
Event Report

ConnectGREEN final conference

“Protected Areas – Cornerstones of Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians and Beyond”

28-30. September, 2021.

Visegrád, Hotel Silvanus

ConnectGREEN final conference: “Protected Areas – Cornerstones of Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians and Beyond” – 28-30/09/2021.

www.interreg-danube.eu/ConnectGREEN
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1. Basic information

Name of the meeting	ConnectGREEN final conference: <i>“Protected Areas – Cornerstones of Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians and Beyond”</i>
Project Pilot Area	HU
Date	28-30/09/2021
Place	Visegrád
Main organizer	CEEweb for Biodiversity
Duration	3 days
Number of participants	app. 130 (online & on-site)
Aim of the meeting	<p>Dissemination of project results: and reaching the following tasks of the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliverable C.2.3 Press articles in English and local languages - Deliverable C.3.1 Press conferences - D.T3.2.4 Study tours on the integration of ecological corridors in spatial planning - D.T3.3.1 Share and promote the role of ecological corridors in strengthening the Natura 2000 network and the project objectives and results - T3.4 Output Knowledge transfer conference for PA professionals - D.T4.3.1 - Workshop reports on EIA process problems, according to information collected over national workshops and one international event - T4.2 Detailed report on the possibilities to improve the EIA Directive
Representer of ConnectGREEN project	ConnectGREEN project consortium

2. Agenda

Day 1 - 28 September

Time:	Agenda item:	Speaker(s)/Presenter(s):
13:30 – 15:00	Arrival, Registration & Welcome Coffee	<u>Moderator of the day:</u> Péter OLAJOS , Delegate in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
15:00 – 16:00	Welcome Session <i>Mátyás Conference Room (stream, zoom)</i>	Bertalan BALCZÓ , Deputy State Secretary, Deputy State Secretariat for Nature Protection, Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture Harald EGERER , Head of the UNEP Vienna Programme Office, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention Mircea VERGHELEȚ , Steering Committee Chair, Carpathian Network of Protected Areas Irene LUCIUS , Conservation Director, WWF Central and Eastern Europe
16:00 – 16:30	Coffee break	
16:30 – 18:00	Keynote Speeches & Moderated Discussion <i>Mátyás Conference Room (stream, zoom)</i>	Nicola NOTARO , Head of Unit, Nature Protection, European Commission - DG Environment, recorded message Wendy ELLIOT , Deputy Leader Wildlife Practice, WWF International, online Gary TABOR , Executive Director, Centre for Large Landscape Conservation/ Specialist Group Leader, IUCN Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group, online Miklós MARTON , Department of Environmental Development and Strategy, Ministry of Agriculture/ Steering Group Member of EU Danube Region Strategy, Priority Area 6 (EUSDR PA6), Biodiversity, Landscapes and Quality of Air and Soils
18:00 – 18:15	ConnectGREEN Youth Video Contest Award Ceremony <i>Mátyás Conference Room (stream, zoom)</i>	Award presented by WWF-CEE
18:15 – 19:15	Press Conference <i>Press Corner in the Mozaik Conference Room</i>	
20:00 – 22:00	Gala Dinner hosted by the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture <i>Gala Dining Room</i>	

