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IN THIS ISSUE

GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT

In 2020 the Corona virus changed our everyday lives. The whole world is affected and still trying its best to reduce the infection rates. What contribution vital and connected ecosystems and green spaces have in avoiding, dealing with and recovering from future pandemics?

Cooperation is central, but Corona has changed the way in which we cooperate and, of course, how we communicate. Face to face project meetings seem like a distant memory, where friendships were forged, problems solved, projects improved and where trust was established. It has been this trust and those friendships that have enabled the project to overcome this current, hopefully short-lived, intrusion of impersonal video-conferencing and successfully meet its objectives. That isn't to say that our current, and sadly, only option to communicate is a bad thing, far from it, indeed without such tools at our disposal the MaGICLandscapes project would not have been able to hold its final conference at all. In fact digital communication enabled the project to reach further than just a physical event. It's is simply that projects such as MaGICLandscapes and others within the Interreg Programme require a level of inter-personal communication on which to build upon. Hopefully in the not-to-distant future we can meet one another again, take the lessons we have learnt from digital communication and develop and implement projects towards a greener and more sustainable Europe. The outputs presented by the partners during the MaGICLandscapes on-line Final Conference on October 6th demonstrated that a green infrastructure approach, developed in cooperation with stakeholders, communities and policy-makers can be a part of achieving that greener and sustainable Europe.

It is interesting that just as our personal interactions with one another had reduced somewhat due to the pandemic, our interaction with the world that surrounds became more important and its value more apparent. During the lockdowns seen across Europe when people were unable to travel around freely, our local green spaces became oases, places where human interaction could be carried out safely at a distance. Those interactions weren't only those between people, they were also between people and nature. The open spaces were a theatre of birdsong, of emerging leaves and flowers, the spectacle of spring itself and thus a stark and welcome contrast to the confines of houses and flats. We walked, we ran, we sat and we enjoyed these spaces with our close families, perhaps more than we would have done under normal circumstances with the 'freedom' to spend the day at work. The outdoors was in itself a distraction from the pandemic and in some respects a cure, not to the virus itself, but perhaps to the secondary symptoms of confinement. It is certainly no great leap of faith, nor cause for in-depth academic research, to suggest that people with access to green spaces were better off physically, mentally and perhaps spiritually during those times than those with limited access. Sadly, it is also reasonable to assume that when this pandemic has passed and if the green space distribution remains the same those with limited access will continue to be worse off.

A wealth of research and evidence already exists demonstrating the clear benefits of green and open spaces to human health and the associated problems of limited access, those problems unfortunately are not just confined to health, there is evidence aplenty that societal and economic deprivation are closely associated with environmental deprivation. Meaning vulnerability can no longer be simply a measure of economic or societal standing, our surrounding environments and lack of green space makes us vulnerable too, and not only to a virus.

This current pandemic will not be the last, increasing stress on ecosystems caused by exploitation

of natural resources has been responsible for almost half of the emerging zoonoses, pathogens that 'jump' from one species to another. It is safe to assume that continuation along our current and unsustainable trajectory will likely increase the chances of further pandemics. So we have a situation where the destruction of core wilderness areas of green infrastructure is also leaving us vulnerable to further pandemics as well as indiscriminate loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

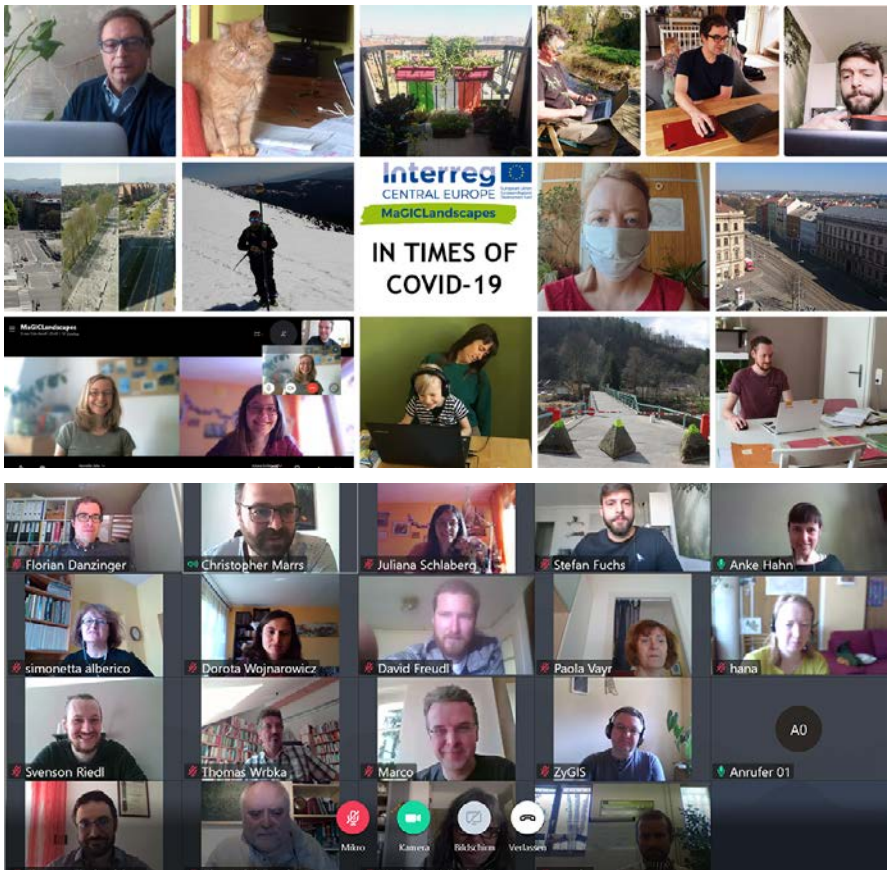
It would appear that the protection we need from future pandemics will need to be more than wearing a mask and washing hands, relying on a vaccine or having to sit at either end of a garden simply to talk to each other. We also need to reduce the opportunities for pandemics to appear and be better prepared to live with them when they do. We need to recognise that protecting and increasing our green infrastructure resources and enabling access for all will have to be an essential and undeniable part of planning for the future and increasing both our resilience as a society and that of the natural world.
During the pandemic and lockdowns there were hopeful glimpses of what could be with stories from across the world about wildlife reclaiming its rightful realm. Stories such as the return of dolphins in Venice's lagoons and Hong Kong's harbour, the return of Dugongs to Hat Chao Mai National Park in Thailand or the Kashmiri wild goats on the streets of Llandudno in North Wales. It shows that perhaps all is not lost and we do have a chance to improve upon what we still have or could have. Though it is possible the good gardeners of Llandudno may hold a slightly different point of view regarding the goats.

Seizing this chance in a post-COVID world, whenever that is, is surely the challenge we must rise to, it's no longer a question of whether we should or should not, simply a question of how. How to ensure that we commit to equitable world for people and wildlife, how to learn the lessons of the past and finally how to avoid the compounding destruction and plunder of natural resources as nations in competition with each other scramble to rebuild economies and make up for lost time…
It would be folly to over-ride the need to protect the environment for the sake of the rampant capitalism that will undoubtedly race to fill the void in economies caused by the pandemic. That our economies collapsed so easily is a clear indicator that they were far too fragile in the first place. Not only were they fragile, they were destructive both locally and globally.

It should therefore be seen with some optimism and a positive move, that here in Europe this has been recognised as unsustainable and a return to business as usual is not an option, that a reset is needed and new innovative approaches are necessary. With its Green Deal the European Union is fostering a green, digital and resilient Europe.
Pandemics will come and go, but our need for a healthy and functioning environment will remain, the ensuing threat of climate change is still with us and will be for generations. We have no choice but to ensure resilience of our environment as we are wholly dependent upon it.

