



# *Event Report*

**EPPA Regional workshop on integration of green infrastructure and  
ecological corridors into the spatial planning and sector policies**

**17-18 May 2021**

**Live video conference**



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**NIRAS** **umweltbundesamt<sup>U</sup>**

The project implemented by the Consortium of NIRAS (lead)  
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## 1 The event

The EPPA Regional workshop on integration of green infrastructure and ecological corridors into the spatial planning and sector policies took place on May 17-18, 2021, via live video conference. The workshop was organized in cooperation with TAIEX, and under the EPPA project work programme, namely activity 5.1.6 “Workshop on integration of GI and ecological corridors into the spatial planning and sector policies”. It targeted the following EPPA beneficiaries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey.

The participants came from the relevant authorities of the EPPA beneficiaries involved in the implementation of green infrastructure. They represented the Ministries with the environment, and agriculture, portfolios, in addition to national environmental management and conservation agencies, forest management agencies and spatial planning agencies. Details are available in the list of participants. Civil society was represented by NGOs from the beneficiaries, namely: Environmental center for Development, Education and Networking (Albania), Centar za životnu sredinu (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Advocacy Training and Resource Center – ATRC (Kosovo\*), Center for Protection and Research of Birds (Montenegro), Nature Conservation Centre (Turkey). The EU Delegations and Office in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey were also present.

The speakers represented EU Member States’ and EU institutions’ experience. There were experts from the relevant national authorities of Slovenia, the Netherlands and Austria; and from DG Environment, European Commission. Additionally, the workshop mobilized contributions from BUND – Friends of the Earth Germany. Details are available in the agenda and the presentations can be downloaded in both the TAIEX website and in the EPPA project website.

The aim of the workshop was to provide guidance so as to raise the capacity of the beneficiaries in the implementation of EU policy in the areas of nature and biodiversity. Advice focusing on ecological connectivity and Green Infrastructure, particularly the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, EU Strategy on Green Infrastructure, the Habitats Directive and INSPIRE Directive, was also provided. The workshop was designed to follow up on the *EPPA Study on green infrastructure deployment and ecological connectivity*. The specific objectives were to provide knowledge and examples of good practices, related to the mainstreaming of Green Infrastructure into the sector policies and integration of the ecological connectivity into spatial planning.

## 2 Proceedings and conclusions

The workshop presented the experiences of the Interreg Danube SaveGREEN Project in safeguarding and improving the functionality of ecological corridors in the Danube basin through integrated planning. SaveGREEN will contribute to improving structural and functional ecological connectivity in bottleneck areas by adapting land use and management in the surroundings involving stakeholders from different fields of experience in Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. It will last from July 2020 to December 2022, with 13 partners (NGOs, research institutions, one environmental authority and 1 private company) from 6 countries and a budget of 2.7 million euros. The project will seek to provide valuable lessons regarding the development of a standardized methodology for monitoring structural and functional habitat connectivity as well as recommendations towards the integration of mitigation measures into the national and EU level policy processes. In this regard the project will operate in 8 pilot areas distributed among the target countries, focusing on the relevant species in each pilot area (which include amphibians, bats, pollinators, birds, reptiles, deer and cray fish).

A particular interest of SaveGREEN is the interplay of different aspects of ecological corridors. On a landscape-scale, the structural connectivity describes the permeability of the landscape due to land-cover and land-use characteristics, while the functional connectivity relates to the interactions of animals with the landscape and its structures due to their needs. Structural connectivity will be assessed by using GIS techniques based on data mostly derived by remote sensing. For functional connectivity (the “species perspective”) each of the eight pilot areas will collect field survey data at locations identified as bottleneck situations in the monitoring of the structural connectivity. This will be done for a set of



different species groups like large carnivores, large herbivores, medium-sized mammals and others. The expected outputs are a standardized methodology for monitoring structural and functional connectivity incl. application toolbox for fieldwork & analysis; local cross-sectoral operational plans for each pilot area incl. preparatory actions for its implementation; international on-site workshops to develop solutions and exchange experience held in the pilot areas; capacity building program for authorities and training events for public authorities and key players on cost/benefit analysis; joint political declaration on maintaining and restoring Green Infrastructure with a focus on spatial planning; recommendations towards the integration of mitigation measures into the national and EU level policy processes (GI funding measure); and an international conference in coordination with the IENE 2022 Conference.