Day 2 - 29 September

Time:	Agenda item:	Speaker(s)/Presenter(s):
9:00 – 10:30	Parallel Workshop #1: Identification of Ecological Corridors – the ConnectGREEN Methodology <i>Mátyás Conference Room (stream, zoom)</i>	<u>Moderation:</u> Cristian-Remus PAPP , WWF Romania Zuzana OKANIKOVÁ , State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic; Martin STRNAD, Václav HLAVÁČ , Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic Kristyna VLKOVÁ & Dušan ROMPORTL , Silva Tarouca Research Institute for Landscape and Ornamental Gardening, Czech Republic Filepné Dr. KOVÁCS Krisztina , Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences Christoph PLUTZAR , Environment Agency Austria, online Milan HUSÀR , Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava - SPECTRA Centre of Excellence of EU
9:00 – 10:30	Parallel Workshop #2: Integration of Ecological Corridors into Spatial Planning – How to Overcome Conflicts between Connectivity Conservation and Spatial Planning (tools and best practice) <i>Mozaik Conference Room (stream, zoom)</i>	<u>Moderation:</u> Dr. VALÁNSZKI István , Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences Dr. TÖRÖK Katalin , Ökológiai Kutatóközpont Krisztián SCHNELLER , Lechner Tudásközpont Dr. KOLLÁNYI László , Hungarian University for Agriculture and Life Sciences Rastislav STANÍK , Slovak Environment Agency, online Vladimír ONDREJIČKA , Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava - SPECTRA Centre of Excellence of EU
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee break	
11:00 – 12:30	Parallel Workshop #3: Restoration of Natural Habitat Connectivity: Different EU Projects' Approaches to Combine Synergies and Potential Cooperation Opportunities <i>Mátyás Conference room (stream, zoom)</i>	<u>Moderation:</u> Isidoro DE BORTOLI , EURAC Research, Italy Stefan FUCHS , University of Vienna, Austria, online Irena BERTONCELJ , Agricultural Institute of Slovenia Ján KADLEČÍK , State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic Filippo FAVILLI , EURAC Research Academy, Italy Mircea VERGHELEȚ , Piatra Craiului National Park Administration, Romania
11:00 – 12:30	Parallel Workshop #4:	<u>Moderation:</u> Dr. NAGY Gabriella , CEEweb for Biodiversity, Hungary

	<p>Mainstreaming Ecological Connectivity into Policy – National Roadmaps & Recommendations for the Improvement of the EIA/SEA Directive</p> <p><i>Mozaik Conference Room (stream, zoom)</i></p>	<p>Dr. Marina NENKOVIĆ-RIZNIĆ, Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia, online</p> <p>Rastislav STANIĆ, Slovak Environment Agency, online</p> <p>Oana POPESCU, National Institute for Research and Development in Constructions, Urban Planning und Sustainable Spatial Development, Romania, online</p> <p>Dr. WEIPERTH András, Hungarian University for Agriculture and Life Sciences</p> <p>Dr. MÉSZÁROS Szilvia, ÖKO Zrt.</p>
12:30 – 14:00	<p>Buffet lunch</p> <p><i>Hotel lobby</i></p>	
14:00 – 16:30	<p>Carpathian Protected Areas Conference “A new age for the Carpathian Protected Areas Network”</p> <p><i>Mátyás Conference Room (stream, zoom)</i></p>	
14:00 – 16:30	<p>Welcome</p>	<p>Harald EGERER, Head of the UNEP Vienna Programme Office, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention</p> <p>Mircea VERGHELEȚ, Chair of the CPA Steering Committee</p>
	<p>Presentation of the Centralparks Project Results relevant for the Carpathian Protected Areas</p>	<p>Hanna ÖLLÖS, European Wilderness Society</p> <p>Mircea VERGHELEȚ, Chair of the CPA Steering Committee</p>
	<p>Short Interventions by the CPA Steering Committee Members</p>	<p>Martin STRNAD, Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic</p> <p>Gyula TAR, Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary</p> <p>Gabriela SZUBA, Ministry of Climate and Environment of Poland</p> <p>Mircea VERGHELEȚ, Piatra Craiului National Park Administration, Romania</p> <p>Nenad RADAKOVIĆ, Djerdap National Park, and Ivan SVETOZAREVIĆ, Manifesto NGO, Serbia</p> <p>Ján KADLEČÍK, State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic</p> <p>Eduard ARUSTAMIANT, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine</p>
	<p>Presentations by the Representatives of the PAs from the Carpathian Countries on best</p>	<p>Marie PETRU, Education and Information Centre of the White Carpathians, Czech Republic</p> <p>Zoltán BIHARI, Aggteleki National Park, Hungary</p>