The green infrastructure strategies and action plans in their case study areas developed by MaGICLandscapes partners will certainly help in some small way to achieving this. They are designed to help national, regional and community stakeholders make landscapes and townscapes more permeable and liveable and their residents healthier.
Thanks to the Interreg Central Europe Programme we kept MaGICLandscapes alive until the end of October 2020. We all did our best to bring the project to a successful conclusion with long-lasting effects on the implementation of green living environments – in urban and rural areas.

We would like to thank all the project partners, associated institutions and external actors involved in the project for their work, input, feedback and all other kinds of contributions they invested in this project making central European landscapes more liveable.



Impressions from MaGICLandscapes partners home office performances and online project meetings in April 2020

FINAL PROJECT OUTPUTS AVAILABLE ONLINE

All outputs generated in the framework of MaGICLandscapes can be downloaded from the project website.
You can access all videos, manuals and documents on the main page in the "NEWS" or "OUTPUT" sections.

The documentary films from Lenka Ovčáčková and the online training seminars in five languages you can also find on our YouTube channel.

HOW TO ENHANCE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE MAGICLANDSCAPES CASE STUDY AREAS?

In close cooperation with local stakeholders during a series of workshops the MaGICLandscapes partners developed green infrastructure strategies and action plans for their case study areas. Each strategy and accompanying action plan(s) follow local specific aims which all strive for a sustainable enhancement of green infrastructure and the benefits it provides in the regions. The main challenges, targets and actions foreseen for the next months and years are summarised on the following pages.

We talked to some of the stakeholders in the regions how they use the outputs in form of manuals and maps in their daily work.

Photo: Hana Skokanová

Kyjovsko is a region in South-Moravia in the Czech Republic. The region covers an area of 470 km2 and has about 55,000 inhabitants living in 42 municipalities. It is situated in the lowlands and is characterised by undulating terrain. Most of the region is intensively used, especially for agriculture, resulting in very large, impermeable blocks of arable fields that suffer from wind and water erosion. Due to its warm and dry climate and soils, the region is known for its vineyards, and to a lesser extent for its orchards, which are unfortunately gradually disappearing. Green infrastructure is mainly represented by large woodland complexes in the north and south, some remnants of dry grasslands and the unique but quickly disappearing mosaic of smallholdings. Approximately 20 percent of the region is covered by NATURA 2000 sites, significant landscape elements or small protected areas.

STRATEGIC AIMS TO ENHANCE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The strategic aims of the green infrastructure strategy in the area of Kyjov are the restoration of historic field roads between the villages by means of green elements. This is to make the landscape more accessible and permeable – for people and for wildlife. At the same time newly planted vegetation to reconnect the GI network along these field roads will reduce soil erosion and support water retention. Due to intensive agricultural practices the region is suffering from high soil erosion and drought.

ACTION PLANS TO MEET THE STRATEGIC AIMS

- Implementation of planned but still not existing elements of the Czech Territorial System of Ecological Stability
- Planting grassland belts (with and without trees) in erosion prone localities
- Creation of new cycle paths with accompanying green infrastructure
- Restoration of (historic) field roads
- Building and restoration of wetlands and water bodies
- Restoration of streams and rivers

The strategy and action plan will be further communicated and distributed via the Municipality of Kyjov, Department of Environment and Territorial Planning. Some outputs of the strategy will be included to the regional territorial plan in the future.

Discussion with stakeholders about identifying localities that would benefit the most GI implementation | Photos: Photo: Marek Havlíček, Pavla Pokorná

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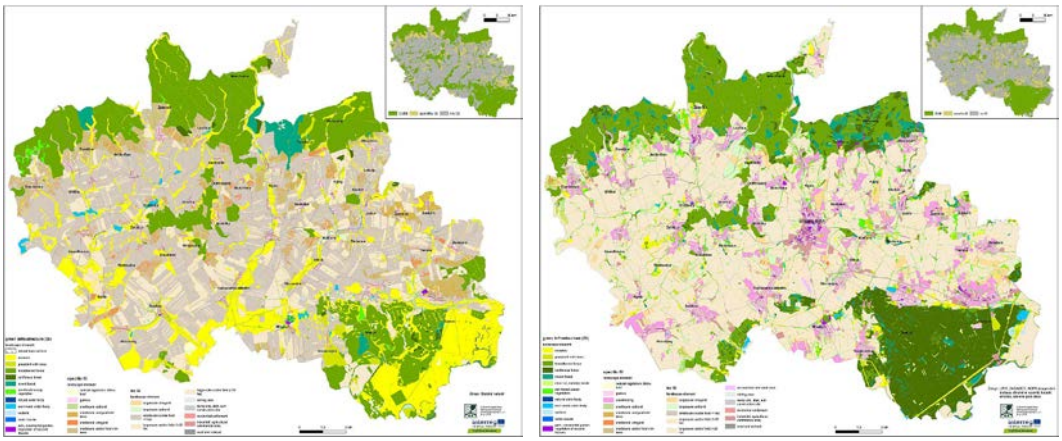


Historical (left) and current (right) green infrastructure in the Kyjovsko region

THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY FEEDS OUR SPATIAL PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Tereza Schielová, Miloslava Ševerlová and Bedřich Kubík
City of Kyjov, Czech Republic

How do or will you integrate the MaGICLandscapes Green Infrastructure Strategy & Action Plan and the other project outputs to your daily work?

TS|MŠ|BK: The project results will be used both at the level of state administration and at the level of individual municipalities in the Kyjovsko region and with the active support of the Local Action Group Kyjovské Slovácko v pohybu for conceptual work, subsidy policy and preparation of individual investment plans.

The results as a whole and in the breakdown for individual municipalities will be included as a special appendix to the Territorial Analytical Documents of the Kyjov Municipality (5th complete update of the TAD as of 31st December 2020). They will therefore be actively used as an indispensable basis for the acquisition of all spatial planning documentation as well as a comparative basis for updating and resolving discrepancies in the general plan for Territorial System of Ecological Stability (TSES) and Significant Landscape Elements. They will be the basis for flood prevention, erosion control, and landscape and development concepts as well as for routine administrative and decision-making activities dealing with environment and spatial planning.

Which topic and/or potential action recommended by the MaGICLandscapes green infrastructure strategy & action plan for your region do you think is the most important one and why?

TS|MŠ|BK: For us, the most important priority is an interdisciplinary and complementary approach to the landscape and territory to supplement, strengthen and renew missing landscape elements. Such an approach will help in increasing the permeability of the landscape, promoting the necessary breaking-up of large blocks of arable fields and refining the landscape mosaic by targeted connection to the historical development and "memory" of the landscape, while respecting the landscape in the design of its target/end goal characteristics.

What are your future visions and plans to maintain and enhance the green infrastructure network in your region?

TS|MŠ|BK: To enforce specific measures in the concept of settlement zones in the municipalities as a multifunctional basis, which creates a gradual zonal transition from built-up and developable area to its immediate surroundings in a colourful mosaic of carefully managed and used land (so called smallholdings) with subsequent radial "branches" of landscape-forming lines, ensuring the required fragmentation of the large intensively cultivated fields. We will clearly define the protection of the potential of the cultural landscape as a determining value of public interest.

