

Partner exchanges:
Best practices are being identified and shared among regions

Combined objectives: Flevoland achieves ecological goals via green infrastructure approach

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COMPLEMENTARY EFFORTS: Knowledge network will collaborate with EC platform

THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

One of the key objectives of the GreenInfraNet project is to establish a permanent facility to promote the sharing of information, expertise, experience and best practices in order to propagate the development and implementation of green infrastructure in regions across Europe. During a workshop in Cyprus, the project partners discussed the focus and organisation of the European Green Infrastructure Knowledge Network. One very important element of the network is that it will complement the work of the forthcoming European Commission green infrastructure platform, a digital network for exchanging and disseminating information. The partners therefore proposed that the network should focus on collecting, organising and disseminating information on practical experiences of green infrastructure in Europe, including examples, lessons learnt and best practices. Two project representatives will further discuss collaboration between the platform and the network at a meeting with the European Commission.

Ingrid Henzen, GreenInfraNet Project Manager, Province of Flevoland

Cohesion Policy benefits for green infrastructure

The Cohesion Policy already actively helps regions to preserve, and to ensure the sustainable management of, their natural assets. Throughout the EU the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund have co-financed projects in Natura 2000 areas, the restoration of wetlands and floodplains, the development of green corridors, and information systems for biodiversity monitoring.

Similar investments will be carried out between 2014 and 2020. Indeed, investments in nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure are relevant for Cohesion Policy. The support of the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund to nature and green infrastructure can actually contribute to several policy objectives and deliver multiple benefits, in particular socioeconomic development. Adaptation to climate change, the prevention of natural disasters such as floods, the preservation of water quality and quantity, and jobs in the tourism or agro-food sectors are intimately linked. It is about ensuring that this integrated approach is followed when working on investments in nature and green infrastructure.

Regional policy will be vital for mobilising the potential of EU regions and cities to decouple growth from resource over-use, in particular through the preservation and sustainable management of natural assets. The *Guide to Multi-Benefit Cohesion Policy Investments in Nature and Green Infrastructure*, recently published by DG REGIO, exposes the multiple benefits of investments in green infrastructure and nature for the regional economy. The guide aims at enabling national and regional stakeholders to improve the quality of their programmes and projects. This guide is not an academic publication but a practical document with clear and concrete recommendations and several examples of good practice that show potential ways forward in order to realise the full potential of Cohesion Policy investments in nature. The guide is available on the DG REGIO website.

Mathieu Fichter, European Commission, DG Regional and Urban Policy

SOUND INVESTMENTS: EU funds for nature management have multiple benefits for society





RESTORATIVE POWER: Outdoor activity and art combined with landscape conservation

EMILIA-ROMAGNA TO GHAJNSIELEM

In September 2013, Emilia-Romagna Region organised a study visit for partners wishing to test and import the Conca project methodology. This pilot landscape conservation and enhancement scheme has produced concrete and durable outputs.

Partners hiked along the restored pathways and learnt about the creation and maintenance of the track network. They also joined in the arts and nature festival *A Passo d’Uomo*, one of the project outcomes.

Partners from Bulgaria and Malta (the latter committed to transferring aspects of the Conca methodology to Ghajnsielem Municipality) explored features of the project’s success:

- fundraising for the concrete implementation of activities and pilot projects;
- technical issues related to trail signage and maintenance; and
- involving citizens and associations during project implementation and festival organisation, and in track maintenance after the end of the project.

Aspects of the Conca methodology can be transferred to other contexts, despite environmental, social and economic differences. Meeting professionals involved in project development gave partners a wider perspective and insights. The goal of the visit was to lead and inspire partners in their planning choices.

Laura Punzo, Emilia-Romagna

Best practice transfers: Work in progress!

The transfer of best practices (Component 3) is at the very heart of GreenInfraNet. Exchanges of experience enable partners to identify, analyse and transfer good practices between regions.

Partners began working on the exchange of experiences in Fingal (Ireland) and Szentendre (Hungary), as the project objective is to achieve the transfer of three best practices and to result in six policy improvements. Partners started working on specific good practices in Barcelona (Spain), where a “best practice market” took place; and in Plovdiv (Bulgaria), where the resulting good practice proposals were further defined. Two further meetings, in Gozo (Malta) and Nicosia (Cyprus), enabled partners to identify the concrete process for best practice transfers.

