

IDENTIFYING AFFINITIES



DANIEL ARIZPE

When people first meet, they generally introduce themselves by sharing information about their occupation and interests. Once the ice is broken, new acquaintances are ready to move forward

and form a closer relationship. The GreenInfraNet project has followed these same general rules. During the first two meetings, partners presented their new friends with a broad overview of green infrastructure in their region, after which the partnership was ready to move on to a new level.

The goal of the Barcelona meeting was to identify affinities among partners that can be used to nurture a successful transfer of best practices.

The coordinating team proposed a “best practice market” in which partners can offer or demand expertise on any topic related to the GI concept.

To establish such a market, the GreenInfraNet project called on Karin Maatje, coordinator of the IVC project MiniEurope, to design and moderate the workshop. Partners were asked to write down their best practice offers and demands; importers’ and exporters’ proposals were then attached to two separate wall charts and positioned on a matrix according to their thematic field. Finally, all participants tried to match pairs of corresponding best practices from the two groups.

By the end of the workshop, 18 best practice pairs had been identified, after which their suitability for transfer can be further analysed. The best practice market was just the starting point of a sound and lasting relationship!

Daniel Arizpe, VAERSA / Centre for Forest Applied Research (CIEF), Regional Ministry for Territory, Infrastructure and Environment, Valencia, Spain



REACHING OUT: The development of common solutions to environmental problems and challenges is the best hope for achieving mutual benefits.

Best practice transfer: Always win-win

Although diversity contributes to the richness of the EU, we are far more alike than we think. Despite our cultural, political and linguistic differences, we all share a common set of values, a common past and a common territory. In fact, the territory of the EU is a very good example of what links us, since nature does not respect political or administrative boundaries and green areas cannot be considered as isolated pixels in the European landscape.

We also share common problems and challenges. Why should we face these challenges alone when we can achieve more by working together? Why try to reinvent the wheel if each of us can contribute to a more integrated solution by working together? In short, if we are all connected, why not cooperate and learn from one another?

Territorial cooperation programmes and projects such as GreenInfraNet have been established to address common problems and identify common solutions. The transfer of best practices among partners is at the very heart of GreenInfraNet, and one of its main goals. In order to exchange best practices, partners meet and talk, exchange information and experiences, and try to match needs and opportunities. Good ideas are identified and the potential for transferability assessed in order to see whether specific best practices can be adapted to different conditions in different regions and can deliver tangible and measurable results. While this is the measure of success, best practice transfer should be seen as an exchange rather than a one-way process. The positive benefits for “importing” partners are clear, but “exporters” also benefit. By applying their expertise and practice to unfamiliar situations, they are able to discover new and unexpected possibilities. Thus best practice transfer is worthwhile in every case, because it always involves a win-win outcome for all the partners involved.

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



Gozo Island hosts eventful best practices workshop

GHAJNSIELEM, APRIL 2013

A little less than a year after its kick-off meeting, the GreenInfraNet project held a first workshop about the transfer of best practices in the municipality of Ghajnsielem in Gozo, Malta. The event, which took place on April 24-25, 2013, was organised back-to-back with a Steering Committee meeting and a meeting of the Monitoring Board. On the occasion, the new chair of the Monitoring Board, Mr Bert Gijsberts, Deputy King's Commissioner in the Province of Flevoland (the Netherlands) was also introduced to the partners. The workshop itself focused on the previously identified pool of best practices and policies, and during group discussions partners selected the ones where they will contribute to the transfer process in the next two years.

On the morning of April 25, a dissemination event was organised for Maltese stakeholders, chaired by Mr Francis Cauchi, mayor of Ghajnsielem. Following presentations of projects related to green infrastructure in Malta and GreenInfraNet project partner Emilia-Romagna region (IT), participants held a fruitful debate on the future of green infrastructure development in the Maltese Islands.

A study visit for project partners was organised to Dwejra, a Natura 2000 site on the island of Gozo with exceptional geological features such as the Fungus Rock and the Azure Window. The site provides a habitat for several endemic species above and below sea level. During the visit partners learned about the rich history of the site and recent efforts to harmonise the interests of biodiversity, landscape conservation and tourism development.

Zsuzsanna Keri, Regional Environmental Center

█ TAKING IN THE VIEW: Project partners had the opportunity to visit the Azure Window, a remarkable natural rock formation on the Maltese island of Gozo.



IT'S ALL ABOUT COMMITMENT AND COOPERATION

Bert Gijsberts, the Monitoring Board's new chair, is impressed by the involvement of the project partners and the activities they have carried out thus far. He also knows that there is still plenty of work that needs to be done.



█ BERT GIJSBERTS

“The transfer of best practices and the improvement of policies are at the heart of the project. All partners have different experience with the development and realisation of green infrastructure policies within their region, and they are keen to share their experience with each other.

During the first year of the project, the partners worked together to exchange this experience, which is an essential step to take, but now it's time to work on the transfer of best practices and the improvement of policies. Partners will need to involve the relevant stakeholders and politicians in their region. Their commitment is essential for a successful best practice transfer or policy improvement.

In Europe, there are many organisations and many regions that work on nature and biodiversity conservation, so we must try to avoid doing work that overlaps unnecessarily with that of others. If you cooperate with other organisations and other regions, you can learn from each other, strengthen each other and reach a bigger audience. Only then can you make a real difference and improve green infrastructure in Europe.”

Bert Gijsberts, Deputy King's Commissioner, Province of Flevoland (the Netherlands)
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Habitat management in challenging conditions

BARCELONA, DECEMBER 2012

During the project's first exchange of best practices workshop, held in Barcelona in December 2012, partners participated in a study visit to the Garraf Natural Park, located 30 km south-west of Barcelona. The Garraf Massif is a calcareous mountain range that reaches to the Mediterranean coast. It is largely covered with shrubs and forests of Aleppo pine that grow on very poor soil and under severe water stress conditions in summer.