Photo: Anke Hahn

Photo: Martin Neuhof

Dübener Heide Nature Park is situated on the southern edge of the North German lowlands in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt. Key elements are the river valleys of the Elbe and Mulde in the west, north and east. In the north, the Dübener Heide is characterised by post-mining landscapes, a legacy of the historic extraction of brown coal. The centre of the park is characterised by mixed woodland.

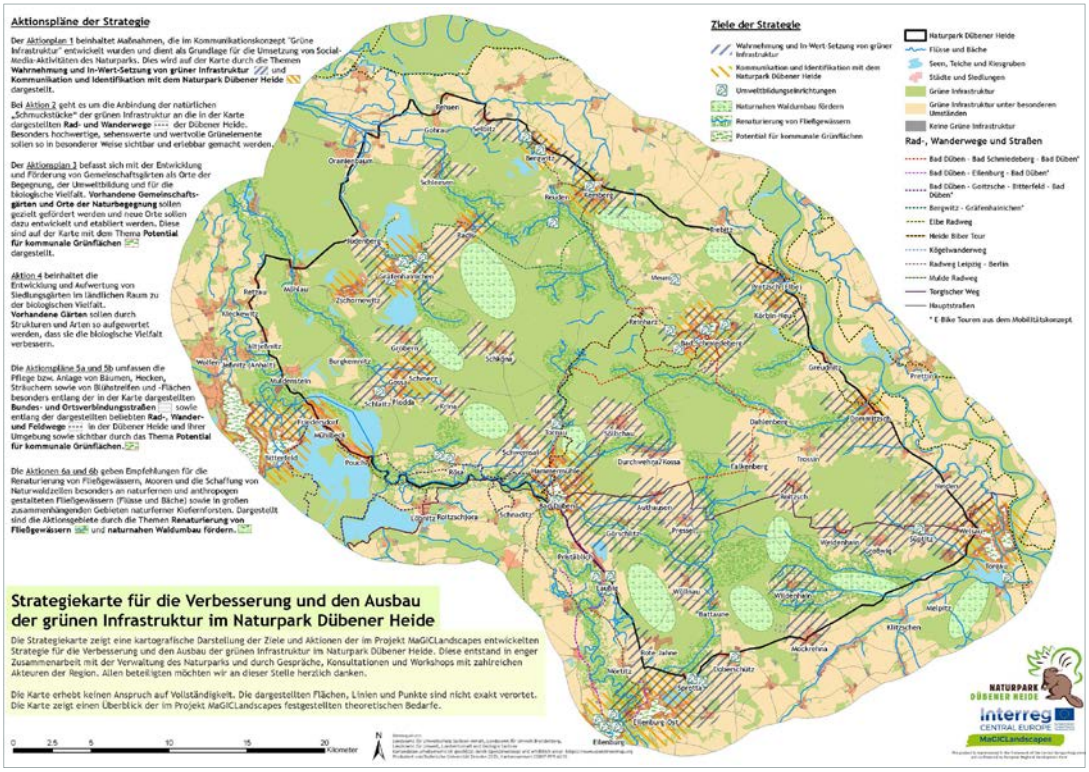
STRATEGIC AIMS TO ENHANCE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

In the Dübener Heide Nature Park the main strategic aims are to improve the perception of green infrastructure (GI) through adequate public communication measures. Residents should get aware of the benefits GI can provide for them and make more use of nature-oriented activities to get to know their green environment on feet or by bike. This way the identification and appraisal of green spaces by the people living in the Dübener Heide is increased. Green infrastructure will become a topic of future environmental education and education for sustainable development. Further strategic aims are the support of near-natural forest conversion, the restoration of water streams and to utilise the potential for green spaces in the communities across the region.

Discussing with stakeholders potential actions how to enhance the existing green infrastructure network in the Nature Park | Photo: Anke Hahn

ACTION PLANS TO MEET THE STRATEGIC AIMS

- Communication of green infrastructure through environmental education, (social) media activities and direct contact
- Connection of representative GI elements by cycle and hiking paths
- Support of community gardens as locations for interaction, environmental education and implementation respectively management of GI
- Enhance biological diversity by supporting a sustainable



Regional green infrastructure map of Dübener Heide Nature Park and surroundings

development of GI in private gardens in the villages
• Planting of GI elements alongside roads, cycle and hiking paths, field roads
• Restoration of water streams and peat bogs
• Creation of nature-based forest cells, mainly within complex pine forest patches

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WE INTEGRATED THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY TO OUR NATURE PARK PLAN 2030

Thomas Klepel
Dübener Heide Nature Park, Germany

How do you use the MaGICLandscapes Green Infrastructure Strategy & Action Plan and the other outputs in your daily work?

Thomas Klepel (TK): The MaGICLandscapes Strategy for Green Infrastructure is cemented in the current Dübener Heide Nature Park Plan 2030 for the regions Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt. The strategy's action plans have been incorporated into the following fields of action:

- Nature Conservation/Landscape Development
- Education for Sustainable Development
- Recreation/Tourism
- Sustainable Local and Regional Development and
- Communication

The findings from the project are to be implemented, for example, in the lead projects "Heather Garden", "Education for Sustainable Development: Educational Landscape Dübener Heide", "Biodiverse Communities" or "Social Media Offensive".

Which topic and/or potential action recommended by the MaGICLandscapes green infrastructure strategy & actions plan do you think is the most important one and why?

TK: The measures "Communication Concept Green Infrastructure" and "Enhancement of Settlement Gardens in Rural Areas", which were jointly developed within the framework of the MaGICLandscapes Strategy for Green Infrastructure and described in the Action Plan under No. 1 and 4 are vital. People's nature is literally on their doorstep. There are great opportunities here to understand the relationship between man and nature in the Dübener Heide and to learn to love it as their own nature park.

What are your future visions and plans to maintain and enhance the green infrastructure network in your region?

The recognition of the green infrastructure as a strength and field of action of the Dübener Heide will strengthen the identification of people, associations, companies and administrations with their local environment and landscape. Green infrastructure offers the space to take advantage of the opportunities to shape one's own future, especially through participation and the assumption of responsibility.

Photo: Verein Dübener Heide e.V.

Photo: M. Wojnarowicz

The Jelenia Góra Basin together with the surrounding Karkonosze, Rudawy Janowickie and Kaczawskie Mountains, provides a diverse cultural landscape. Towns and villages nestle wihtin a natural mosaic, consisting of mountains and valleys, forests and fields as well as marshes and ponds. Jelenia Gora, the largest city, forms an agglomeration with municipalities at the foot of the Karkonosze Mts. Local green infrastructure elements are mostly shaped by man: urban parks, squares, allotments, as well as production forests, agricultural areas, and semi-natural and natural ecosystems in the highest parts of the mountains. The most valuable areas have been included in the Natura 2000 network, including the Karkonosze National Park - the area with the largest nature protection regime in Poland. The Jelenia Góra basin contains a number of palaces and park complexes which serve as important GI elements with a rich history and culture.

