

Project Official Code: BG16RFOP001-1.031-0001-C04

Operational Programme: OP “Regions in Growth” 2014-2020 (total budget € 1.689.180.000,00)

Project Total Budget: € 2.629.350,00 (percentage of EU co-financing:: 85%)

Main Theme: Education

Sector of Intervention: Investments in educational infrastructure

Research project name assigned by the Team: Road map to our dream school

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The team has decided to monitor a project very close to its direct experience: **the restructuring of the “St. St. Cyril and Methodius ”and the “Zdravets” kindergarten**. This choice was motivated by the fact that the “Burov” High School frequented by team’s students is adjacent to the school complex under renovation and will soon be involved in similar restoration works. The starting point for the monitoring experience was the governative web portal <http://2020.eufunds.bg>, in which are published all the information on projects funded by the EU. Thanks also to the support of the **District Information Points (DIPs) on the**



European Structural and Investment Funds operating within the Operational Program “Good Governance” 2014-2020, and of the **Job Orientation Center of the Municipality of Silistra**, the team collected information on the progress of the works, whose declared objective was the restoration of a **modern, safe and functional educational facility**. All project activities have been completed: building repairs and renovations, energy efficiency interventions, removal of architectural barriers, arrangement of outdoor spaces and sports fields, new furnishings in the classrooms.

Monitoring outcomes

The research allowed the students to closely observe what will soon happen to their high school as well. *“Thanks to our civic monitoring research work - they say - we are now ready to consciously follow the entire restructuring process that will see us directly involved in the short term: from the executive project to the preparatory phases, from the implementation to the reporting of the activities, we will be able to make proposals and dialogue with those responsible for the intervention”.*

The team will organize **awareness raising events** on the project’s topic aimed at the local community - thanks also to the close support of the Headmaster - and will keep the contact channels with the technical managers of the project open. The results of this follow-up will be shared with the **entire school community** (teachers, students, parents).

The commitment of the students in the monitored project led to two accurate digital storytelling works: a creative video and a brochure full of information, graphics and images on the civic monitoring process.

Watch the [Final Video](#)

Browse the [Brochure](#) prepared by students

> CROATIA



The project is monitored by the team *Edu-Akcija Zadar*, winner of the ASOC Croatia 2019-2020 edition.

The starting point for students' monitoring and acknowledgement about the cohesion policy was represented by two websites developed by the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds of Croatia (Managing Authority for the ESI Funds in Croatia): www.strukturnifondovi.hr – one stop shop for all the structural funds investments and expenditures related in the Republic of Croatia, as well as <https://asoc.strukturnifondovi.hr/> taken in analysis as a central point for information for the development of the learning program ASOC in Croatia, as well as the project website <https://www.zadarbastini.hr/>

Name of the Project: Zadar for heritage – Integrated Cultural Programme of the Zadar Municipality 2020

Project Official Code: KK.06.1.1.01.0052

Operational Programme: Operational Programme Coherence & Cohesion 2014-2020: Total budget 6.831 Billion €. (out of which 4.321 Billion from ERDF and 2.510 Billion from Cohesion Fund)

Project Total Budget: approx. 8,91 Million €, (co-financed by the EU funds 85% and Municipality of Zadar 15%)

Main Theme: Culture & Tourism

Sector of Intervention: Public procurement of services and goods, infrastructural investments, financial support for SMEs and legal persons

Research project name assigned by the Team: Zadar heritage under the EU stars

The students have noticed that the life quality level in Zadar has risen in the last period and were keen to get to know whether these positive changes were influenced by the project



financed by the EU funds at the local level for infrastructure, education and culture. So, the decision fell on the project dealing with the **restoration of the Zadar city walls** and their symbolism of the **"shield" of the city**. With this project, the ramparts surrounding the peninsula and the central part of the city are being

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restored in such a way that they turn from the existing road into a promenade and become a new place for socializing with a beautiful view. In addition, it is an area that has been placed under the protection of **UNESCO since 2017**.