EU member states (Slovenia and Netherlands) also offered their experience with the integration of green/blue infrastructure into spatial planning practices and other policies, as well as specific mitigation measures addressing grey infrastructure. Slovenia, in particular, presented its practice of mainstreaming and implementation of green and blue infrastructure into spatial planning and sectoral policies, which is based on a national handbook for recognizing and planning green infrastructure. The main challenges the handbook addresses are quality of water, air, food; amounts of natural resources and green areas; increased dynamics of the weather, river regimes, erosion processes and the activity of the sea. The GI recognition and planning cycle should consider possible conflicts with other uses and include clear management mechanisms. The process starts with a comprehensive harmonization and planning of multiple policies affecting each area with the goal to preserve natural resources by linking green areas. Although the needed initial development might entail an increase in investment and operating costs, the potential economic non-competitiveness resulting from that is largely offset by increasing the supply of benefits derived from the natural environment, ultimately resulting in better adaptability to environmental, social and economic changes and setting the long-term stage for sustainable economic potential, for instance, through increased leisure and tourist activities. This is all the more important when taking into consideration the hypothetical relationships between land use intensity, Mean Species Abundance Index (MSA) and the output of ecosystem services (Braat et al., 2008, The Cost of Policy Inaction: the case of not meeting the 2010 biodiversity target), according to which increased land use intensity will lead to the degradation of the mean species abundance index (quality and extent of biodiversity present).

Slovenia recognizes green infrastructure by integrating different regulatory and spatial scales, starting with the macro level (strategic planning for natural regions), the mezzo level (strategic planning for river basins and potentially cross border natural areas), and the micro level (spatial planning for concrete, subnational areas). As a result, Slovenia identified green and blue corridors in its marine and coastal planning (included in latest draft of Marine Strategic Plan of Slovenia and harmonized with Italy and Croatia). Green and blue corridors, especially sea blue corridors, are generalised lines. There are, of course, deviations from these lines, because some members of a certain species may also appear at completely unexpected places.

Nevertheless, recognising and planning the GI, for now, does not have any legal bases, only has directions, and the existing legal regimes need to be respected. In the short term, it is reasonable to seek the means to preserve and establish green areas on an existing and established legal basis which already address ES and GI, such as nature protection, water management, forests and agriculture, cultural heritage, etc. In EU Funds one of selection criteria for applying projects will be also the consideration of ES and GI. In the long term, it would be sensible to think about (gradual) changes of laws so that strategic policies for GI eventually become binding. The main challenge in Slovenia is the synergy between the various existing legal regimes: the sectoral partial approach, which is still strongly present. Long-term success of implementing individual sectoral goals requires the observance of other sectoral goals and “movement” in the direction of sustainable development.

In this background, Slovenia is preparing a new Strategy for Spatial Development of Slovenia 2050. Green infrastructure is addressed at national, regional and local level. GI provides multifunctionality of space and quality of life, and it is an element of recognizability and identity of rural and urban areas. It is also being used as an element of planning (landscape design). An example is the municipality of Ankaran (Slovenian coastline) which has a new Municipal Spatial Plan integrating ES functions and GI planning in



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the process of preparing an urban and landscape design as a compulsory professional basis in spatial planning.

The Netherlands presented its planning and design of road mitigation measures as part of ecological corridors, seen as need to create or maintain viable wildlife populations. The road mitigation green infrastructure implemented so far as resulted in a measurable rebound of wildlife numbers. Grey infrastructure often acts as a barrier to wildlife, fragmenting habitats and therefore reducing their viability. Depending on particular species needs, there are many potential solutions to overcome this type of fragmentation:

- Measures addressing traffic – lowering speed limit or traffic volume
- Measures addressing driver behavior – road signs, wildlife detection systems
- Measures addressing animal behavior – virtual fence, vegetation management
- Measures addressing animal populations – increased hunting along roads
- Measures that facilitate safe crossings – wildlife tunnels and bridges

The speaker then presented concrete examples of the use of tunnels and bridges tailored for certain species' needs, with verifiable positive results in terms of wildlife conservation. Additionally, this type of infrastructure can also serve low-impact human use (walking, cycling), without detriment to wildlife transit goals, and therefore increasing liveability.