The strategic objectives to enhance green infrastructure and subsequent actions to meet those objectives are the following:

OBJECTIVE 1: SHAPING OF MEADOWS AND ECOLOGICAL SITES AND IMPROVING BIODIVERSITY

- Communication and habitat maintenance
- Creation of new/expansion of protected areas
- Testing the functionality of ecological corridors
- Maintenance and revitalisation of green spaces
- Creating new forms of greenery

OBJECTIVE 2: IMPROVE WATER MANAGEMENT

- Identification of water and urban key resources for retentions that require intervention
- Improve water retention
- Improving water and sewage management

OBJECTIVE 3: IMPLEMENT THE GI CONCEPT IN SPATIAL PLANNING, LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION, IMPLEMENTATION OF INVESTMENTS

- Update of municipal planning documents taking into account the system components of the GI and their communication
- Promotion of social participation and promotion of GI in spatial planning

OBJECTIVE 4: BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP IN DEVELOPING GI

- Implementation of GI themes in environmental education
- Maintaining environmental education centres and continuation of their existing forms
- Establishment of local groups and regular workshops on GI
- Sharing and exchanging GI data
- Creating citizens‘ green budgets

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Left: More inteconnected cycling routes is one of the main needs (Photo: Dorota Wojnarowicz) | right: Mountain meadows as habitats and part of ecological corridors used by deer (Photo: Barbara Wieniawska-Raj)

IMPROVE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND QUALITY OF LIFE AT THE SAME TIME

Magdalena Krzysik
City of Jelenia Góra, Poland

How do you use the MaGICLandscapes Green Infrastructure Strategy & Action Plan and the other outputs in your daily work?

Magdalena Krzysik (MK): Some representatives of the City of Jelenia Góra participated in the workshops since the very beginning of the MaGICLandscapes project, discussing the benefits of GI in our region as well as the needs of communities and conservation institutions. The objectives of the GI Strategy are universal for all partners in the region and speak about important issues such as water retention and cooperation.

As far as action plans are concerned, we actively participated in their creation. Some of the green infrastructure plans have already been implemented. I think that green action plans collected from many institutions, municipalities or associations allows us to inspire each other to improve the GI and at the same time improve our quality of life as residents. We are also preparing to develop an urban plan for adapting to climate change, which will certainly take into account the development of green infrastructure and its multifunctional aspect. We will use the Green Infrastructure Handbook, developed as part of the project.

Which topic and/or potential action recommended by the MaGICLandscapes green infrastructure strategy & actions plan do you think is the most important one and why?

MK: The most important objective is to build up a local partnership for green infrastructure. Existing and emerging thematic leisure routes should be more integrated with each other supra-locally, encouraging both residents and tourists to use the green infrastructure. In Jelenia Góra are many bicycle paths, tourist routes and recreational areas, which are not integrated with similar places in neighbouring communes. This is also because people do not have comprehensive information about locations and routes within the network of green infrastructure.

What are your future visions and plans to maintain and enhance the green infrastructure network in your region?

MK: We plan to further expand the network of cycling routes and integrate them among ourselves and between neighbouring municipalities. A new idea is to use the floodplains on the River Bóbr and make them available to the inhabitants as urban beaches. This summer we created the first public beach, a second one is planned. We have also introduced a new category of 'green' projects in the city for 2021. We want to encourage the residents of Jelenia Góra to submit green projects covering activities such as greening of public space, revitalisation of squares and parks, creation of flower meadows, rain gardens and small retention tanks. There will be funding to finance workshops and educational activities in the field of ecology and nature protection.

Photo: Dorota Wojnarowicz

Photo: Kamila Antošová

Krkonoše National Park is the oldest National Park of the Czech Republic. This valuable mountain protected area consists of different types of ecosystems and landscapes. It ranges from hilly landscapes peppered with villages, fields and pastures at the lower parts, through the mountain mixed and spruce forests with enclaves of high biodiversity meadows, up to arcto-alpine tundra characterised by natural grasslands with dwarf pine shrubs at the upper parts and sparsely vegetated areas on the top of the highest peaks.

STRATEGIC AIMS TO ENHANCE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The strategic aims to enhance green infrastructure (GI) in the Giant Mountains National Park and its surrounding area in the Czech Republic are to manage the key ecosystems in a sustainable way. The mountain meadows are managed by regular grazing by sheep or cows, and regular mowing activities. The large tundra forests are important GI elements and provide habitat for the black grouse or the lynx. Connecting corridors by additional GI elements enable species to migrate further distances. Also the creation of GI elements is connected to the renovation of environmental education trails and establishment of sustainable tourism facilities.

ACTION PLANS TO MEET THE STRATEGIC AIMS

• Key protected species management including their habitats, e.g. respect for quiet areas and grazing and/or mowing activities at suitable time
• Definition and implementation of ÚSES in the territory of the National Park and its surrounding area: the proposed corridors and bio-centres will be seamlessly connected between individual municipalities and thus guarantee the connectivity of habitats in the area and its connection with the surrounding protected areas.
• Integration of GI elements to the establishment and management of sustainable tourist infrastructures (e.g. environmental education trails, eco-farms, cycle paths)
• Support water retention of the landscape, e.g. peat bogs, springs, and restoration of drained water streams

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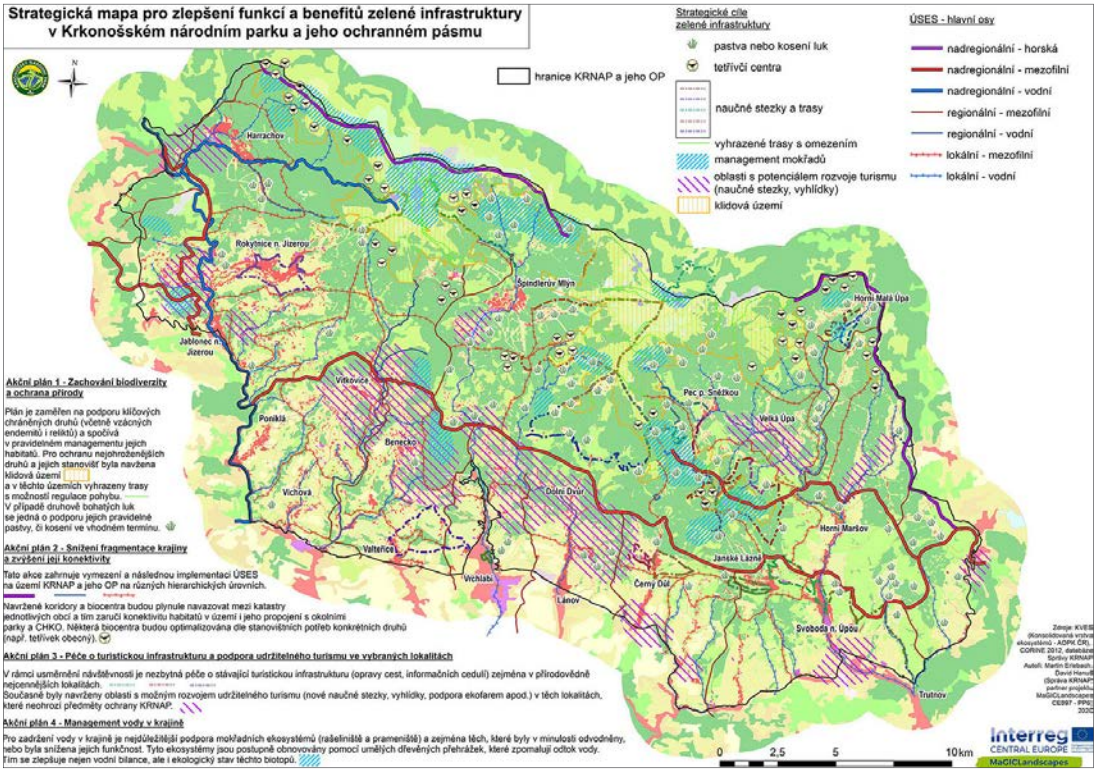

Green infrastructure strategy map of the case study area Krkonoše National Park/Czech Republic

THE VISION OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE HAS ALREADY BEEN STARTED

Ing. Petr Kostečka

ORP Jilemnice (Municipality with extended power), Czech Republic

How will you integrate the MaGICLandscapes Green Infrastructure Strategy & Action Plan and the other project outputs to your daily work?