A curiosity is that beneath the well-known asphalt laid in the 1980s, in some places the students, during their monitoring activity, came across asphalt from the 1950s and 1960s, the time of the reconstruction of the city after the demolition in the Second World War. The next layer is a road from the time of the Italian administration, and below it are the remains and traces of a postal road that was completed in 1878. Inside a probe, at a depth of about 5 meters, the walls of buildings from Roman times were discovered.

However, the residents of Zadar are divided on whether Zadar needs a promenade or wants to preserve the existing parking spaces. Also, there are attitudes that Zadar is a city that is oriented exclusively to the **development of tourism**, and that too little attention is paid to citizens and all jobs are given to companies without clear selection criteria, thus the students during the monitoring decided to examine the opinion of the residents of Zadar by the means of **interviews**, but also to further **inform them about the implementation of the project**.

Monitoring outcomes

The students registered the correct assignment of the contract related to the public procurement procedures for renovation works which are proceeding within the planned deadlines and that is something the team will **continue to monitor**. It is also crucial to monitor whether the citizens themselves will recognize the **value of the project** and use this new space in the planned sense - for **family gatherings**. It is important to continue to **monitor transparency regarding the disclosure of all information related to the project**. Citizens also expressed concern during numerous interviews about the possible over-commercialization of the wooden houses that will be set up. It is important for them that they be set up for the purpose of presenting local products, without being another café, and then an inappropriate space for family gatherings, which would miss the purpose of the entire project.

Important out take and quote: "In the past, the ramparts protected the city, and now the City protects the ramparts"

Watch the [Final Video](#)

> GREECE

The projects monitored by the winning teams of ASOC Greece 2019-2020*

** ASOC Greece was carried out on a regional basis, so, as a result, there are 3 winners, one for each participating region: Ionian Islands, Peloponnese, Thessaly.*

>> Ionian Islands



The *H2O Explorers* team from the **Argostoli High School (Kefalonia)** was awarded the first place of ASOC Greece in the Ionian Islands, having monitored the intervention on the **Argostoli desalination plant**, thanks to which the city receives a large part of its supply of drinking water.

Name of the Project: [Desalination unit in Argostoli \(Kefalonia\) with a capacity of 8000 sq.m. drinking water per day](#)

Project Official Code: 5001348

Operational Programme: Infrastructure for transport, environment and sustainable development

Project Total Budget: € 4.523.272 (Cohesion Fund)

Main Theme: Environment

Sector of Intervention: Infrastructure for city services

Research project name assigned by the Team: More tap water, less plastic waste

The project, which has been completed in 2018, was analyzed by the students starting from the sources and information available on the national web portal <https://www.espa.gr>.



The team also provided **questionnaires** to the population, with the aim of raising awareness among citizens on the issue of water waste and consequent pollution. The choice of the project, in fact, served also to the team's stated goal of **promoting a drastic reduction in the purchase of**

drinking water bottled in plastic and therefore in the use of **public water for drinking purposes**. After discovering that most citizens refused to drink tap water due to hygiene bias, the team visited the plant on site, where they met with technicians who explained how it works. At the same time, the experts carried out specific laboratory tests to testify the certification of **clean water**.

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Encouraged by this evidence, the students designed and implemented a series of **communication and awareness actions among citizens**: tv interviews, radio programs hosted by the local broadcaster, website, up to the creation of graffiti and the use of [minibuses](#) to travel around the city districts to disseminate the message "YES to clean tap water, NO to plastic bottles".

Monitoring outcomes

The team's goal was to convince the inhabitants of Argostoli that tap water is clean and safe. *"We believe that, to a certain extent, we have succeeded - say the students - and in any case we will continue in our awareness-raising activity"*. In the meantime, habits have changed at school: **they only drink tap water and no longer use plastic bottles**. While the students of the H2O Explorers team have become, among the inhabitants of Argostoli, a **model of sustainable and responsible behavior**.

Watch the [Final Video](#)

>> Peloponnese



In the Peloponnese, the winning team of the 2019-2020 edition of ASOC EU was *Mare Nostrum ... Vita Nostra*, from the High School of **Neapolis (Laconia)**. The monitored project concerns the construction of the **Museum of the Naval Tradition of Neapolis**, one of a kind in the Peloponnese region.