	practices of protected areas management and networking	Alin MOS , Apuseni Nature Park, Romania
16:30 – 17:00	Coffee break	
17:00 – 18:30	Presentations by the Representatives of the PAs from the Carpathian Countries on best practices of protected areas management and networking - <i>continuation</i>	Ján KADLEČÍK, Peter PUCHALA, Martina LUKANOVA , State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic Mykola TARASYUK , Carpathian Biosphere Reserve, Ukraine Mykola DERBAK, Fedir MATIICHYN , National Nature Park “Synevyr”, Ukraine Taras YAMELYNETS , Expert, Ukraine
	Presentation of the Protected Area Management Effectiveness Tool	Cristian-Remus PAPP , WWF Romania
	Presentation of the CPA Status Quo - Need for Revision of the Strategic CPA Documents and Discussing the Way Forward	Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention
	Interactive Exercise – Future Activities relevant for the Carpathian PAs	Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention
	Recommendations and Next Steps	Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention and the CPA SC Chair
	Wrap-up of the Carpathian Protected Areas Conference	Mircea VERGHELEȚ , Steering Committee Chair, Carpathian Network of Protected Areas
14:00 – 16:30	Connectivity Academy – part I (in parallel to the CPA Conference): ConnectGREEN's potential transferable outputs planned and ad-hoc meetings - Central and Eastern cooperation <i>Mozaik Conference Room (Zoom)</i>	
19:00	Dinner	

Day 3 - 30 September

Time:	Agenda item:	Speaker(s)/Presenter(s):
8:30 – 10:30	Connectivity Academy – part II Carpathian Wetland Initiative Workshop <i>Mozaik Conference Room (Zoom)</i>	Ján KADLEČÍK , State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic
9:00 – 9:30	Workshops Wrap-up <i>Mátyás Conference Room (stream, Zoom)</i>	<u>Moderator:</u> Csaba MEZEI , CEEweb for Biodiversity Workshop Rapporteurs
9:40 – 11:15	ConnectGREEN Final Conference <i>Mátyás Conference Room (stream, Zoom)</i> <u>Moderator:</u> Csaba MEZEI , CEEweb for Biodiversity	
9:40 – 10:00	Overall presentation of results & outputs including a moderated Q&A session	Cristian-Remus PAPP , WWF Romania
10:00 – 10:45	Panel discussion on lessons learnt, experience made, recommendations for follow up activities and policy work	Zuzana OKÁNIKOVÁ , State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic Martin STRNAD , Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic Dr. NAGY Gabriella , CEEweb for Biodiversity, Hungary Dr. NENKOVIĆ-RIZNIĆ Marina , Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning, Serbia, online Hildegard MEYER , WWF Central and Eastern Europe Cristian-Remus PAPP , WWF Romania
10:45 – 11:15	Presentation of Conference Declaration addressing Higher Level Stakeholders & Agreement with Participants	Cristian-Remus PAPP , WWF Romania Csaba MEZEI , CEEweb for Biodiversity
11:15 – 11:30	Official Closing of the Conference	Harald EGERER , Head of the UNEP Vienna Programme Office, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention Cristian-Remus PAPP , WWF Romania
11:30 – 12:00	Coffee Break & Preparation for the “Walk shops”	
12:00 – 19:00	“Walk shops” & Press Field Visit	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk shop 1: “River adventure on River Ipoly” • Walk shop 2 “Walking adventure to Pilis Mountain” • Walk shop 3 “Training adventure up to Nógrád Fortres” 	