Petr Kostečka (PK): The integration of GI Strategy and Action Plan and other project outputs is achieved by their nature and the legal framework. Specifically we try to promote the local level of Territorial System of Ecological Stability (TSES) in the territorial and urban plans and to direct new actions within the territorial plans so that they do not conflict with the work that we do. We perceive our main role in advising on land-use and territorial plans, more specifically where we can have an influence on those plans. We do this to ensure a consistent approach when assessing individual plans, such as maintaining a functional TSES (to support connectivity of landscape) or landscape character for example.

Which topic and/or potential action recommended by the MaGICLandscapes green infrastructure strategy & actions plan do you think is the most important one and why?

PK: Water management and drought are probably the most visible topics pertinent at this time. From my point of view I can see the effects on the scattered GI elements in the region. It was as if the alleys had lived to the last few years and were gradually drying out. It is slowly disappearing, and many times we don't even notice that there is only a trunk left from the continuous tree line after five years. At the same time, the alleys - an important landscape feature - needs to be here for another hundred years and they have an impact on many of today's problems such as drought, water and biodiversity.

What is your vision and future plans to maintain and enhance the green infrastructure network in your region?

PK: The vision of the green infrastructure has already been started. However, sometimes we need to have a real impact on existing functional elements of green infrastructure, or provide advice on submitted projects ensuring that GI is taken into account. An example could be improving migration functionality of bridges and culverts or the restoring the greenery along reconstructed roads. We are also partners in various sub-plans and strategies.

In addition to the above-mentioned active approach to spatial plans, which is not always easy in the normal routine of state administration, there is some room for improvement - we want to be seen as a trustworthy partner rather than troublemaker, and as a cultivator of ideas to make a project better and more sensitive to the environment in general.

Photo: KRNAP/LIFE Corcontica

Photo: Henriette John

The case study area of the tri-border region Czech Republic-Germany-Poland stretches from Bohemian Switzerland in the west through the Zittau and Lusatian Mountains to the Jizera Mountains in the east. An important landscape feature is the River Neisse with its tributaries. This network of waterways connects the three countries and passes through mountainous areas with forests, peat bogs, rocky areas and mountain meadows and the lowlands with their settlements and agricultural areas. Open cast lignite mining still impacts this landscape, with the Turów mine being the largest.

STRATEGIC AIMS TO ENHANCE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The creation and enhancement of urban green spaces is a central aim of the strategy. It is to improve the quality of life of city dwellers and to create recreational areas and environmental education opportunities. At the same time, this is expected to increase biodiversity and improve the adaptation of cities to climate change. The restoration of watercourses, floodplains and catchment areas intends to prevent future heavy flooding, reduce soil erosion in the catchment areas and increase the biodiversity of the floodplains.

ACTION PLANS TO MEET THE STRATEGIC AIMS

- Integration of the concept of green infrastructure to informal and formal planning instruments in the tri-border region Czech Republic – Germany – Poland
- Connection of cities and surrounding green infrastructure hot spots by planting new GI elements alongside roads and cycle paths
- Establish a second “green ring” around the city of Zittau (DE)
- Make edible urban green accessible for everyone, management and attractive arrangement
- Revitalisation of existing urban parks and rearrangement of green spaces to multifunctional parks and urban gardens
- Utilisation of brownfields for new public green spaces and parks
- Enhance urban biodiversity through insect-friendly green spaces
- Reduction of soil erosion on agricultural lands and of damages through diffuse running of surface water by means of an adapted land management in the catchment areas
- Partly uncovering of the ‘Goldbach’ stream in Zittau (DE)
- Revitalisation of artificial standing water bodies in Bogatynia (PL)

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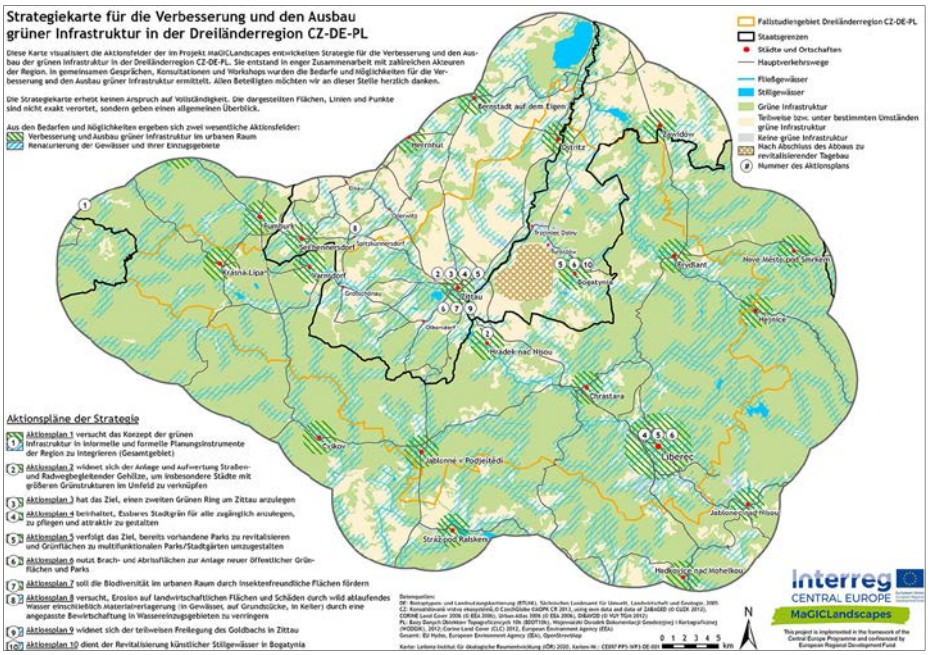

Green infrastructure strategy map of the Tri-border region Czech Republic-Germany-Poland

MAGICLANDSCAPES PROVIDED THE EVIDENCE FOR A TRI-NATIONAL GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK

Susanne Mannschott
Zittauer Stadtentwicklungsgesellschaft mbH, Germany

How do you think the results and publications of the MaGICLandscapes project can help you in your future work at the Urban Development Agency of the City of Zittau?

Susanne Mannschott (SM): We see a great benefit in this. We have received a lot of input from the project, because up to now we have had a very limited view on the topic of greenery in our planning. It was mainly anchored in economic considerations, social issues, etc. Of course, Zittau also has different functions, firstly as a large municipal forest owner, and secondly as a provider of urban green space. Until now, the focus has always been on individual components of urban green space. A special feature is the 'Green Ring' with its preservation and management issues. Through our participation in the MaGICLandscapes project and the individual discussions and workshops, we have now delved deeper into the subject matter, so that we are now looking at ecosystem services and all other functional aspects of green infrastructure in a holistic way. We are trying to include a very extensive networking of green infrastructure in planning processes, and thus also to follow up with informal planning. The project results are of course an ideal starting point for this, or even beyond that, they provide very detailed information that we can use in our work.

What are your visions and goals for the Tri-border region and especially for the City of Zittau regarding green infrastructure development?

SM: When considering the Tri-border region, there are always planning restrictions due to the three state borders. This of course is a challenge when planning a trinational green network, it's the same for other planning issues. We also need evidence and that is exactly what the MaGICLandscapes project provides. People from all three countries are working together to create a green infrastructure network and to break down existing barriers in the individual planning processes. In my opinion, this is the greatest basis on which we need to work. In addition, of course, we also hope to achieve better recreation opportunities and tourism development, which we are jointly striving for here in the tri-border region, both are directly linked to the issue of green infrastructure.