As a result of this three-stage selection process, five good practices have now been selected from the 15 initially proposed, and very active transfer processes are now under way. The five practices address a wide range of issues, from geographic information system (GIS) tools to the inclusion of green infrastructure elements in plan development, and landscape planning and participatory processes.

To facilitate dialogue among partners, including the technical and administrative staff dealing with specific practice-related issues, five study visits involving eight of the 11 partners took place in 2013. Three more study visits are planned for 2014. As the last stage in the transfer process, 2014 will be devoted to the development of implementation plans in order to ensure the sustainability of project results.

Gloria Ortiz, Coordinator of Component 3, VAERSA/Centre for Forest Applied Research (CIEF), Regional Ministry for Territory, Infrastructure and Environment, Valencia, Spain

STARA ZAGORA TO NICOSIA

On September 18–19, 2013, a study visit took place in Stara Zagora focusing on green infrastructure planning in urban areas. The exporting partner was Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency (SZREDA) and the importer was Nicosia Development Agency (ANEL).

The goal was to explore Stara Zagora’s local government practice and experience in green infrastructure and the possibilities for transferring this best practice, or part of it, to ANEL.

The visit began with a workshop at the town hall with the head of the Sustainable Development Department, who is responsible for planning processes and documents. He presented the methodology and gave a detailed description of both the Municipal

Development Plan 2014–2020 and the Integrated Plan for Urban Recovery and Development 2014–2020. This was followed by a visit to Ayazmoto Park, a popular recreation spot among citizens of Stara Zagora. The second day focused on stakeholder involvement in the planning process. The visit ended with a tour of Stara Zagora’s “green circle” (urban parks within the city limits) to demonstrate measures and projects for park renovation and development.

As a next step, ANEL will explore the potential of this practice among its member municipalities. A second visit is planned, this time to Nicosia, in the middle of 2014 to monitor the transfer of the best practice.

Konstantin Stoyanov, SZREDA



◀ **STRATEGIC ASSETS:** Investments in Fingal's tourist attractions have a strong focus on green infrastructure

FINGAL TO STARA ZAGORA AND BARCELONA

As part of the development of a best practice transfer, Fingal County Council hosted a two-day study visit by GreenInfraNet partners from Stara Zagora and Barcelona in July 2013. Participants explored Fingal's experience and methodology for integrating green infrastructure into spatial plans, known as local area plans.

Day 1, chaired by Tom Kelleher of Fingal County Council, included presentations by the Fingal, Barcelona and Stara Zagora teams on spatial planning systems in the three regions. Participants gained an understanding of the different planning systems and the challenges facing the three regions. A presentation on green infrastructure in Fingal described how the concept was included in the County Development Plan, which sets the county's land-use planning framework. As the current County Development Plan has a strong focus on green infrastructure, all local area plans must include comprehensive green infrastructure proposals. The first day ended with an examination of the local area plan for the village of Rolestown, which was developed using the green infrastructure concept to ensure an integrated approach to landscape, biodiversity, open spaces and recreation, cultural heritage and water management. Early consultation with the local community underpinned the development of the plan, leading to strong local support. The group visited Rolestown to see the challenges and discuss the plan.

Day 2 began at Malahide Castle and Gardens, a strategic green infrastructure asset for Fingal. Recent investments by the council and the Irish Tourist Board have re-energised this major tourist attraction, important civic amenity and public park. Participants examined two local area plans for adjacent areas in nearby Baldoyle and Portmarnock. The challenge was to provide for significant residential development at the northern edge of Dublin while protecting adjacent Natura 2000 sites and providing a high-quality environment for future residents. An understanding of the local environment provided the foundation on which the green infrastructure framework was developed for both plans. This addressed the five themes set out in the County Development Plan: landscape, biodiversity, open space and recreation, water management and cultural heritage. Participants visited Portmarnock and Baldoyle to discuss issues raised earlier in the day.

Fingal County Council indicated its willingness to assist Stara Zagora and Barcelona in implementing its approaches to integrating green infrastructure into local spatial plans. A study visit to Stara Zagora will take place in 2014.

Gerry Clabby, Fingal County Council

BARCELONA TO HUNGARY

A good practice related to spatial planning methodologies for the protection of natural values will be transferred from Barcelona to Central Hungary. The transfer will be based on the SITxell model, developed in the Province of Barcelona, which is a GIS scheme for assessing natural and socioeconomic land value as a basis for green infrastructure policies. The goal of the transfer is to encourage decision makers and experts to rethink the planning of objectives, responsibilities and main functions in open areas in the framework of an integrated land-use assessment. It introduces a new approach to harmonising the needs of natural areas and spatial planning and developing recommendations for decision makers on how areas can retain their existing function (e.g. agricultural production) while ensuring social and environmental sustainability.