Name of the Project: Museum of the Maritime Tradition of Neapolis (Lakonia)

Project Official Code: NP

Operational Programme: Regional Operational Programme "Peloponnese 2014-2020", - Measure 41 "Local development strategy"

Project Total Budget: € 247.840,00

Main Themes: Culture & Tourism, Cities and Rural Areas

Sector of intervention: Infrastructure for cultural services

Research project name assigned by the Team: Housing our nautical memories

The choice of the team preserves reasons well anchored to the millenary history of the place: the lifestyle and culture of the maritime professions, the close connection with the sea, the remarkable naval tradition of the area. Reasons why the European Union financed the **renewal of the historic building that hosted the elementary school**, thus allowing its conversion into

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a brand new museum that now hosts objects, artifacts, and testimonies from donations from elderly fishermen and sailors.



The museum, whose renovation began in 2013 and was completed in 2015, has quickly become a **historical, cultural and tourist landmark of the entire area.**

The museum exhibition effectively showcases a series of themes that can be ascribed not only to the history of the town, but to the **culture of the entire Greek nation:** man's ancestral

relationship with the sea, navigation, fishing, trade maritime, underwater and archaeological activities, the natural marine environment.

This is why the students wanted to deepen every aspect of the project, from the possible impact in terms of **tourist increase** to the promotion of collateral initiatives of **environmental awareness**, to the realization of information actions aimed at the citizens of Neapolis themselves to put them more in connection with the historical asset. and cultural object of the intervention, also helping to **bridge the gap between the older and younger generations and to shape a sense of common identity.**

In their research, the students analyzed the broader context of Greek museums by making comparisons on the basis of data and information collected from institutional sources, examined the budgets relating to renovation costs, studied the various phases of the work, getting in touch with experts , technicians and local authorities, interviewing the population on the level of knowledge of the value that the museum represents.

Monitoring outcomes

During the research, the team found a **lack of awareness of the local community about the potential of the city museum.** Hence, the idea of establishing a direct line with citizens and institutions to stimulate a **broader and more effective promotion** not only of what the museum hosts, but also of what it represents in terms of cultural identity, also in terms of a possible, desired increase in the number of visitors.

The local community was immediately ready to accept the challenge launched by the students to identify improvement proposals aimed at promoting the museum's cultural and tourist attractions to the general public. Thus some shared ideas were born, including the implementation of an ad hoc **website**, the publication of **audiovisual material on social media**, the organization of a **day dedicated to the museum as part of the Nautical Week**, which is traditionally held in the summer period.

Watch the [Final Video](#)

>> Thessaly



The *Karla Lakers* team of the **Larissa** high school was awarded the first place of ASOC Greece in Thessaly, with the monitoring of the vast **reconstruction and redevelopment project of the Karla artificial lake**, an important landscape-environmental site located on the border between the prefectures of Larissa and Magnesia, which has returned to life thanks to European Union funds for environmental protection and regional development.

Name of the Project: [Recreation of lake Karla](#)

Project Official Code: MIS: 299882 - CCI: 2010GR161PR006

Project Total Budget: € 50.000.000,00 (€ 37.890.900,00 co-funded by EU)

Main Theme: Environment, Culture & Tourism

Sector of Intervention: Infrastructure

Research project name assigned by the Team: Past, present and future of a life project for Thessaly

Considering lake Karla both as a **living and evolving organism**, an ecosystem rich in biodiversity, the team has set up its research work by moving on three axes: the historical value of the lake, the process of its recreation, its social and economic relevance.



The recently completed overall project is **one of the largest and most ambitious in South Eastern Europe**. From a technical point of view it is made up of many smaller projects, whose together has managed to create remarkable results, recognized by the entire national and international community: the **quality of**

groundwater and drinking water has improved, the **ecosystem** has improved the **microclimate** of the area, many locals work in related industries and the lake has become an **attraction for many tourists**. The team's **documentation work** was enormous, as was the amount of information on the lake recreation project, once thriving but completely dried up in the 1960s to make room for agricultural fields, and then revitalized starting in 1999 with the beginning of the recreation process and "inaugurated" in **October 2018**. A long administrative history that the students meticulously studied and told in their reports, and then shared it with citizens, testing a little lack of awareness of the population on the extent of the works carried

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out and on the potential offered by the intervention. Many locals do not know the story of lake Karla, or know little, even if the reconstruction project has become a **model for the European Union** as it is capable of **combining environmental protection and economic growth through agriculture and tourism**.