Photo: Andreas Keller/pixelio.de

Photo: Florian Danzinger

The Lower Austrian case study covers the districts of Horn and Hollabrunn and is a transition area between two landscapes, the Waldviertel in the west and the Weinviertel in the east. The Waldviertel is shaped by the highlands of a shallow gneiss landscape. The River Thaya partially marks the northern border to the Czech Republic and gives its name to the trans-boundary Thayatal/ Podyjí National Park, recognised as an outstanding biodiversity hot spot. Challenges and needs for enhancing green infrastructure in the area:

- Intensive agriculture leads to cleared and featureless landscape
- Connecting migration corridors and Natura 2000 areas by additional green infrastructure elements in the landscapes
- Development of a coordinated regional instrument for spatial and landscape planning

ACTION PLANS TO MEET THE STRATEGIC AIMS IN THE EASTERN WALDVIERTEL AND WESTERN WEINVIERTEL

According to the results of the comprehensive green infrastructure assessment the following actions and areas of intervention were identified as most urgent:

- Enhancement of the cleared, arable dominated cultural landscape by re-cultivating it with landscape elements such as hedges, field margins or flower strips
- Climate-friendly forest conversion of spruce plantations with tree species appropriate to the location and designation of natural forest reserves
- Creation of retention and buffer areas, widening of water bodies, promotion of small water bodies and increase of structural diversity in river beds and bank areas of water bodies and wetland habitats for ecological improvement, raising of the groundwater level and improvement of flood protection
- Securing and improving green infrastructure in areas of fruit and wine growing complexes by preserving and returning to the traditional small-scale cultural landscape and its numerous intermediate structures such as slopes, rows of trees and individual trees.
- Targeted maintenance and resumption of traditional forms of use such as mowing and grazing of the remaining dry grasslands, meadows and pastures which, as scattered residual areas within the intensively used cultural landscape.
- Improvement measures for green areas close to settlements, such as home gardens and parks as well as accompanying areas of road and rail infrastructure offer the possibility to improve the environmental conditions in the villages and towns and to increase the quality of life of the people.
- Securing and establishing habitat corridors to re-connect protected areas, improve an effective biotope network and increase the connectivity of the landscape.

ACTION PLANS TO MEET THE STRATEGIC AIMS IN THAYATAL NATIONAL PARK

- Strengthen communication with regional stakeholders on the green infrastructure approach and enhancement of specific GI elements and spaces
- Conservation measures to maintain biodiversity of meadows, dry grasslands and heathlands
- Implementation of the green infrastructure approach into environmental education offers at Thayatal National Park, GI is an important topic of Education for a Sustainable Development
- Activate visitor groups and citizens to create natural gardens to maintain biodiversity also in settlements
- Enrich habitats of the European wildcat and create additional migration corridors in and around Thayatal National Park by means of new GI elements

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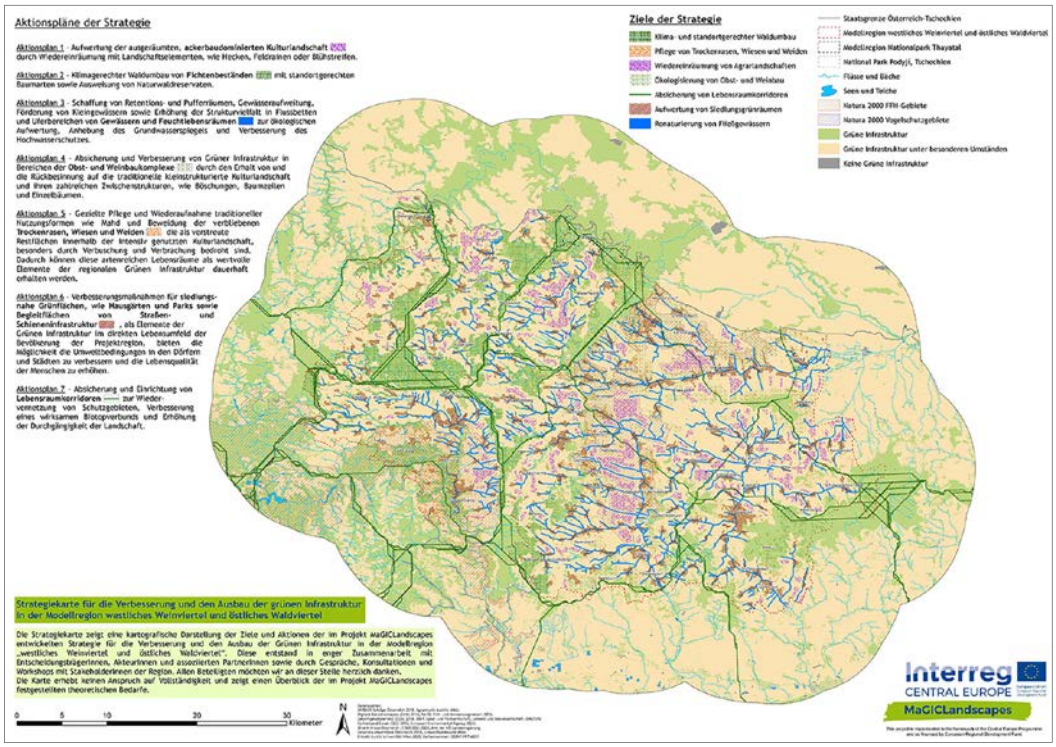
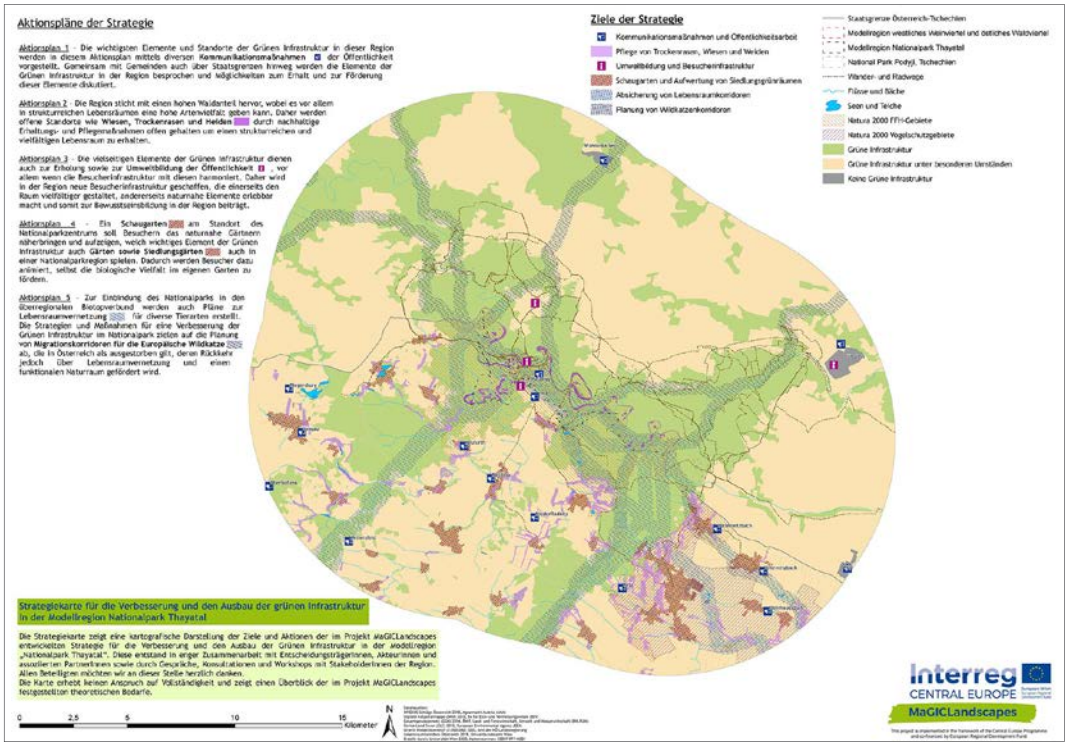
Photo: Christoph Milek



Green infrastructure strategy map of the case study area
Eastern Waldviertel and Western Weinviertel/Austria



Green infrastructure strategy map of the case study areaThayatal National Park

THE SITUATION IS SERIOUS, BUT NOT HOPELESS.