Two workshops were held in 2013 in relation to the best practice transfer. SITxell methodologies used for mapping and assessing environmental and land-use characteristics were presented, along with national GIS-based tools to support decision making in spatial planning.

The best practice transfer began in January 2014 with an analysis of relevant datasets and the selection of pilot areas in Central Hungary. Indicators will be developed to show the vulnerability of the selected areas. Pilot study outcomes will be presented later this year.

Reka Prokaj, REC



◀ **HARMONISING NEEDS:** Assessments of land use are a valuable basis for decision making



◀ A VISION REALISED: Unusable space becomes living green infrastructure

PARTNERSHIP MEETS IN CYPRUS

On October 23–24, 2013, Nicosia Development Agency (ANEL) organised a meeting of the GreenInfraNet partnership in Cyprus. The packed agenda included the fourth Steering Committee meeting, a study visit, the second best practice transfer workshop, a press conference and a workshop about the establishment of the Green Infrastructure Knowledge Network.

The study visit was to Nicosia's National Forest Park of Athalassa, which features several protected species of flora and fauna. This natural green space adjoins four ANEL member municipalities.

Athalassa National Forest Park covers 840 hectares and includes lakes, a botanical garden, nature trails and an environmental awareness centre managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources. The lakes attract many animals, birds, insects and amphibians. The park has a very diverse flora, the dominant species being *Convolvulus*, *Helianthemum*, thyme, *Ziziphus lotus* and *mosphilla*. The park's fauna include 173 species of birds, seven species of mammals, six species of reptiles, one amphibian species and several butterflies. The lakes are home to many aquatic birds, mainly migratory, including egrets and kingfishers. An observation hideout has been built, and last spring breeding pairs of Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*), a species of global conservation concern, were observed.

Bicycle and walking paths have been created throughout the park allowing visitors to enjoy the area without disturbing the habitats. The park is a good example of how to combine green infrastructure and urban development, preserving biodiversity and the use of a natural space by citizens.

Eleftherios Loizou, Managing Director, Nicosia Development Agency (ANEL)

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!

Vital coalitions in Dorhout Mees

In Flevoland, the green infrastructure concept has been realised by connecting two core areas of the province's Ecological Main Structure (EMS). Half of the new green and blue corridor currently comprises wet woodland crossed by a brook. The other half is a golf course, relatively rich in habitats such as ponds and shrubs. The role of the Province of Flevoland was essential in achieving this result.

The project area previously comprised five parcels of arable land, although water seepage under the dikes meant that farming conditions were not optimal. The province's policy in 2006 was to transform these five parcels into natural areas (wetlands and meadows). However, the province had no budget to acquire the land. In 2007, two of the parcels were owned by the State Forestry Department that manages the adjacent core areas of the EMS. The other three parcels had been purchased by the owner of the nearby golf course, Dorhout Mees, in the interests of expansion. Because the parcels were oriented at right angles to the dike (above left), neither of the parties could achieve their objectives.

In 2008, the province mediated between the two parties. It organised meetings and conferences and financed essential studies and legal advice. The five parcels were rearranged into two parcels and the orientation rotated (above right). The part closest to the dike was transferred to the State Forestry Department, the inner part to Dorhout Mees. The owner of the golf course agreed that the new part of the course should be designed and managed to optimise its ecological functions. A total of 85 percent of the golf course is nature, not lawn.

In 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, dozens of regional volunteers assisted in an assessment of natural values in this new green infrastructure area, organised by the province. Among the species recorded in both the new wet woodland and the extended golf course were several species from the IUCN Red Lists of birds, mammals and insects: Montagu's harriers, bitterns, great white egrets, little grebes, beavers, buntings and rare dragonflies. The volunteers included people with doubts about the whole process. Sharing reports and meals during the Day of Biodiversity helped in gaining acceptance for the golf course as an area complying with the province's nature policy. The region has achieved a step forward by thinking in terms of strict ecological objectives in combination with wider objectives — that is, via green infrastructure.

Andre van den Berg, Senior Policy Maker, Province of Flevoland

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