Moreover, other project-based experience was brought forward for discussion, namely the Interreg project D2C (DaRe to Connect), which supports the Danube region's ecological connectivity by linking Natura 2000 areas along the Green Belt. The project has a budget of 2.8 million euros stretching from June 2018 to November 2021. It involves 11 partners from 8 countries. The European Green Belt is a 12.500 km of living memorial landscape, crossing 24 States. 20 States of those states sign/support the Initiative with a Letter of Intent (May 2013) and more than 150 GOs and NGOs involved in the Initiative. The Commission also sees it as a model-project for Green Infrastructure in Europe (May 2013). The tendency has been for the percentage of protected areas along the green belt to increase and the average distance between protected areas declining.

The main objectives of the DaRe to Connect project are to contribute to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) by further development of the connectivity of protected areas along the Green Belt in the Danube Region as backbone of EU Green infrastructure; identify ecological corridors between existing Natura 2000 areas and other protected areas along the EGB in the Danube Region and maintain and enhance ecosystems and their services; improve capacities and the level of trans-national and trans-boundary cooperation between GOs, NGOs and on policy level; support the aim of the EGB-Initiative to nominate the European Green Belt as UNESCO World heritage. The project is taking pilot actions in several countries (Austria, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania and Serbia), including high resolution habitat classification (identifying potential corridors through a connectivity functionality index) which will be the basis of detailed planning for implementation measures of multifunctional ecological corridors and priority areas. The connectivity functionality index combines criteria for habitat quality and connectivity, identifies potential and existing corridors on a transnational and transboundary, it offers high readability as a tool for policy recommendations and prioritisation (Areas of Action). However, the index does not take into account the costs of implementation or the willingness of relevant authorities and in some cases the resolution is insufficient to address problems at local level.

The DINALPCONNECT Project focuses on the transboundary ecological connectivity of the Alps and Dinaric Mountains, a very important south-north link in view of climate change, as it would connect two mountain ranges rich in biodiversity. This is illustrated by certain species, like the wolf, that migrate between the 2 mountain ranges. Therefore, the project objective is to strengthen transnational and sectoral cooperation to improve ecological connectivity throughout Dinaric Mountains connecting them with the Alps, enabling long term protection of biodiversity in view of current and future climate changes. The project has 11 partners from 6 Dinaric countries and Italy. In particular, the project seeks to establish a strategy for improved ecological connectivity throughout the Dinaric Mountains and to the Alps, to create action plans for pilot regions fostering EC on transboundary level, and therefore creating also a network of transboundary pilot regions (capacity building of stakeholders).



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As a first step, the project is mapping, at macro-regional scale, the current state of the ecological networks in the project area, with an general overview of the landscape permeability and the main barriers to it (including topography, land use, population, and fragmentation). There are 4 pilot regions identified, all of them cross-boundary (IT-SLO, SLO-HR, HR-BiH, ALB-GR).

Both the DINALPCONNECT Project and the DaRe to Connect illustrate the advantages of planning green infrastructure at a cross-border level and offer lessons on how to achieve to it. Finally, the EPPA beneficiaries discussed their challenges and needs related to the integration of Green Infrastructure and ecological corridors into the spatial planning and sector, in the context of recent developments in terms of legislation, infrastructure growth and governance measures to improve ecological connectivity.

### **Workshop outputs**

The workshop's main outputs were:

- Strengthened capacity to address the implementation challenges of green infrastructure
- Raised awareness on the latest initiatives on ecological connectivity in EU Member States
- Exchanged experiences in the implementation of green infrastructure between EU Member States and the EPPA beneficiaries
- Increased regional dialogue on the implementation of green infrastructure
- Identified national obstacles towards the implementation of green infrastructure

## **3 Evaluation**

The participants were asked to evaluate the workshop by TAIEX using an online survey after the event. The evaluation results are presented below in a summary table.



