



spongeworks

Archipelago Sea catchment as an Associated region for *SpongeWorks* project



PA Nutri Talks 9.9.2025

Katariina Yli-Heikkilä



Regional Council
of Southwest Finland



Funded by
the European Union



UK Research
and Innovation

VALONIA 

Municipalities in co-operation for sustainable development

Valonia is an unbiased regional advisory organisation for 27 municipalities in matters regarding sustainable development. Part of the **Regional Council of Southwest Finland**.

Our activities are guided by the following themes:

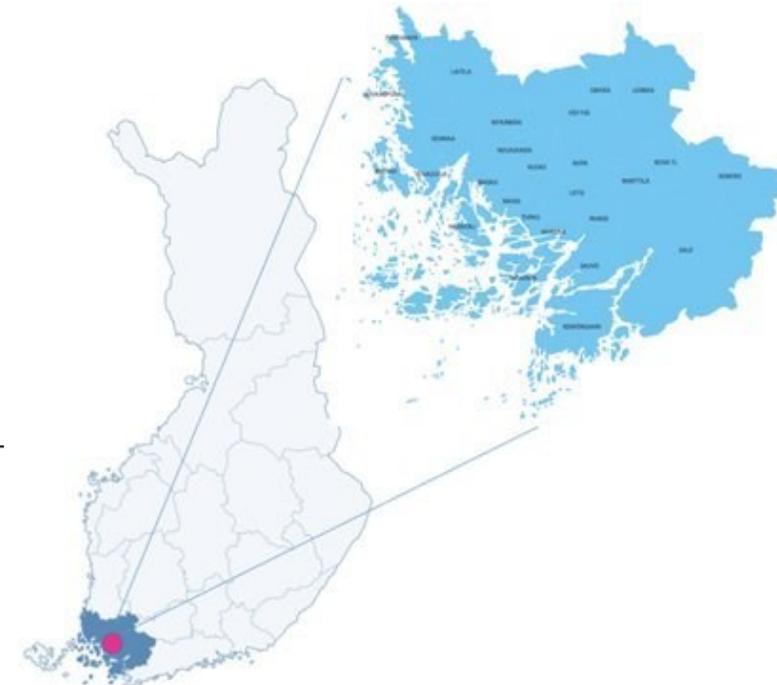
- Building a Carbon neutral Southwest Finland
- **Preserving biodiversity and water protection**
- Sustainable use of natural resources



We offer **support and expertise** within these themes for all municipalities and stakeholders. We act as a platform for projects.

Networks, capacity building, participation. We create co-operation opportunities, convey information and offer practical solutions to build a sustainable society.

Unique organization in Finland, public organization, municipalities as owners and co-funders.



SpongeWorks

Aim

- sponge measures and sponge strategies to address floods, droughts and biodiversity decline by demonstrating effective and integrated approaches to increase landscape water retention capacity of groundwater, soil and surface water systems

Expected impact

- Progress toward transformative change in landscape and water management, contributing to enhanced climate resilience
- Accelerated implementation of sponge measures and strategies in Europe and beyond, driven by the integration of scientific excellence and practical know-how

Part of three EU Missions: Ocean & Waters, Adaptation to Climate Change, and Soil Deal for Europe