For this reason, the students decided to **leverage the promotion of initiatives already in place**, such as the Lake Information Center, as well as the history and importance of the natural site for Greece, also encouraged in this by the words of the **Governor of Thessaly Costas Agorastos**, with which the students established [direct contact](#).

Monitoring outcomes

The team's information activities, aimed in particular at the younger generations, take place on the **web and social channels** set up for this purpose - in particular on the blog <https://karlalakers.blogspot.com> - where students publish historical notes, dossiers, interviews, multimedia material, focus on flora and fauna, brochures and information on services. As a final report, the team created a **detailed Lake Karla tourism information booklet**, available on the group's blog.

> SPAIN



Here is the project monitored by the *Ecolliures* team from Mataró, winner of ASOC Spain 2019-2020.

The *Ecolliures* team from the High School “Le Cinc Sènies” of the Catalan city of **Mataró** chose to monitor the project entitled “**Mataró Energy Transition Promotion Process**”, driven by the idea that it is very important, in this historical phase, to direct development towards a more sustainable model in which the

reduction of greenhouse gases must play a predominant role.

Name of the Project: Mataró Energy Transition Promotion Process

Project Official Code: PR15-012779

Project Total Budget: 3,3 MLN euro (ERDF funds: € 1.361.321,58; Municipality of Mataró: € 1.938.678,42).

Main themes: Research & Innovation, Energy, Environment, Cities and Rural areas

Sectors of intervention: Infrastructure, Business Competitiveness

Research project name assigned by the Team: Energy is neither created nor destroyed: let's transform Mataró!

The monitoring work initially focused on the collection of data from different sources, starting with the open data published on the Open Government portal of the Autonomous Region of Catalonia http://governobert.gencat.cat/ca/dades_obertes.

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The energy transformation project of the Catalan city has a budget of **3,3 million euro**, divided between the FESR Fund and municipal co-financing. The goal of the project is to **reduce energy consumption by more than 65%**, as well as **reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 42.7%**. The intervention involves the

activation of energy diagnosis systems, the improvement of public lighting and the installation of photovoltaic panels. The project is aimed at companies and institutions in Catalonia and, in the long term, there is the possibility of extending it to local authorities throughout Spain.

The first actions foreseen by the project - which is in its initial phase - are the creation of an **Energy Transition Office in Mataró (OTEM)** and the **promotion of the energy efficiency program in public lighting**. In particular, the Energy Transition Office will coordinate and monitor the actions to be developed thanks to dedicated technicians: the office operation envisages an investment of approximately 283,000 euros and should be operational by 2021. Subsequently, for the next 4 years, the other planned actions were carried out, including the installation of photovoltaic panels on 40 municipal buildings. Subsequently, in the next 4 years, the other planned actions will be carried out, including the **installation of photovoltaic panels on 40 municipal buildings**. The objectives of the project are part of the **Action Plan for Sustainable Energy and Climate (SECAP)** ratified in March 2018 by the **Provincial Council of Barcelona** together with the representatives of the territorial areas, including the Municipality of Mataró.

Monitoring outcomes

The ideas of the students were clear from the beginning: **to improve their level of knowledge of the funded intervention and of the context related to climate change**, to become **active actors in raising public awareness on these issues**, promoting the debate on energy waste caused by limited and polluting sources and **involving the local community in civic monitoring** (citizens, associations, companies, public bodies, trade representatives), with an ever-vigilant eye on the progress of the interventions investigated. And this is exactly what the *Ecolliures* team continues to pursue, adopting the motto of the ASOC initiative: "**monitoring goes on!**"

Watch the [Final Video](#)