3. Topics embed to WPs

<p>Final Conference held: the ConnectGREEN final conference aimed to promote results and outcomes of the project, to involve relevant stakeholders and to enhance cross-sectoral discussion on ecological connectivity.</p> <p>T3.4 Output Knowledge transfer conference for PA professionals embedding activities:</p> <p>D.T3.3.1 Share and promote the role of ecological corridors in strengthening the Natura 2000 network and the project objectives and results</p> <p>D.T3.2.4 Study tours on the integration of ecological corridors in spatial planning</p>	<p>WP 5 with support of all WPs</p>
<p>Press articles: a press conference and a field trips were held with the involvement of media representatives, spatial planners in order to gain insights on the ConnectGREEN project and the whole problem area</p> <p>Deliverable C.2.3 Press articles in English and local languages</p> <p>Deliverable C.3.1 Press conferences</p>	<p>WP C</p>
<p>Workshop was held to present the EIA problem area and search for solutions, comments, initiatives support the project approach.</p> <p>D.T4.3.1 - Workshop reports on EIA process problems, according to information collected over national workshops and one international event</p> <p>T4.2 Detailed report on the possibilities to improve the EIA Directive</p>	<p>WP C</p>

4. Description of the event

On 28-30 September 2021, the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CPA) Steering Committee, WWF, CEEweb, and EURAC Research held the International Conference “*Protected Areas - Cornerstones of Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians and Beyond*” in Visegrád, Hungary and virtually via Zoom or a live stream on YouTube.

The event addressed stakeholders working in and around protected areas at different levels to **gain knowledge and share experiences on ecological connectivity**. Furthermore, through a special session organised by the [Centralparks](#) project (“*Building Management Capacities of Carpathian Protected Areas for the Integration and Harmonization of Biodiversity Protection and Local Socio-economic Development*”), the event **fostered collaboration** between protected area professionals in the Carpathians and beyond. Representatives of related sectors like agriculture, spatial planning and forestry attended the conference. The conference aimed to **generate cross-sectoral discussions** and aimed to **enhance the cooperation between these sectors** regarding protecting and restoring ecological connectivity.

4.1 Welcome session & keynote speeches

The first day of the Conference opened with a welcome session with introductions by **Bertalan Balczó** (*Deputy State Secretary, Deputy State Secretariat for Nature Protection, Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture*) **Harald Egerer** (*Head of the UNEP Vienna Programme Office, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention*) **Mircea Verghelet** (*Steering Committee Chair, Carpathian Network of Protected Areas*) and **Irene Lucius** (*Conservation Director, WWF Central and Eastern Europe*)

In the Welcome Session **Bertalan Balczó** emphasized the importance the Visegrád location as the Danube symbolizes the cross-border cooperation, also that the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture is working on the national version of the European Biodiversity Strategy. **Harald Egerer** highlighted that ecological interoperability is also important for human health and resilience and stressed the importance of implementing holistic vision which the Carpathian Convention seeks to pursue in its everyday work. **Mircea Verghelet** emphasized the advantages of face-to-face meetings and joint exchange of knowledge, discussions and cooperation. **Irene Lucius** also mentioned the benefits of protected areas not only for wildlife, but for people as well and stressed that nature protection should go beyond boundaries of protected areas.

This was followed by four keynote speeches by **Nicola Notaro** (*Head of Unit, Nature Protection, European Commission - DG Environment*), **Wendy Elliott** (*Deputy Leader Wildlife Practice, WWF International*), **Gary Tabor** (*Executive Director, Centre for Large Landscape Conservation/ Specialist Group Leader, IUCN Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group*), and **Miklós Marton**

(Department of Environmental Development and Strategy, Ministry of Agriculture/ Steering Group Member of EU Danube Region Strategy, Priority Area 6 (EUSDR PA6), Biodiversity).

The keynote speeches took place in the second part of the opening day. **Nicola Notaro** stressed the importance of the newly adapted European Biodiversity Strategy which aims to protect and increase protected areas, therefore the resilience of the nature. **Wendy Elliot**'s presentation was focusing on the effects of migrating species, **Gary Tabor** highlighted the issues deriving from the fragmentation of habitats, stressed the importance of ecological connections and also mentioned the correlations between human and landscape health. **Miklós Marton** emphasized the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation of restoring ecological relations.