48

Months

Sept. 24 - Aug. 28



28

Partners



15 M€

Budget



<https://www.spongeworks.eu/>



Co-funded by
the European Union

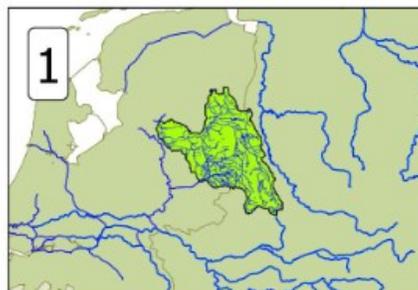
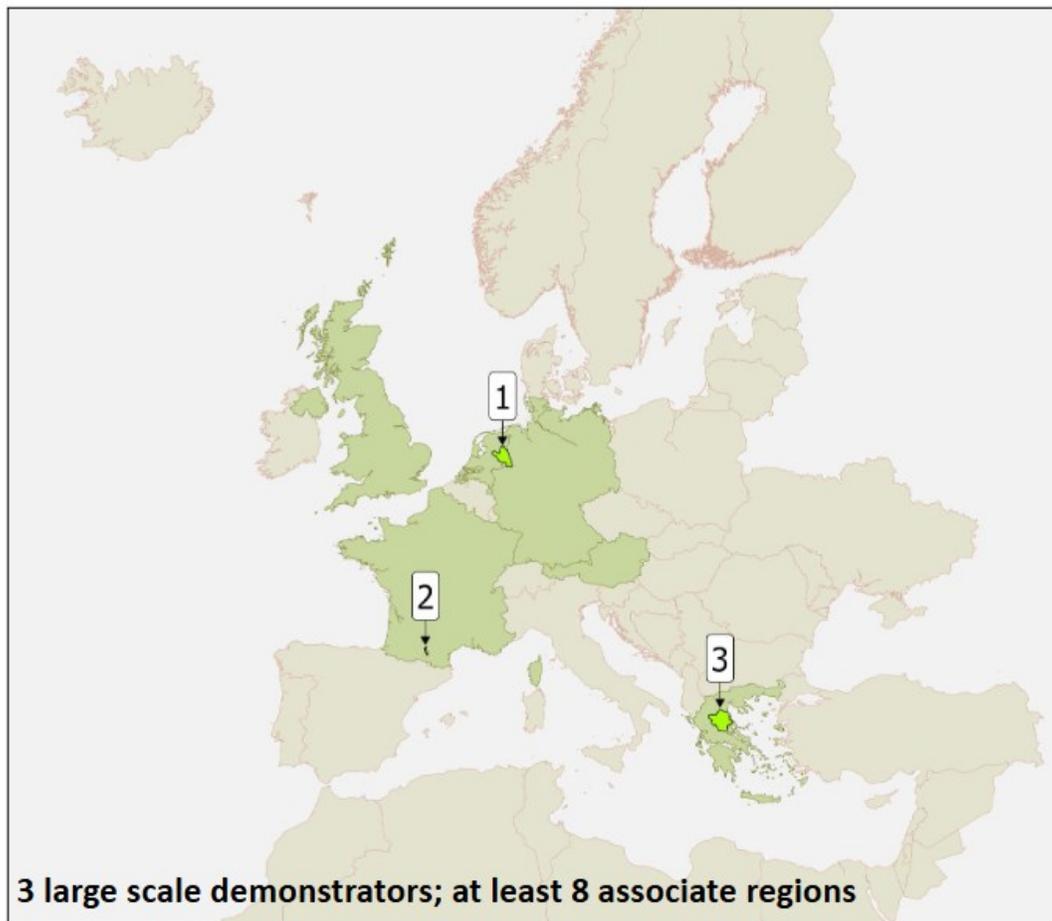


Co-creating and Upscaling Sponge Landscapes by Working with Natural Water Retention and Sustainable Management (SpongeWorks) 101156116

Sponge measures at landscape scale

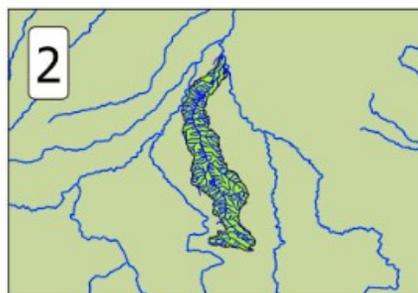


SpongeWorks demonstrator regions



Vecht River Basin

Cross-boarder lowland basin; complex institutional setting with many authorities in 2 member states
Current main focus: water management for floods and droughts; Improving Water Framework Directive and biodiversity goals



Lèze River Basin

Hilly agricultural catchment, with many small rural communities
Current main focus: floods and related soil erosion management
Water quality improvements



Pinios River Basin

Intensive agricultural catchment under severe droughts with **many agricultural organisations**
Current main focus: (ground-)water scarcity and soil management
Water quality improvements