In recent decades this massif has been severely affected by extensive wildfires, and many ecosystems are currently recovering from disturbance. Areas of shrubs and young pine forests have a very dense structure due to the dynamics of natural succession, leaving them highly vulnerable to new wildfires and making poor-quality habitats for flora and fauna.

A broad habitat management project has therefore been initiated, the main goals of which are to accelerate natural regeneration through forest management; reduce stand density and increase stability; create a landscape mosaic by restoring open areas (grasslands, crops); restore specific habitats for fauna (water points, refuges); and restore farming



GOATS ARE BACK: One of the habitat management objectives for Garraf Natural Park is to recover grazing areas for goat flocks.

infrastructure (water points, shelters) for the introduction of goat flocks.

In the course of the four-year project, which comes to an end in 2013, over 3,000 ha of public land have been managed. A flock of 70 goats has been introduced, which graze in open and forested areas, increasing habitat diversity and reducing the risk of fire. This huge project was made possible by private financing from a bank foundation (Fundació la Caixa), which has collaborated over the past nine years with the network of parks in the Province of Barcelona.

[Carles Castell Puig](#), Barcelona Province Council

Park and palace delight workshop participants

PLOVDIV, FEBRUARY 2013

On February 26–27, 2013, Plovdiv Regional Development Agency organised the project's second exchange of best practices workshop in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

On the second day of the workshop, participants enjoyed a study trip to the nearby town of Kritchim, where they visited the palace and park of the former king of Bulgaria.

The park covers an area of 200 hectares, 170 hectares of which were declared a protected area in 2001 by the Ministry of the

OUT FOR A STROLL: Plovdiv participants tour Kritchim's expansive park and palace grounds during the second day of the workshop.



Environment. Over 140 hectares are covered in dense forest, and 30 hectares form an ornamental park. The park and the palace, which dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, are now managed by the Ministry of Finance.

The ornamental park is home to over 300 species of trees from around the world, including several rare species, a 600-year-old oak tree and some 200-year-old silver poplars. In addition to morello cherry, cherry laurel, deciduous sequoias, bamboo, lilacs, crepe myrtles and evergreen magnolias, the park is used for the cultivation of peaches, cherries and apples. The park also features several biodiversity-rich lakes, which are covered with water lilies.

The forested area, once used as the royal hunting estate, is rich in fauna, including naturalised Mexican turkeys, pheasants, and even South American rhea. Species bred for hunting include a herd of over 200 fallow deer, as well as rock partridges, grouse, guinea fowls and other game birds. The forests are also home to moufflons, turtles, falcons, foxes and polecats.

The palace and park will be opened to visitors in 2013.

[Aleksandar Tonkov](#), Plovdiv Regional Development Agency

EMILIA-ROMAGNA REGION, ITALY CONCA PROJECT BRINGS ART TO A NATURAL SETTING

Between September 6 and 8, the 2013 *A passo d'uomo* performing arts festival will take place in the hills of the Conca Valley in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy.

A passo d'uomo means “at walking pace”, and festival audiences arrive at the performance sites using the hiking trails of the Grande Anello Verde (Green Ring). This network of trails is one of the key outcomes of the Conca Project, the goal of which was to create a landscape and environmental improvement plan for the Conca River Valley in the Province of Rimini. The four-year project involved a range of public authorities, local associations and the inhabitants of the valley.

The *A passo d'uomo* festival can be regarded as one of the elements of the landscape plan. By using the artistic performances to promote the use of the hiking trails, the festival contributes to raising environmental awareness. Festival goers walk through the natural landscapes and historical locations guided by artists whose performances are inspired by specific sites.

In 2012, over 30 artistic performances were staged in the Conca Valley, and around 2,000 visitors participated by hiking to the events. The festival's success was owed to the 27 local associations (including tourist guides, theatre companies, sculptors, architects, designers, musicians and poets) that volunteered to organise the event.

Further information is available at:

www.apassoduomo.org
www.facebook.com/apassoduomo/

Laura Punzo, Emilia-Romagna Region

OUT IN THE OPEN: Italy's Conca Valley provides a scenic backdrop for the 2013 *A passo d'uomo* festival, which will feature dozens of artistic performances.



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TAKING ROOT: Numerous tree and shrub species thrive in Ayazmoto Park.

STARA ZAGORA, BULGARIA PRESERVING AYAZMOTO PARK

Ayazmoto Park, in the city of Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, was founded in 1895 when Bishop Metodi Kushev organised the first tree-planting campaign on a bare hill in the north of the city. A magnificent park was created, featuring tree species imported from Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, Spain and Italy.

Situated on the southern slopes of the Sarnena Sredna Gora mountains, today the park covers approximately 320 hectares. As a result of regular tree planting campaigns over the years, the park area is largely forest — mostly oaks, with pines, cedars and cypresses. There are also various exotic tree and shrub species, including Aleppo pines, Aleppo oaks, bay trees, pencil trees, paradise apple trees and ginkgo bilobas.

The park is one of the most popular leisure and recreation destinations for citizens of Stara Zagora. It features a network of walking trails, as well as recreational facilities for people of all ages, including four badminton courts, tennis courts, children's playgrounds, an open-air theatre and a hall of mirrors. Visitors to the park can also enjoy a 24-hectare zoo, which is home to around 450 mammals, birds and amphibians of 80 species.

Konstantin Stoyanov, Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency (SZREDA)

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!