The first day ended with the Award Ceremony of the ConnectGREEN Youth Video Contest, moderated by **Hildegard Meyer** (WWF-CEE). Amongst 26 application a Serbian group of students (Aleksandar Despotović, Miodrag Manojlović, Ognjen Vučetić) was awarded by the first prize. Their video (The Memory – When you build, build for all) expressively introduces the importance of ecological corridors and issues of ecological fragmentation.

4.2 Workshops on ecological connectivity

From the morning of the second day of the conference parallel workshops were held. The workshops were focusing on issues relating to ecological connectivity, ecological corridors, spatial planning, EIA processes, etc.

Workshop 1: Identification of Ecological Corridors – the ConnectGREEN methodology *(moderated by Christian-Remus Papp – WWF Romania)*

Ecological corridors' embedding process to spatial planning: on the methodological and policy levels, providing good practices from Slovakia and Hungary on the countries' approach and progress on how to embed ecological corridors into strategic planning and country scale policy.

In this workshop participants were introduced to the ConnectGREEN “Methodology for Identification of Ecological Corridors in the Carpathian Countries by Using Large Carnivores as Umbrella Species”, related project activities and further developments. The presentations were followed-up by a moderated discussion.

Workshop 2: 2. Integration of Ecological Corridors into Spatial Planning – How to Overcome Conflicts between Connectivity Conservation and Spatial Planning (tools and best practice) - *(moderated by Dr. Valánszki István – Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences)*

During this workshop the ecological corridors' identification were introduced from a practical approach. Online and desktop tools and practical approaches were presented together with

introduction on habitat suitability modelling, structural and functional connectivity monitoring apps.

In this workshop participants were introduced about the technical tools that have been developed during the implementation of ConnectGREEN. These includes the introduction of the 'Guidelines on reducing conflicts in corridor areas', the internet-based platform 'Carpathian Countries Integrated Biodiversity Information System' (CCIBIS) including the Decision Support Tool for economic project development, the e-learning platform for students and professionals alike with units on ecological connectivity and spatial planning, and best practice examples. The workshop was followed-up by a moderated discussion.

Workshop 3: Identifying and managing ecological corridors for the restoration of natural habitat connectivity - Different EU projects approach to combine synergies and potential cooperation opportunities. *(Moderated by Isidoro De Bertoli – EURAC Research)*

During the workshop, important achievements of specific European projects developed in different geographical areas, but with the same aims, was presented. The experiences of the projects "D2C - Dare to connect," "AlpBioNet2030," "Dinalpconnect," and "Centralparks" was introduced and compared with ConnectGREEN's main implementation results. The workshop was focusing on potential synergies and connections, while also analyzing promising gaps and divergences and ways to address them through strong transnational cooperation on the topic of connectivity.

Workshop 4: EIA/SEA workshop - CEE countries' approach on the EIA processes *(moderated by Dr. Nagy Gabriella – CEEweb for Biodiversity)*

The workshop aimed to provide inputs on the feasibility study of the official Fitness Check of EIA Directive from different countries' perspectives, supporting the cross-sectoral cooperation of nature protection, infrastructure development and spatial planning, and providing road-maps for the participating countries on the progression with identical road-maps, while also compiling recommendations towards decision makers mainstreaming ecological connectivity into EIA processes using the setting of a world café.

4.3 Carpathian Protected Areas Conference – “A New Age for the Carpathian Protected Areas Network”

The afternoon of the 2nd day was dedicated to the Carpathian Protected Areas Conference “A new age for the Carpathian Protected Areas Network”, which was opened by Harald Egerer, Head of the UNEP Vienna Programme Office, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, and Mircea Vergholet, Steering Committee Chair, Carpathian Network of Protected Areas.