				No. Responses	Expert Score	Yes / Excellent	No / Good	Partially / Satisfactory	
88757	Workshop - participant - A. Questions	1	Was the workshop carried out according to the agenda?	18	-	18 (100%)	-	-	
		2	Was the programme well structured?	18	-	17 (94%)	-	1 (6%)	
		3	Were the key issues related to the topics addressed?	18	-	17 (94%)	-	1 (6%)	
		4	Did the workshop enable you to improve your knowledge?	18	-	14 (78%)	-	4 (22%)	
		5	Was enough time allowed for questions and discussions?	18	-	18 (100%)	-	-	
		7	Do you expect any follow-up based on the results of the workshop (new legislation, new administrative approach, etc.)?	18	-	14 (78%)	4 (22%)	-	
		8	Do you think that further TAIEX - %pr_c_abbreviation% assistance is needed (workshop, expert mission, study visit, assessment mission) on the topic of this workshop?	18	-	15 (83%)	3 (17%)	-	
		Workshop - participant - B. Expert ratings	-	Mr. Dimovski, Mihail - Other speakers	17	94.11%	13 (76%)	4 (24%)	-
	-		Mr. Santi, Saso - Speaker MS	17	98.52%	16 (94%)	1 (6%)	-	
	-		Ms. Ivanica, Madalina - Speaker EU	17	92.64%	13 (76%)	3 (18%)	1 (6%)	
	-		Mr. Van Der Grift, Edgar - Speaker MS	17	98.52%	16 (94%)	1 (6%)	-	
-	Mr. Kuba, Martin - Other speakers		17	94.11%	14 (82%)	2 (12%)	1 (6%)		
-	Mr. Plutzar, Christoph - Speaker MS		17	95.58%	15 (88%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)		
-	Ms. Bertonec, Irena - Speaker MS		17	94.11%	14 (82%)	2 (12%)	1 (6%)		
Workshop - participant - C. Logistic Ratings	1	Conference venue	9	-	6 (67%)	1 (11%)	2 (22%)		
	2	Interpretation	12	-	9 (75%)	1 (8%)	2 (17%)		
	3	Hotel	6	-	2 (33%)	2 (33%)	2 (33%)		
88757	Workshop - participant - C. Logistic Ratings	4	Flight	5	-	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	
		5	Catering	5	-	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	
		6	Was the communication leading up to the event satisfactory?	13	-	11 (85%)	-	2 (15%)	
		7	Was the pre-event test useful?	11	-	9 (82%)	-	2 (18%)	
		8	Did you find the virtual event platform easily accessible?	14	-	14 (100%)	-	-	
		9	Was the platform user-friendly?	15	-	15 (100%)	-	-	
		10	Did the host provide adequate instructions during the event, on the use of the platform and in problem solving?	15	-	15 (100%)	-	-	
		11	Was the IT support provided adequate?	14	-	14 (100%)	-	-	
		Workshop - participant - D. Comments	-	Hope to meet you all in an offline conference some day. Best regards The topic for the WB countries is rather futuristic. The topic is relevant, but stages where we are not are too far from the practices we could learn from the presenters.	-	-	-	-	-
		Workshop - speaker - A. Questions	1	Did you receive all the information necessary for the preparation of your contribution?	6	-	6 (100%)	-	-
			2	Has the overall aim of the workshop been achieved?	6	-	5 (83%)	-	1 (17%)
3	Was the agenda well structured?		6	-	5 (83%)	-	1 (17%)		
4	Were the participants present throughout the scheduled workshop?		6	-	4 (67%)	1 (17%)	1 (17%)		
5	Was the beneficiary represented by the appropriate participants?		6	-	5 (83%)	-	1 (17%)		
6	Did the participants actively take part in the discussions?		6	-	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	4 (67%)		
7	Do you expect that the beneficiary will undertake follow-up based on the results of the workshop (new legislation, new administrative approach etc.)?		6	-	3 (50%)	-	-		
8	Do you think that the beneficiary needs further TAIEX - %pr_c_abbreviation% assistance (workshop, expert mission, study visit, assessment mission) on the topic of this workshop?		6	-	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	-		
9	Would you be ready to participate in future TAIEX - %pr_c_abbreviation% workshops?		6	-	6 (100%)	-	-		
Workshop - speaker - C. Logistic Ratings	1	Conference venue	2	-	2 (100%)	-	-		
	6	Was the communication leading up to the event satisfactory?	5	-	5 (100%)	-	-		
	7	Was the pre-event test useful?	3	-	3 (100%)	-	-		
	8	Did you find the virtual event platform easily accessible?	5	-	5 (100%)	-	-		
	9	Was the platform user-friendly?	5	-	4 (80%)	-	1 (20%)		
	10	Did the host provide adequate instructions during the event, on the use of the platform and in problem solving?	5	-	5 (100%)	-	-		
Workshop - speaker - D. Comments	-	The aim of the workshop was not very clear and the follow up activities of EPPA project were not listed. The participants were not active and most of the discussion was conducted by the host and the speakers. The participants should be given very clear information about the aim of the workshop and what is their task during workshop and also after the workshop.	-	-	-	-	-		

## Endnotes

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

## Annexes

Annex 1: Agenda (provided as a separate document)

Annex 2: List of Participants (provided as a separate document)

Annex 3: Presentations (provided as a separate document)





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