



BIOGOV uses multi-stakeholder partnerships and participatory governance to improve regional policies for natural heritage and biodiversity conservation

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An interregional cooperation project for improving natural and cultural heritage policies.

Project Partners

Province of Fryslân (NL)
Flemish Land Agency (BE)
Bulgarian Management Association (BG)
Territorial Studies Institute (Environment and Territorial Planning Ministry) (ES)
Lodzkie Region (PL)
ADEPT Transylvania Foundation (RO)
Mures Environmental Protection Agency (RO)
County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland (SE)
Slovenian Forestry Institute (SI)



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

Action Plan
BIOGOV 2020-2022

BIODIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Improving regional policies for natural heritage and
biodiversity conservation through multistakeholder
partnerships and participatory governance

**BULGARIAN
MANAGEMENT
ASSOCIATION**

Projekt: BIOGOV

Partner organisation: Bulgarian Management Association

Country: Bulgaria

NUTS2 region: Blagoevgrad Region

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Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:

- ☒ Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme
- ☐ Territorial Cooperation Programme
- ☐ Other Regional Development Policy Instrument

Name of the policy instrument addressed:

Operating Programme “Environment”,
IP3: Biodiversity

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MANAGEMENT
ASSOCIATION**



BIOGOV
Interreg Europe

European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

This action plan has been developed with the support of
the European Union through Interreg Project BIOGOV 2018-2020.

Biodiversity Governance

Improving regional policies for natural heritage and biodiversity conservation through multistakeholder partnerships and participatory governance

BioGvo project in Bulgaria worked with stakeholders' groups from Blagoevgrad Region to explore their needs and aims with the purpose to address them through improvement in the policy instrument – Investment Priority 3: “Biodiversity” of the Operating Programme “Environment”. The multistakeholder approach used by the project, the opportunities to share good practices from eight European countries and the peer reviews carried out in the partner countries helped to identify the relevant actions to be included in this Action Plan. The actions aim to achieve involvement of local authorities, non-government organizations and businesses, in projects and initiatives for nature protection and biodiversity conservation. This will be achieved through active involvement of Bulgarian Management Association in technical groups, regional and national representative bodies, and in projects that support improvements of biodiversity governance.

The following objectives have been set for the implementation of the second phase of the BioGov project:

1. Improvement of the policy instrument IP 3: “Biodiversity” of OP “Environment” 2021-2027.
2. Representation of project stakeholders’ needs and aims at regional and national consultative bodies.
3. Promotion of environmental excellence practices amongst the businesses, which operate in protected areas.
4. Building awareness amongst the local communities about the possibilities for start up and development of environmentally friendly businesses in the protected areas.

Indicate status of the action plan:

The action plan has been adopted and accepted by the Regional Stakeholder Group

Executive summary

Involvement of local communities in biodiversity conservation

1. The state of biodiversity conservation in Blagoevgrad Region

Blagoevgrad Region is characterized by many and important natural resources and exhibits an impressive species richness. Its territory harbours the highest densities of protected sites. In the region are declared 41 protected areas totaling 17.882 hectares: 5 reserves, 1 maintained reserve, 16 protected areas, 17 landmarks, Pirin National Park and parts of "Rila" National Park and 2 natural parks. The challenges faced by the region include intensive deforestation, forest fires, use of poisonous baits for raptors, reduction of nesting sites, illegal hunting, illegal fishing, and pressures from agriculture.

As of today the process of defining which territories to be included as protected sites, what should be the size of the protected areas and of developing their managements plans is based entirely on scientific criteria like the density of the habitats in a certain zone as well as the ecological quality and the size of the aereas inhabited by birds and species. No economic arguments are taken into consideration. This is why, for example, a landowner can not object to the inclusion of his land in a protected area unless he provides scientific arguments as to why it is not important for the biodiversity. Also, investors, mayors and government institutions cannot challenge the inclusion of a region in the eco-network, because it is important for the local businesses or the economy. In Bulgaria the lists with the protected areas were developed by two non-government organizations in 2005 and 2006. 34.5% of the territory of the country was included in the Natura 2000 Network. Although there were significant benefits acheved for the nature, later it appeared that the interests of large stakeholders' groups were not considered in the process of selection of the protected areas. Furthermore, the interests of these groups were also not taken into consideration later when the territorial managemen plans were being developed. It became obvious that changes in the policies are needed to ensure that the interests of all stakeholders are addressed.