 Demonstrator basins

 Territories covered in consortium



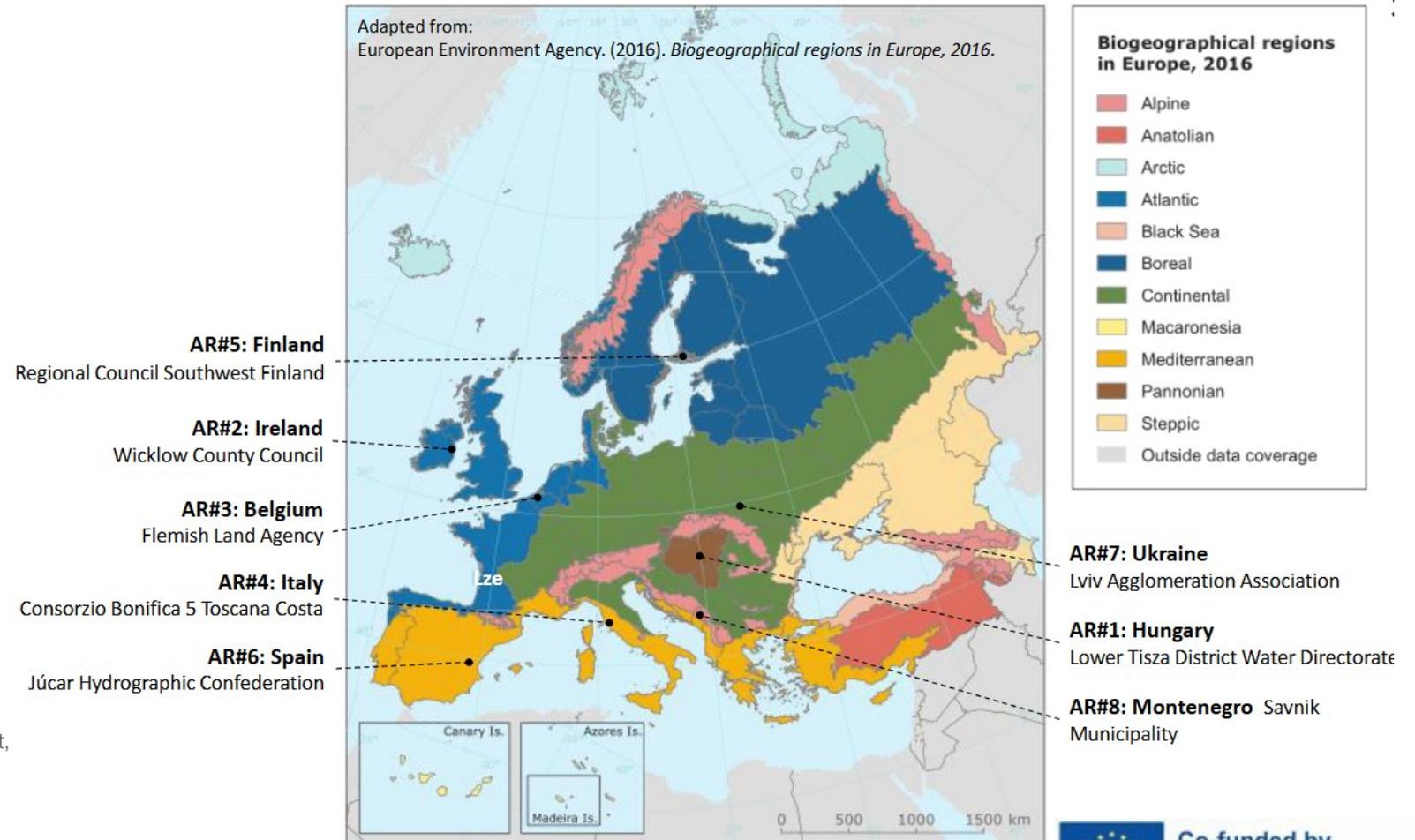
Associated regions to translate or transfer sponge measures

Associated region #5 Southwest Finland

- **Translation region** = Test how proven sponge measures from the Vecht (Atlantic basin) into the Finnish (Boreal context) > under different climate & biophysical conditions
- **Basin:** Archipelago Sea Catchment
- **Lead organisation:** Regional Council of Southwest Finland (RCSF) (operational lead project unit for sustainable development VALONIA)
- **Partner:** Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for Southwest Finland (ELY Centre)



Centre for Economic Development,
Transport and the Environment



Why We Joined SpongeWorks



Sponge Enough? – Adding sponge to the Archipelago Sea catchment

- Are river basin management plans/restoration plans sponge enough for climate resilience and are we promoting the right measures?