Ing. Wolfgang Riener

Austrian Forest Service and former forester in Thayatal National Park

How do you use the MaGICLandscapes Green Infrastructure Strategy & Action Plan and the other outputs in your daily work?

Wolfgang Riener (WR): During my work in Thayatal National Park I learned a lot about the complex processes in the forest, and I was able to acquire a great deal of specialist knowledge and, above all, practice in forest restructuring. For my new job I can make good use of the strategies and measures developed in the project.

The focus of my work is specifically on forest conversion and biodiversity maintenance and the cornerstones of a sustainable green infrastructure, combined with a certain economic interest or survival, because with today's timber revenues profitable forestry is no longer possible. This does not yet include the costs of forest conversion. The situation is serious, but not hopeless.

Which topic and/or potential action recommended by the MaGICLandscapes green infrastructure strategy & actions plan do you think is the most important one and why?

WR: That would be the climate adaptation measures. Climate change can no longer be denied in our region either. Not only spruce forests but also all old trees suffer a lot. I have been working on forest restructuring for more than 20 years, but the rapid progress of climate change has put a serious dent in our plans. Despite having a plan, no conversion has been feasible in recent years and will not be possible in the future either.

What are your future visions and plans to maintain and enhance the green infrastructure network in your region?

WR: We must create mixed forests that are rich in structure and which are also valuable habitats. For this we need harmonised wildlife ecology and tourism spatial planning. There is no such thing as a forest that meets all the demands of society, at least not without rules and spatial planning. The "expert hand" of the forest ranger is needed more than just the forestry planning on the drawing board. Having many tree species of different ages reduce the risk of total failure. In addition, the origin of the trees would also have to be taken into account.

We have to manage to hold the rainwater in the region for a longer period of time and prevent the targeted drainage of surface water and drains. This requires a structurally-rich agriculture instead of our current agricultural deserts. Structure-rich landscapes, such as the municipality of Geras in the Waldviertel, and forests are better able to cope with heavy rainfall events; they retain water and release it over time. As a result, there is a reduced flood peak.

I believe we must restore our landscape, give nature more space again and manage land that is unproductive from a forestry or agricultural point of view less intensively. We should reduce the use of chemicals and ban large machines from forests and fields, and pay more attention to our soil and soil life.

Photo: Christoph Milek

Photo: Gabriele Bovo

The case study area includes the city of Turin on the River Po and the surrounding peri-urban areas located on the plain. The Turin hills to the east are covered with woodlands and vineyards. Many special protected areas are located on the hills and in the plain along the River Po. South of the area is the Altopiano di Poirino and a wide plain, where the woodlands were replaced by agriculture. The area has a significant naturalistic-environmental and landscape value. Challenges and needs for green infrastructure:

- Landscape deterioration in urban and peri-urban areas
- Urban sprawl in the plains and in the hills along the main transport routes
- Reduced biodiversity and ecological connectivity due to intensive agriculture
- Soil erosion, hydro-geological fragility, landslides and flooding
- Prevention and mitigation of soil erosion/instability
- Afforestation of areas in the plain
- Containment/eradication of invasive species
- Enrich biodiversity in agricultural areas with hedge planting
- Mitigation of the effects of soil consumption (sealing, fragmentation, impoverishment)
- Improvement of air quality and environmental quality
- Connection of natural, semi-natural areas and agricultural parks, protection and greening of brownfields and other open spaces
- Increase of public green areas, cycle paths, nature-based solutions e.g. green roofs and walls, tree-lined avenues, permeable pavements etc.
- River areas: enhancement of GI through increased vegetation along the riverside, perifluvial vegetation, recovery of degraded areas (quarries, dumps), sediment management
- Restoration and greening of wetlands

STRATEGIC AIMS TO ENHANCE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The inclusion of rules and regulations in the various territorial and urban planning tools will help to protect and implement GI and their benefits such as:

ACTION PLANS TO MEET THE STRATEGIC AIMS

The Action Plan of the case study area "Po Hills around Chieri" contains measures aimed at the landscape and environmental improvement of Lake Arignano area. Among others these are the following:

- Enlargement of the existing Capture Repopulation Zone (ZRC)
- Identification of the needed restoration interventions in the area north of the lake in order to create an "educational forest"
- Forecast of a working group to set up a system of PES (Payment of Ecosystem Services) on the entire area of the Action Plan
- Realisation of a naturalistic-environmental route around the lake equipped with bird watching huts and information panels about flora and fauna

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Photo: D. Genovese

WE NEED PRACTICAL AND CONCRETE ACTIONS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF LAKE ARIGNANO

Laura Vaschetti

Association for the protection of Lake Arignano, Piedmont/Italy

How do you use the MaGICLandscapes Green Infrastructure Strategy & Action Plan and the other outputs in your daily work?

Laura Vaschetti (LV): The general aim of the interventions is the environmental/landscape enhancement and use of the different areas, as well as the enhancement of green infrastructure. As far as the area of Lake Arignano is concerned, the Plan identifies a number of critical issues including human disturbance and the need for organisational improvement regarding sustainable use, especially in spring and autumn when the lake is frequented the most.

This is why the Action Plan must be detailed and offer practical and concrete solutions. In this regard, new meetings with stakeholders are planned for the coming months.

Since the area is limited in size with a fragile ecosystem, it is necessary to highlight incompatibilities, raise awareness and educate in order to maintain and increase "intelligent tourism" whether this is a simple walk or more specific interests such as fauna, flora, history, etc.

The Committee has already indicated the need to increase protection for the fauna by prohibiting hunting over a larger area than the current one, tackle fly-tipping and the lighting of fires.

The final objective that the Committee would like to see is increased protection for the lake and valley by the Metropolitan City or Piedmont Region and avoid the reckless creation of car parks in unsuitable spaces, the construction of piers, moorings and other invasive intervention whilst maintaining and improving walking and cycling routes along the shores of the lake.

Which topic and/or potential action recommended by the MaGICLandscapes green infrastructure strategy & actions plan do you think is the most important one and why?

LV: I think it's all important. However, it is essential to find resources to finance interventions through the channels indicated in the strategic Action Plan. For example, the restart and refinancing of the Corona Verde project in Piedmont would be very useful. Without proper funding, project remain a paper exercise.

What are your future visions and plans to maintain and enhance the green infrastructure network in your region?

LV: A volunteer association has a limited possibility to upgrade green infrastructure, but it can make demands:

- Ask local governments to make uncultivated land available to them for planting trees;
- Request that the same administrations take care of and increase green areas in built-up areas;
- Request that they supervise the correct management of vegetation, avoiding indiscriminate and out-of-season cutting, even by their own technicians;
- Request that the owners implement and maintain the masking of industrial areas, warehouses, etc.;
- Ask that the car parks are built on permeable ground, that they are widely planted with trees, that they are not in full view.
- Request that the planting of tree-lined hedges along the edges of the fields be encouraged by farmers with incentives to reimburse them for the small part of any lost harvest;
- Ask that cycle paths and unpaved roads be bordered by trees as much as possible, always providing incentives for the owners of neighbouring fields.

