

## COMBINING ECONOMY AND NATURE: MEETING THE CHALLENGE



ANNE BLIEK-DE JONG

As chairwoman of the Green Infrastructure Network (GreenInfraNet) Monitoring Board, it is my pleasure to present the first

issue of *GreenSpace*, the project newsletter. I am convinced that the GreenInfraNet project is concerned with a very relevant and important topic. Local and regional authorities across the European Union are dealing with two seemingly conflicting interests: the recovery of economic growth and the conservation of nature for future generations. Our challenge is to combine the interests of both the economy and the natural world. This can be achieved through the concept of green infrastructure, which will be described in detail in this newsletter. Through the GreenInfraNet project we will be gathering and exchanging expertise, experience and best practices among the 12 participating partners.

I had the opportunity to meet with the enthusiastic project team in May this year at the kick-off meeting in Lelystad, the Netherlands. I am very much looking forward to working with the project partners and stakeholder networks in the coming years.

I welcome any ideas or comments you might have about the project!

**Anne Bliek-de Jong**, Deputy Queen's Commissioner, Province of Flevoland (The Netherlands)  
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## What is green infrastructure?

The most important challenge for biodiversity conservation in most of Europe is to reconcile nature with other types of land use. The Natura 2000 initiative has established a representative system of protected areas in the EU27 that conserves the most valuable species and habitats. However, many challenges remain:

- Much of the biodiversity outside Natura 2000 sites is subject to less strict or no formal protection.
- Conserving biodiversity in the long term requires the maintenance of ecosystem functions over wide areas.
- Climate change will lead to shifts in species populations, but the locations of existing protected areas are fixed.

The green infrastructure concept meets these challenges by strengthening the coherence and resilience of ecosystems, which also contributes to climate change adaptation and reduces vulnerability to natural disasters. It promotes a sustainable economy by maintaining ecosystem services and mitigating the adverse effects of transport and energy infrastructure and economic development in general.

Biodiversity conservation has traditionally been pursued through nature conservation measures that have generally been formulated in isolation from broader land use and economic development policies. Green infrastructure recognises the limitations to this approach by placing biodiversity conservation in a broader policy framework, whereby primary nature objectives are achieved in closer harmony with other land use priorities such as agriculture, forestry, recreation and climate change adaptation.

As a component of EU policy, green infrastructure was introduced in the 2009 European Commission White Paper on Adapting to Climate Change (COM[2009] 147 Final). According to the EC, green infrastructure is "essential to mitigate fragmentation and unsustainable land use both within and outside Natura 2000 areas and to address the need for and multiple benefits of maintaining and restoring ecosystem services" (Background Paper, Green Infrastructure Implementation Conference, November 19, 2010). The EC is now developing a green infrastructure strategy, which is due to be published in 2012.

**Ingrid Henzen**, GreenInfraNet Project Manager, Flevoland Province Council  
**Graham Bennett**, External Advisor to the Project



ON REFLECTION Future conservation goals need to be set in the context of economic growth and sustainable spatial planning



## Who are the partners?

The Green Infrastructure Network is a partnership of 12 regions across Europe. The partners are working together to strengthen the development and implementation of green infrastructure through the exchange of experience and by identifying, analysing and transferring good practice in relation to the implementation of green infrastructure policies. These activities will result in the production of the Green Infrastructure Action Toolkit for wider dissemination and the establishment of the European Green Infrastructure Knowledge Network. The three-year project was launched in April 2012 and is co-funded by the INTERREG IVC Programme.

### FINGAL COUNTY COUNCIL (IRELAND)

Fingal is a leader in Ireland in implementing green infrastructure policy at local level and has recently integrated the approach into its land-use development plan. The council recognises that creating connected and multifunctional green infrastructure yields economic and social as well as environmental benefits. It also recognises that green infrastructure is a vital component in building resilient communities able to adapt to the consequences of climate change.

### FLEVOLAND PROVINCE COUNCIL (NETHERLANDS) (LEAD PARTNER)

Flevoland Province has great ambitions for green energy, with wind energy playing an important role. Flevoland already boasts many wind turbines, and plans for further wind farms are being developed. With its many rapidly growing cities, Flevoland's involvement in the GreenInfraNet project is based on its recognition of the need for integrated planning and spatial development in order to strengthen the economy and protect ecosystems.

### EMILIA-ROMAGNA REGION (ITALY)

Although it has a high level of urbanisation, the Emilia-Romagna Region has an important natural heritage, including conservation areas and Natura 2000 sites, and is one of the richest Italian regions in terms of habitats and species, including coastal, wetland and Apennine habitats. The region manages this precious natural heritage by trying to combine conservation with the sustainable development of the human population.

### MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT (LATVIA)

The ministry is responsible for the development and implementation of policy in relation to environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and regional development. The ministry hopes that its experience in developing a concept for the integration of biodiversity conservation into local development planning will be of interest to the other project partners.

### REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (HUNGARY)

The Regional Environmental Center (REC), which has a network of offices throughout the region, brings to the project its 20 years of experience in addressing environmental issues and transferring knowledge and experience. The REC fulfils its mission through work in the fields of biodiversity conservation, climate change and clean energy, environmental management and green transport, all of which are linked to green infrastructure.

### STARA ZAGORA REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (BULGARIA)

The agency has over 15 years' experience in creating and implementing urban development plans in partnership with municipalities and regional authorities. Its expertise is based on participation in various campaigns dedicated to climate change adaptation, food security and the Natura 2000 network, implemented at regional level to promote innovative methods of nature and biodiversity conservation.

### NICOSIA DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (CYPRUS)

The main goal of the agency is to support the municipalities of Nicosia in the exchange of experience with organisations in other EU member states; the transfer of good practice; and the implementation of development activities. Its contribution to the project will draw on its experience in regional landscape planning and the implementation of environmental policy at regional level for the management and preservation of natural resources, geological heritage and protected areas.

### AZORES REGIONAL GOVERNMENT (PORTUGAL)

In the Azores Archipelago, the green infrastructure concept was taken into consideration in the creation of nine natural island parks, one per island. These parks protect areas within the Natura 2000 network as well as others identified as important to guarantee biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services. The Regional Secretariat for the Environment and Sea brings to the project experience in the management of coastal areas, water resources and other natural areas for the conservation of endemic fauna and flora.

### VALENCIA REGIONAL GOVERNMENT (SPAIN)

As part of the Regional Ministry for Infrastructure, Territory and Environment, the Centre of Applied Forest Research (CIEF) deals with territorial management and public policy implementation related to forest management and the conservation of native plant genetic resources. Working closely with the departments for territorial and landscape planning, water management, biodiversity and protected areas management, the CIEF, representing the regional government in the project, is ideally placed to promote green infrastructure approaches.

### BARCELONA PROVINCE COUNCIL (SPAIN)

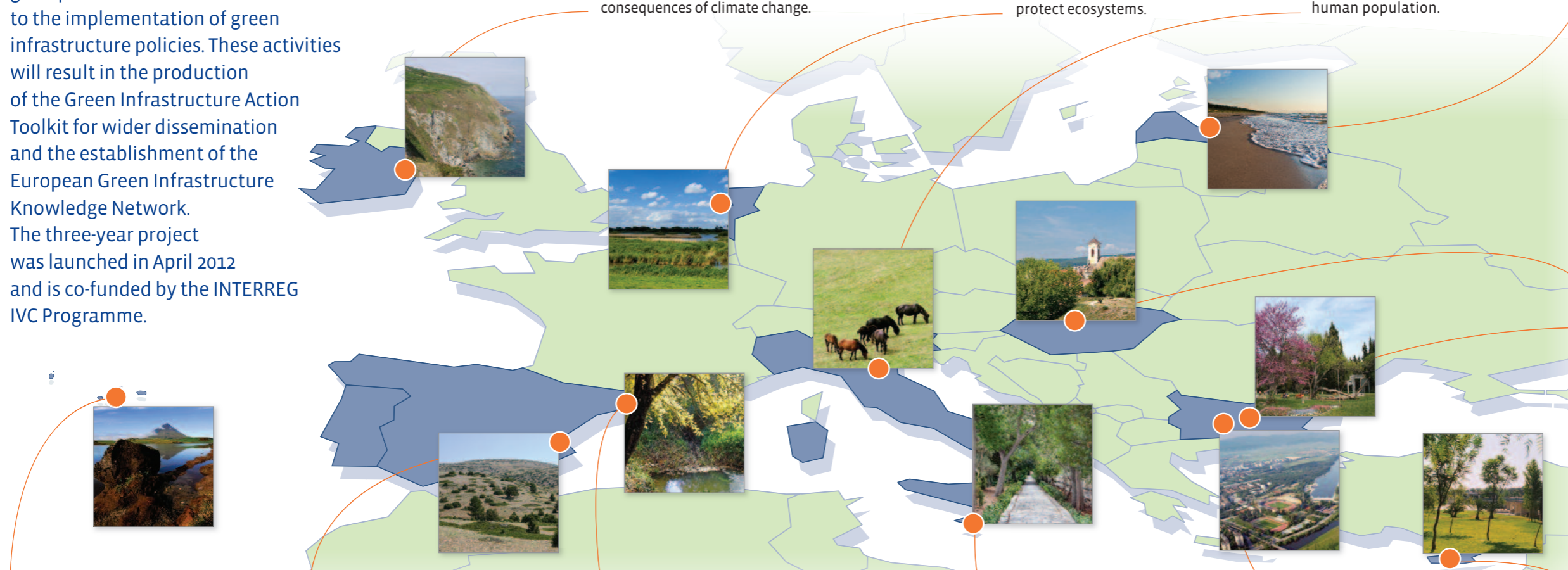
In the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona, conflicts have emerged among various land-use interests. Coordination in the public administration can be improved and policies strengthened to ensure sustainable land planning. The council is implementing the SITXELL project, a territorial information system, to analyse open areas and their values. The system uses the green infrastructure approach and has already been used by over 70 municipalities and several departments in the Catalonia Region. The council thus brings valuable lessons learned to share with the Green Infrastructure Network.