2. Policy support for biodiversity conservation

The policy instrument addressed in the application form of the project BIOGOV is IP6d: "Protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil and promoting ecosystem services including through Natura 2000 and green infrastructure" from the Operational Programme "Environment" 2014-2020. This policy instrument corresponds to the IP3: "Biodiversity" of the new

Operational Programme "Environment" 2021-2027. As a member of the Thematic Working Group for the development of the OP "Environment" 2021-2027 Bulgarian Management Association will contribute for the inclusion of more stakeholders, including local authorities, non-government organizations and businesses, as beneficiaries under this policy instrument.

Since the end of 2019 the Bulgarian Government is trying to pass through the National Assembly the Law for Changes and Additions to the Law for Biodiversity. This new law will regulate the establishment of regional and national bodies, which will be involved in the process of development and acceptance of the management plans of the Natura 2000 sites. Bulgarian Management Association will make the necessary steps to become a member of the regional or the national committee, therefore, allowing representation of the project's regional stakeholders' groups into these bodies.

Not at last place, Bulgarian Management Association intends to develop a set of criteria for environmental excellence and to promote environmentally friendly businesses in the Blagoevgrad Region, which can further contribute for making improvements.

3. Involving regional stakeholders

Throughout the implementation of the BIOGOV project the team of Bulgarian Management Association worked effectively with regional stakeholders' groups from Blagoevgrad Region. Overall, ten meetings were held, at which participated representatives of the local businesses, municipalities, communities, schools, non-government organizations, universities and schools. The ideas shared and the lessons learned from this cooperation will be taken into consideration in future projects and initiatives developed by our organization. The needs and the aims of the regional stakeholders' groups will be presented on occasions provided in the work of the working groups and technical committees where Bulgarian Management Association will take part.

4. How implementing the actions will improve the Policy instrument

The first three actions in this Action Plan aim to make improvements in key policy instruments dealing with biodiversity governance, namely: IP3: "Biodiversity" of Operational Programme "Environment" 2021-2027; territorial plans for management of the territories; legal framework for management of the Natura 2000 Network; other strategic documents for management of the network.

The rest of the activities aim to identify new tools and means for the support of biodiversity conservation on local level through promotion of good business practices and environmentally friendly business activities.

Action Plan

BIOGOV 2020-2022

The following actions are proposed to be carried out during phase 2 of the project (2020 - 2022) contributing to broader representation of regional stakeholders' groups in policy making bodies and to implementation of projects supporting businesses, which operate in the protected areas.

Strategic level – Providing representation of local stakeholders' groups in national and regional bodies responsible for development of policy instruments.

1

Action 1 Proactive involvement of Bulgarian Management Association in the Thematic Working Group for the development of Operating Programme "Environment" 2021-2027

We want to include into the Programme Strategy of OP "Environment" 2021-2027, IP 3: Biodiversity, beneficiaries like local authorities, non-government organizations, businesses and the National Road Agency in order to support wider participation of regional stakeholders in measures with focus on biodiversity conservation.

2

Action 2 BMA to become a member of the Committee of Local Stakeholders in Blagoevgrad Region

BMA will undertake the necessary steps to become a member of the Committee of Local Stakeholders in Blagoevgrad region. This will allow us to make policy improvements in the territorial plan for management of the protected areas and in particular to include provisions for participation of local authorities, non-government organizations and businesses in activities for biodiversity conservation.

3

Action 3 BMA to become a member of the National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network.

BMA will undertake the necessary steps to become a member of the National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network. This will allow us to make policy improvements in the legal framework and in strategic documents for management of the Natura 2000 Network, including support for broader participation of stakeholders in the management of the Natura 2000 sites and promotion of the criteria for environmental excellence for businesses through educational materials developed as part of the awareness campaigns for the Natura 2000 Network.

Key projects – Developing indicators for environmental excellence and awareness campaign promoting environmentally friendly businesses.

4

Action 4 Developing a set of criteria for environmental excellence for businesses operating in protected areas

The criteria for environmental excellence will help the businesses, which operate in protected areas, to undertake biodiversity conservation actions and capitalize on these initiatives by effective marketing of their products and services.

5

Action 5 Awareness campaign to promote the start up and the development of environmentally friendly business activities in the protected areas.

We will undertake an awareness building campaign in 2021 and 2022 to promote environmentally friendly business activities as means for income generation for the people inhabiting settlements in Rila and Pirin national parks. We will also support the development of such businesses through projects, consulting activities and assistance in the marketing and sales of their products.