The session opened with a presentation of the Interreg CentralParks project given by **Hanna Öllös** (*European Wilderness Society*) and **Mircea Vergholet**. In the following session, **Cristian-Remus Papp** (*WWF Romania*) gave a presentation on the Protected Area Management Effectiveness Tool. Finally, **Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention** gave a presentation on the "CPA Status Quo - Need for Revision of the Strategic CPA Documents and Discussing the Way Forward", after which ensued an interactive exercise. Day two ended with a wrap-up and recommendations for next steps by **Harald Egerer** and **Mircea Vergholet**.

The event, launched by the Centralparks Project Partnership in strong synergy with the ConnectGREEN and the SaveGREEN projects and with fundamental support of the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, will focus on the revitalization process of the CPA network. Protected area representatives from each Carpathian country shared with the best practices in protected area management and networking in their countries, with a particular focus on achievements and experience gathered in their respective parts of the Carpathian region. The CPA Steering Committee members were invited to evaluate the progress of the work dedicated to the network achieved so far. The event aimed to offer a platform for discussions in order to foster collaboration and future cooperation among the managers of the Carpathian protected areas.

In his opening speech **Harald Egerer** emphasized the importance of cooperation between the Carpathian Conventions and managers of the Carpathian protected areas, and stressed that the improvement of the cooperation, more often networking and exchange of knowledge and experience is necessary between the stakeholders. Harald also suggested that a new action plan should be developed in order to set guidelines for the Carpathian countries and improve cooperation. The opening speech was followed by the presentations of the Carpathian countries on the general state of each countries' PA-s. Attendees of the CPA session were also introduced to the outputs of Centralparks project, received inputs from the Steering Committee Members of the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CPA) and learnt about best practices in protected areas management from protected areas representatives. This was followed by an interactive exercise, facilitated by the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, to identify relevant future focuses for the Carpathian Protected Areas Network.

4.4 Connectivity Academy – Part I.

In parallel to the CPA conference the Connectivity Academy was organised for participants. The session aiming to enhance cooperation between the Central-Eastern European Countries while also focusing on various topics such as capacity building, policy and communication regarding NGO-s working in the CEE region. CEEweb has organised the event with the main aim to introduce the project deliverables for relevant stakeholders, including the European Wilderness Society, Machaon International, Connecting Natural Values and People NGO, Eko-Zhivot NGO, Estonian Fund for Nature, Ecologist's Movement of Macedonia, UNEP / GRID-Warsaw Center, National Infrastructure Developing Private Company Limited, Ministry of Environment of the

Slovak Republic, Tatra National Park, HBH project s.r.o., Bieszczady National Park (BdPN), Eco-Centar NGO, WWF Romania.

The event held to collect stakeholders from the CEE region and discuss the selection and use of best practices, as well as negative examples related to human impacts on the green infrastructure, including technical specifications and management measures for mitigating the effects of linear infrastructures and other threats to ecological connectivity coming from other relevant sectors like forestry, wildlife management, agriculture, and water management.

The project-trilogy focusing on green infrastructure (TransGREEN, ConnectGREEN and SaveGREEN) was introduced by **Gabriella Mária Nagy PhD**, CEEweb conference, in order to provide a full picture of the available tools, practices and instruments or measures that can contribute to improving the maintenance of GI at the landscape level. The aim of the introductions was to allow a better understanding of human impacts on GI and a better identification and implementation of measures to prevent and reduce impacts by all stakeholders, especially decision makers.

Following the introduction, relevant thematic workshops held on the topic of Public health aspects of biodiversity; Protected area Communication and biodiversity conservation with the aim of capacity building. To establish the future cooperation with the invited stakeholders, CEEweb has also introduced a project building activity for relevant further joint proposals in the pilot area regarding to the topic of nature protection, biodiversity conservation and awareness raising.