### GHAJNSIELEM MUNICIPALITY (MALTA)

The municipality of Ghajnsielem lies on the south-eastern coast of the Island of Gozo, Malta, and includes the whole of the minor island of Comino. The local government is already implementing "ECO GOZO", a policy and strategy formulated by the Ministry for Gozo aimed at transforming Gozo into a sustainable society. The municipality's participation in the GreenInfraNet project will contribute to its work of maintaining, restoring and redeveloping its public parks, gardens and green spaces.

### PLOVDIV REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (BULGARIA)

Members of this non-profit organisation include the municipalities of Plovdiv, Plovdiv Industrial Association, Plovdiv Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the University of Food Technologies. In line with the GreenInfraNet objectives, its focus is on regional development and the strengthening of civil society, science and technology; and sustainable development via the improvement of regional infrastructure.





# GreenInfraNet kick-off



POINTING THE WAY: The GreenInfraNet project launch event in Flevoland, the Netherlands, offered a chance for partners to plan the way forward to a new European nature policy.

The GreenInfraNet project was launched in Lelystad, the Netherlands, on May 25, 2012. “Its main purpose is to strengthen the development and implementation of green infrastructure in EU regions, as a new approach to conserve nature for future generations,” stated Deputy Queen’s Commissioner Anne Bliëk-de Jong, from the Province of Flevoland. The aim of this new approach is to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services across the wider countryside, in the framework of close cooperation with other policy measures in the fields of agriculture, urban development, transport, recreation and climate change adaptation.

The partner regions will work together to develop the Green Infrastructure Action Toolkit, which can be used for the wider dissemination of project results across Europe. Each partner will develop an implementation plan for the development and/or implementation of green infrastructure and will organise workshops, study visits and dissemination events. All these activities will be part of the action toolkit.

The exchange and dissemination of expertise, experience and best practices among the partners will be at the heart of the project: “How to make regions learn from each other is the key challenge. All regions have different experiences with the development and/or implementation of green infrastructure. Some regions are in the phase of exploring the needs for green infrastructure, others are making plans to develop the concept and some regions are looking for expertise and experience to get from the development of green infrastructure to its implementation. By learning from one another, we can work on a new nature policy across Europe”, explained Anne Bliëk-de Jong, who chairs the GreenInfraNet Monitoring Board.

“The most important element of this project is to learn from the other partners. But it is also very important that we show other European regions that green infrastructure is an effective way of managing natural resources. After the project period, there will be a permanent European Green Infrastructure Knowledge Network and this network needs to ensure the involvement of other countries. If we succeed in this, then the project will have an impact on all 27 EU countries and on many regions in Europe”, stressed Graham Bennett, project external expert.

**Ingrid Henzen**, GreenInfraNet Project Manager, Flevoland Province Council

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## FIRST EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE WORKSHOP FINGAL, IRELAND

The first exchange of experience workshop took place in Fingal, Ireland, on July 12–13, 2012. The event focused on development strategies and process management practices related to green infrastructure in the partner regions. It also explored methodologies and policy strategies that can be effective in securing the development of green infrastructure; which entails an understanding of the long-term process through which green infrastructure is put in place and effectively managed. Outcomes and results of the workshop will feed into the final project output, the Green Infrastructure Action Toolkit.

TAKING THE LONG VIEW: The focus in Fingal was on strategy and policy development.



**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT [www.greeninfranet.org](http://www.greeninfranet.org)**

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With the aim of establishing the European Green Infrastructure Knowledge Network, we are keen to find out about similar initiatives, individual regions with good practice in the field, as well as companies and/or organisations carrying out research on the topic. If you have experience to share, please get in touch!