Part III – Details of actions envisaged

Action 1	<p>Proactive involvement of Bulgarian Management Association in the Thematic Working Group for the development of Operating Programme “Environment” 2021-2027</p> <p><i>We want to include into the Programme Strategy of OP “Environment” 2021-2027, IP 3: Biodiversity, beneficiaries like local authorities, non-government organizations, businesses and the National Road Agency in order to support wider participation of regional stakeholders in measures with focus on biodiversity conservation.</i></p>
1. Background	<p>Bulgarian Management Association (BMA) gained new and significant experience on biological governance through its participation in the BioGov project. Through series of meetings held in 2018, 2019 and 2020, key information was accumulated in regard to the needs and the interests of the regional project stakeholders in Blagoevgrad Region. Amongst the most important issues raised at these meetings were the willingness of the stakeholders to have rights and responsibilities to be directly involved in biodiversity protection and conservation actions. In November 2019 BMA became a member of the Thematic Working Group (TWG) for the development of the Operating Programme “Environment” 2021-2027 (OPE 2021-2027). As a full member of the TWG BMA will have an influence on the scope of IP 3: “Biodiversity” as well as on the rest of the investment priorities of the programme. BMA will suggest and support texts, which will allow more regional stakeholders to be included as direct beneficiaries under IP 3: “Biodiversity”. In addition, the involvement of regional project stakeholders in the process of development of IP “Biodiversity” will result in higher effectiveness and efficiency of this policy instrument.</p>
2. Activities	<p>BMA’s representatives will support the inclusion of the following regional stakeholders as direct beneficiaries under investment priority 3: “Biodiversity” of OPE 2021-2027: the municipal administrations, the non-government organizations, the local businesses and the National Road Agency.</p>
3. Players involved	<p>Representatives of BMA at the TWG, other members of the TWG, experts from OP “Environment” 2021-2027 who work on the programme documents.</p>
4. Timeframe	<p>2020-2021</p>
5. Cost	<p>Cost for salaries of BMA staff participating at the work of the TWG. Travel and accommodation costs associated with the meetings of the TWG. Office and administration costs for the office of BMA in Bansko.</p>
6. Funding sources	<p>To be covered by the regular budget of Bulgarian Management Association.</p>
7. Lessons learned from BioGov	<p>The action has been identify following the visit to the Romanian partner – ADEPT foundation. ADEPT used to be a voting member of the Monitoring Committee for the National Rural Development Programme. As such the organization was able to influence agrienvironment funding and schemes with regard to conservation measures to protect Habitats Directive species. They also intended to join other technical bodies, like the technical working groups organized by the Monitoring Committee of the Large Infrastructure Operational Programme, with the purpose to support the improvement of relevant policy instruments.</p>

Part III – Details of actions envisaged

Action 2	<p>BMA to become a member of the Committee of Local Stakeholders in Blagoevgrad Region.</p> <p><i>BMA will undertake the necessary steps to become a member of the Committee of Local Stakeholders in Blagoevgrad region. This will allow us to make policy improvements in the territorial plan for management of the protected areas and in particular to include provisions for participation of local authorities, non-government organizations and businesses in activities for biodiversity conservation.</i></p>
1. Background	<p>Since the end of 2019 the Bulgarian Government is trying to pass through the National Assembly the Law for Changes and Additions to the Law for Biodiversity. This new law regulates the establishment of regional and national bodies, which will be involved in the process of development and acceptance of the management plans for the Natura 2000 sites.</p> <p>In particular, the new law suggests establishment of Committees of Local Stakeholders in each region. Each Committee will have the following responsibilities: participate in the entire process of development and change of the territorial plan for management of the protected areas; discuss and provide the necessary information for development of the territorial management plan, which are of competence to the members of the Committee; regularly discuss the progress on the development of the territorial management plan and makes suggestions for changes and improvements; approve the draft territorial management plan and its changes before presenting it for co-authorization to the National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network; follow up and regularly discuss the progress of the implementation of the territorial management plan on the bases of the prepared monitoring reports; make suggestions for changes of the territorial plan to the National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network.</p> <p>By becoming a member of the Committee of Local Stakeholders in Blagoevgrad Region BMA can be directly involved in the process of development and acceptance of management plans for the Natura 2000 sites. This will help the organization to support the needs and the interests of the regional project stakeholders and in particular the plans to allow more regional stakeholders, like local authorities, non-government organizations and the businesses, to be involved and responsible for undertaking biodiversity conservation actions.</p>
2. Activities	<p>BMA will take the necessary steps to become a member of the Committee of Local Stakeholders in Blagoevgrad Region. The partner will follow on the establishment of these regional units under the Law for Changes and Additions to the Law for Biodiversity and will be proactive to become a member of the Committee and to present the needs and interests of the regional stakeholders' groups in the work of the Committee.</p>
3. Players involved	BMA team
4. Timeframe	2020-2022
5. Cost	Remuneration for the BMA team members involved in the application process for membership to the Committee of Local Stakeholders in Blagoevgrad Region. Remuneration for the BMA team members who will prepare, participate and follow up on the work of the Committee.
6. Funding sources	To be covered by the regular budget of Bulgarian Management Association.
7. Lessons learned from BIOGOV	The action has been identified following the visit to the partner in Spain – Territorial Studies Institute. During the visit we learned about the partner's leading role in Galicia and on national level in developing strategic and policy instruments