The invited stakeholders agreed to add them on the stakeholder list of the project for future cooperation. The goal of the Connectivity Academy was to gain insight of the subject to help stakeholder representatives to promote the activities and the results of the GI projects to help to start public discussions on the issues regarding habitat protection, wild wading, importance of ecological corridors, social conflicts, etc.

4.5. Connectivity Academy – Part II.

Within the framework of the second part of the Connectivity Academy the Carpathian Wetland Initiative Workshop took place and was moderated and led by **Ján KADLEČÍK** (*State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic*).

The opening presentation was made by Jan Kadlecik, who gave an update on the Carpathian Wetland Initiative's current projects and operations, which was followed up by the presentations of the CWI members their current work and involvement in the projects and their potentials to bring forward the ConnectGREEN – SaveGREEN - Centralparks projects outputs as a permanent body of the Carpathian Convention.

4.6 ConnectGREEN final conference – 3rd day

The final day of the 3-day event was dedicated to the ConnectGREEN Final Conference.

The day began with an overall presentation of project results & outputs by **Cristian-Remus Papp** (WWF Romania) including a moderated Q&A session. After that we heard a panel discussion between the Work Package Leaders of ConnectGREEN on lessons learnt, experience made, recommendations for follow up activities and policy work.

Panellists emphasized that the current challenges can be also seen as possibilities. Adaptation to changes require huge efforts which highlights the importance of capacity building activities and dissemination of project results and tools. Enhancing cooperation between stakeholders is crucial, so as to involve engineers and spatial planning professionals. The cooperation between NGO-s working in the Carpathian countries is smooth and effective, but there is a lot to be done regarding the implementation of ecological corridors in spatial planning. Panellists also mentioned that the Covid-19 pandemic required to adapt new ways of cooperation, management and policy work, but the consortium proved to be resilient and could adapt to the changes by finding alternate ways of operation.

The last session of the day and the entire event was dedicated to the presentation of a Conference Declaration. After an open discussion based on which some amendments were made, the Conference Declaration was officially adopted by the participants.

The Conference was called to a ceremonious end by **Cristian-Remus Papp** (WWF Romania) and **Harald Egerer**, (Head of the UNEP Vienna Programme Office, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention).

4.6.1 Conference Declaration

The final version of the Conference Declaration was adopted by the participants on the final day of the conference:

The CONNECTGREEN1 International Conference, organized in Visegrád and online on the 28th-30th of September 2021 with the support of UNEP - Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CPA) Steering Committee, WWF, CEEweb for Biodiversity, and EURAC Research (Lead Partner of the Interreg Central Europe Centralparks project), brought together key stakeholders working in and around protected areas at different levels to gain a common understanding, knowledge and share experiences on ecological connectivity in the Carpathians. They are united by the common goal to raise awareness on the need for cross-sectoral approaches and cooperation for the identification, conservation and restoration of ecological connectivity in the Carpathians and beyond. The Conference concluded that avoiding/minimising habitat fragmentation, maintaining and restoring ecological connectivity between Natura 2000 sites and other

protected and conserved areas in the region is of high importance, and only possible if a science-based and proactive cross-sectoral approach is applied at the local, national, regional and EU level.

We, the conference participants, accepting that habitat fragmentation influences biodiversity and ecological integrity in a significant way, herewith call on the European Commission, the European Parliament and the national governments of the Danube-Carpathian region to drive the efficient management of ecological corridors, avoid further deterioration, restore their functionality and reverse habitat fragmentation, and to