For their part, the associations can raise citizens' awareness through meetings, screenings, films to promote respect for green spaces; similarly, as far as schools are concerned.

Photo: Simone Ciadamidaro

The case study area includes protected areas along the River Po between Vercelli and Alessandria - mainly regional Nature Reserves and Natura 2000 sites. The area is characterised by the presence of the river corridor, which runs through the territory for about 90 km. This corridor consists of the river itself, the riparian vegetation strips and marginal areas such as oxbows, side branches and wetlands.

STRATEGIC AIMS TO ENHANCE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

- Improvement of ecological connectivity, particularly in the rice sector
- Increase biodiversity and the conservation of species and habitats
- Reduction of damage caused by floods

ACTION PLANS TO MEET THE STRATEGIC AIMS

Based on an intensive dialogue with local stakeholders the following areas of interaction were defined:

- The connection through natural elements of the core areas; the connection axes that seem most relevant are those that would allow the connection between Bosco della Partecipanza and Palude di San Genuario, and those that would connect these special protected areas with the river corridor
- The recovery and strengthening of minor roads for the realisation of cycle and pedestrian tourist routes including accompanying green elements
- Improving the integrity of the irrigation network

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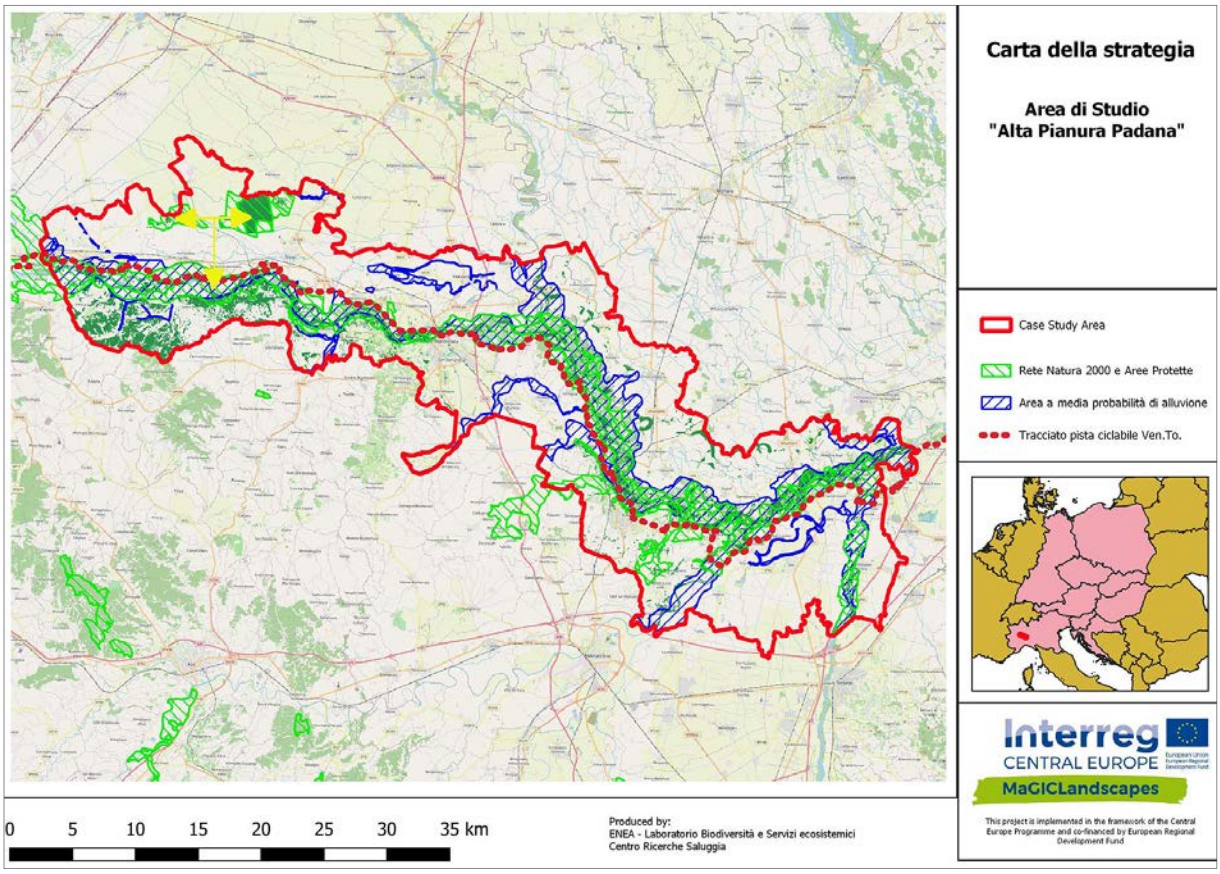

Green infrastructure strategy map of the case study area Upper Po Plain

PROVIDE THE RIGHT DIRECTION TO IMPROVE A SOUND ECOLOGICAL NETWORK IN THE PO PLAIN

Dario Zocco

Director of Po Protected Areas Management Authority Vercelli-Alexandria, Italy

How do you use the MaGICLandscapes Green Infrastructure Strategy & Action Plan and the other outputs in your daily work?

Dario Zocco (DZ): Since the Strategy & the Action Plan have been built on a solid analysis which took into account the main issues managed by our Organisation, it should be easy to make use of them in our daily work. MaGICLandscapes provided further evidence for our policies' rationale and we will use this evidence in our negotiations with stakeholders. Some insight from analysis will be useful for technical planning about improving the coherence of the core Natura 2000 objectives and GI creation.

Which topic and/or potential action recommended by the MaGICLandscapes green infrastructure strategy & actions plan do you think is the most important one and why?

DZ: We do think that the most important topic could be the enhancement of the role green infrastructure plays in strengthening the Natura 2000 network. From a conservation point of view, this would allow the system (natural and social) to gain in soundness and resilience. Right now, from a socio-economic point of view, the actions with the greatest potential are those related to the building of sustainable infrastructure, such as the Po cycle-way (VENTO) and the Po Shared forest and all the satellite economic activities that they could spark.

What are your future visions and plans to maintain and enhance the green infrastructure network in your region?

DZ: Following our vision, we intend to promote any initiative that could realise the conditions to build sustainable businesses on the above green infrastructure. We will act directly, by building natural patches and providing the main actors the direction they might need to improve the soundness of the ecological network. We will also act to improve the social network of local actors providing them information about the scope for potential economies connected with GI. We look ahead to building a landscape that could provide the local community opportunities to invest in environmental quality and improve their lives and incomes.

Photo: C. Lenti

THANK YOU ALL FOR THE FRUITFUL COOPERATION!

Upper row from left to right: Christopher Marrs, Josef Talab, Sven Riedl, Florian Danzinger, Ina Hahn, Stefan Fuchs, Elmar Csaplovics, Maria Rita Minciardi, Gian Luigi Rossi, Thomas Wrbka, Marco Neubert, Simonetta Alberico, Juliana Schlaberg, Andrzej Kocjan, Martin Erlebach, Marek Malicki, Pavla Pokorná, Dorota Wojnarowicz, David Hanuš, Tomáš Slach, Magdalena Jirousová; lower row from left to right: Henriette John, Anke Hahn, Hana Skokanová

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