	related to green infrastructure and protection of biodiversity through cooperation with local authorities, farmers and businesses. The partner also takes participation in the Monitoring Committee of the respective policy instrument and can influence its decisions in regard to the revision and approval of methodology and selection criteria of the operating programme, the evaluation plan of the programme and the modifications of the programme.
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Part III – Details of actions envisaged

Action 3	<p>BMA to become a member of the National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network.</p> <p><i>BMA will undertake the necessary steps to become a member of the National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network. This will allow us to make policy improvements in the legal framework and in strategic documents for management of the Natura 2000 Network. including support for broader participation of stakeholders in the management of the Natura 2000 sites and promotion of the criteria for environmental excellence for businesses through educational materials developed as part of the awareness campaigns for the Natura 2000 Network.</i></p>
1. Background	<p>Since the end of 2019 the Bulgarian Government is trying to pass through the National Assembly the Law for Changes and Additions to the Law for Biodiversity. This new law regulates the establishment of regional and national bodies, which will be involved in the process of development and acceptance of the management plans of the Natura 2000 sites.</p> <p>In particular the new law suggests establishment of a National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network. This Committee will have the following responsibilities: follow up and discusses the progress in the management of the Natura 2000 Network; make suggestions and provide opinions upon requests of the Minister of Environment and Waters for changes in the legal framework for management of the network; provide opinions before the Minister of Environment and waters accepting and approving strategic documents for management of the Natura 2000 Network, as well as strategic documents related to types of natural habitats and species, which a subject to protection in the protected zones; make suggestions for more efficient and more effective implementation of the policies under Natura 2000.</p> <p>By becoming a member of the National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network BMA can be directly involved in the process of acceptance and approval of all strategic documents for the management of the Natura 2000 Network. This will help the organization to support the needs and the interests of the regional project stakeholders from Blagoevgrad Region by suggesting participation of local authorities, non-government organizations and businesses in the management of the Natura 2000 sites. Furthermore, we will make efforts for the criteria for environmental excellence for businesses, which will be developed as part of activity 4, to be promoted nationwide through educational materials developed as part of the awareness campaign for the Natura 2000 Network.</p>
2. Activities	<p>BMA will take the necessary steps to become a member of the National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network. The partner will follow the process of passing the Law for Changes and Additions to the Law for Biodiversity through the National Assembly and will be proactive to become a member of the National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network and to present the needs and interests of the regional stakeholders' groups in the work of the Committee as well as to promote the developed under activity 4 criteria for environmental excellence for businesses.</p>
3. Players involved	BMA team
4. Timeframe	2020-2022
5. Cost	<p>Remuneration for the BMA team members involved in the application process for membership to the National Consultative Committee for the Natura 2000 Network. Remuneration for the BMA team members who will prepare, participate and follow up on the meetings of the Committee.</p>
6. Funding sources	To be covered by the regular budget of Bulgarian Management Association.

7. Lessons learned from BIOGOV

The action has been identified following the visit to the partner in Spain – Territorial Studies Institute. During the visit we learned about the partner's leading role in Galicia and on national level in developing strategic and policy instruments related to green infrastructure and protection of biodiversity through cooperation with local authorities, farmers and businesses. The partner also takes participation in the Monitoring Committee of the respective policy instrument and can influence its decisions in regard to the revision and approval of methodology and selection criteria of the operating programme, the evaluation plan of the programme and the modifications of the programme.