- Knowledge exchange:

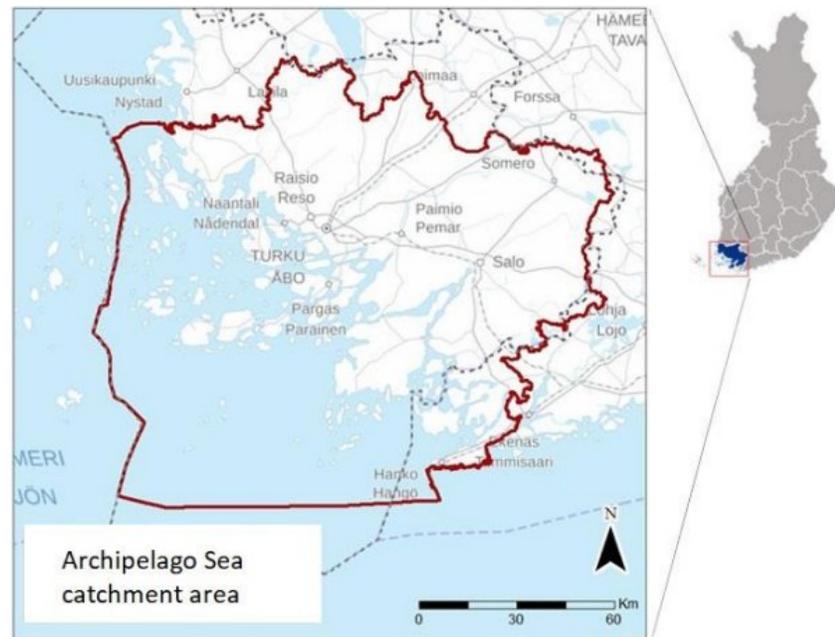
- Learn how river basin management is dealt with in SpongeWorks partner countries (Greece, France, transboundary basin Germany/the Netherlands)
- Learn what novel methods we could deploy in our river basin

- Current status of Archipelago Sea

- **The Archipelago Sea Programme** to tackle especially nutrient loading from agriculture, several up-to-date catchment restoration plans
- But are they sponge enough? Are water quality measures also promoting sponginess?

- Sponge itself

- In preparation of e.g. the national implementation of the Nature Restoration Law we need to already start integrating sponge measures to the landowners and other stakeholders' agenda.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Objectives



- Increase regional resilience to climate change by adding SPONGE MEASURES to **strategies and plans** mitigate flooding, drought, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss in the Archipelago Sea Catchment.
- **Implement and promote** sponge measures as a feasible method to tackle above mentioned challenges especially across agricultural and forestry areas but also in urban areas.
- **Not only Regional Sponge Strategy and Road Map** but also systematically integrate sponge measures into regional water management and land use frameworks.
- **Engage and support local stakeholders**—especially landowners—through capacity building, co-creation workshops, and demonstration sites to ensure long-term adoption of sponge measures.

Expected impact



- Improved climate resilience of agriculture, forestry, and communities in Southwest Finland.
- Reduced nutrient runoff and eutrophication in the Archipelago Sea through enhanced water retention.
- Strengthened biodiversity and soil health via the restoration of wetlands, peatlands, and other ecosystems.
- A scalable model for integrating sponge measures into regional planning and catchment management, which can be replicated in other regions facing similar environmental pressures.
- Novel methods from SpongeWorks partners, such as hedges, will be considered and possibly deployed as part of the project.



Co-funded by
the European Union



VALONIA 

 Co-funded by
the European Union

Thank you!



spongeworks



VALONIA 

Katariina Yli-Heikkilä

Environmental specialist

Valonia / Regional Council Southwest Finland

katariina.yli-heikkila@valonia.fi



@spongeworks

@spongeworksEU

www.spongeworks.eu



Funded by
the European Union



UK Research
and Innovation

The SpongeWorks project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101156116. The project will run from 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2028.
Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.