Part III – Details of actions envisaged	
Action 4	<p>Developing a set of criteria for environmental excellence for businesses operating in protected areas.</p> <p><i>The criteria for environmental excellence will help the businesses, which operate in protected areas, to undertake biodiversity conservation actions and capitalize on these initiatives by effective marketing of their products and services.</i></p>
1. Background	<p>Many businesses in the protected natural areas, including those in Blageovrgad Region, face restrictions on their business practices. In the same time, they fail to promote the ecologically friendly practices they developed over time. Providing opportunities to implement and share good practices will help local businesses further develop their business operations in an environmentally friendly manner. Based on these good practices BMA can develop a set of criteria for environmental excellence. Those criteria can be used not only by local businesses to improve their operations, but also by policy makers, for example by including these or similar criteria as good practices or as criteria for assessment of applicants for the grants provided by the EU operating programmes. Once implemented by local businesses the criteria will help them integrate environmentally friendly operations and utilize those practices in their marketing strategies and development plans. The involved businesses will have direct influence and be promoters themselves of good practices for protection of the nature and biodiversity conservation. The good practices collected and shared between businesses can be considered by regional and national consultative bodies in the process of improving existing and structuring new policy instruments.</p>
2. Activities	<p>BMA team will develop a set of criteria for environmental excellence to assist the businesses in the integration of new ecologically friendly practices as well as to improve their marketing strategies by advertising their services and products to new market niches. Will be developed and distributed information materials (leaflets, brochures, an internet site) about the good practices used by the businesses, which operate in the Rila, Pirin and Rodopi mountains. Will be provided information to businesses how to implement those practices, including information on how to use funding from the EU operational programmes like “Competitiveness and Innovations”, “Human Resources Development”, “Programme for Development of the Village Areas”. BMA will also take actions, in particular if the organization becomes a member of the National Consultative Committee, to include information about the criteria in educational materials developed as part of the awareness campaign for the Natura 2000 Network.</p>
3. Players involved	BMA team
4. Timeframe	2021
5. Cost	Euro 10 000,00
6. Funding sources	To be covered by the regular budget of Bulgarian Management Association and in-kind contribution of external experts.
7. Lessons learned from BIOGOV	<p>The action has been identified following the visit to the partner in Slovenia – Slovenian Forestry Institute. There BMA's team met with representatives of businesses, which operate in the protected areas of the country. They shared information on the good practices they use and how these practices are integrated in their marketing strategies and business plans. The criteria for environmental excellence, which will be developed under this action, will become a part of the already used by BMA Model for Business Excellence of the European Foundation for Quality Management.</p>

Part III – Details of actions envisaged

Action 5	<p>Awareness campaign to promote the start up and the development of environmentally friendly business activities in the protected areas.</p> <p><i>We will undertake an awareness building campaign in 2021 and 2022 to promote environmentally friendly business activities as means for income generation for the people inhabiting settlements in Rila and Pirin national parks. We will also support the development of such businesses through projects, consulting activities and assistance in the marketing and sales of their products.</i></p>
1. Background	<p>BMA is actively involved in projects, which support start ups and small businesses on local and national level. In the last five years the organization trained over 250 young entrepreneurs in five regions of Bulgaria. It also provided technical assistance to over 100 small and medium businesses in the Blagoevgrad Region, including strategic advice, technical support in the marketing and sales efforts of the entities. Through its participation in the BioGov project BMA's experts gained knowledge and technical expertise on a variety of biodiversity governance issues, including the issues businesses face when operating in protected areas. Our team discovered that making a business in an environmentally friendly manner can not only bring drawbacks for the economic operators but can also bring benefits, especially when the business practices used are well marketed to the potential clients. Therefore, in our future projects in Blagoevgrad Region, we will focus on the promotion of starting up and developing environmentally friendly business activities as means for income generation activities for the local population. Such activities, combined with activities for improvement of the conservation status of the habitats, will contribute for the achievement of the targets set up by IP 3: "Biodiversity" of OP "Environment" 2021-2027. The experience gained when implementing the activity will bring ideas for future improvements of the policy instrument.</p>
2. Activities	<p>We will develop projects, which support the start up and the development of environmentally friendly business activities in the protected areas. BMA's team will work on the development of the application forms together with experts from potential partner organizations. Direct beneficiaries of those projects will be local entrepreneurs, start ups and small businesses, which are committed to undertake economic activities in an environmentally friendly manner.</p>
3. Players involved	BMA, project partner organizations
4. Timeframe	To be implemented in 2022
5. Cost	To be covered by project budgets of Bulgarian Management Association.
6. Funding sources	The funding will be obtained from the following EU programmes: INTERREG EUROPE, Danube Transnational Programme, Bolkan-Mediterranean Programme, Interreg Greece-Bulgaria Programme, IPA CBC Bulgaria – Northern Macedonia Programme.
7. Lessons learned from BIOGOV	The action has been identified following the visit to the partner in Slovenia – Slovenian Forestry Institute. During the visits in several protected areas BMA's team observed number of successful business initiatives carried out by the local population. This brought the idea to promote similar business activities in Blagoevgrad Region and that this can not only support the local economy but also contribute for the improvement of the conservation status of the habitats.