- Acknowledge that a closer cooperation between the European Protected Areas networks shall facilitate joint activities for the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecological connectivity in the Carpathian region in the future.
- Provide and activate adequate financial resources and transboundary consultations for implementation of integrative spatial planning and green infrastructure development. Public investment policies, including the EU structural funds, have to prioritise sectorally and regionally integrated approaches, aiming at harmonising the interests of environmental protection and economic development.
- Foster design and finance capacity building measures to empower stakeholders to participate effectively in spatial planning processes, including how to properly design the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the environmental impact assessments, supervise their development and conclude on results such as adapting the siting and design of infrastructures.
- Underline that adjustments of national legislative tools may be necessary to avoid/minimise habitat fragmentation, maintain the functionality of ecological corridors and efficiently manage Natura 2000 sites and other protected and conserved areas, in tune with recommendations developed within the ConnectGREEN project together with spatial planners.
- Encourage integration of ecological corridors into spatial planning in order to find best solutions for the harmonization of development needs with biodiversity conservation on the level of spatial and urban planning, construction, operation and maintenance.
- Emphasize the need for enabling sustainable spatial planning by amending, where necessary, relevant policies, strategies and laws, in particular those related to biodiversity conservation and spatial planning, e.g. on identifying, managing, monitoring and ensuring the functionality of ecological corridors.
- Support a cross-sectorally based and internationally harmonized framework that can bring a solid basis for long-term efficient and functioning ecological networks in the Carpathian region, a prerequisite for viable large carnivore populations.
- Draw attention to the need to invest in the restoration of ecological corridors, the maintaining of their functionality, and the maintenance of mitigation measures, to

ensure their coherence and integrity long after the implementation of different infrastructure or other development projects.

- We welcome the result of related projects such as “D2C - Dare to connect”, “AlpBioNet2030”, “Dinalpconnect”, “Centralparks”, “LIFE Green-Go! Carpathians”, “TRANSGREEN” and “SaveGREEN”, including synergies and connections, while analysing gaps and divergences, and ways to address them through strong transnational cooperation on the topic of connectivity. We express our willingness to sustain and apply the findings of those projects.
- Recognizing that the Carpathians are a major element of the EU’s ecological network, encourage the EU to accede to the Carpathian Convention as a holistic instrument to foster ecological connectivity.

4.7. Press conference

The closing session of the ConnectGREEN final conference was followed by a **Press Conference** with the involvement of project partners and media representatives. The main aim of the press conference was to involve media representatives to gain insights and hands-on examples on the ConnectGREEN project. The press conference was a great opportunity for the media representatives for deep understanding of the project and its outcomes, also to gain knowledge on protected areas, ecological connectivity, ecological corridors and large carnivores.

The Press Conference was organized with the involvement of 3 media outlets (Tilos Rádió, Zöldbolt.hu and a social media influencer site of Aleksandra Khriv, GreenAdvisor YouTube channel, also with green infrastructure professionals and project partners (Dr. Nagy Gabriella, Weiperth András, Lazaros Georgiadis). The press conference was meant to enhance knowledge transfer and to gain comprehensive and thorough press articles in the relevant media outlets to disseminate the project results and outcomes to a broader audience.

4.8 Walk-shops

Field trips were planned on the final day of the ConnectGREEN conference:

- Walk shop 1” River adventure on River Ipoly”
- Walk shop 2 “Walking adventure to Pilis Mountain”
- Walk shop 3 “Training adventure up to Nógrád Fortres”

Due to unfortunate weather conditions ‘River adventure on River Ipoly’ excursion had to be cancelled and was merged into Walk shop 3 “Training adventure up to Nógrád Fortress”.

4.8.1 Walk shop 1&3 “Training adventure up to Nógrád Fortres”

CEEweb has organised the event with the main aim to deepen the public awareness on nature protection, more specifically the to gain insight and deepen public knowledge of the situation of the wildlife in Hungary. The walk-shop was a side event of the ConnectGREEN project and was organised within the framework of the SaveGREEN project.

CEEweb invited the press and relevant stakeholders to the event to introduce the SaveGREEN project and therefore to reach a broader audience. The event was originally planned to be held as a river adventure on Ipoly river, however due to bad weather conditions on the 30th of September, the canoeing tour had to be cancelled. Instead of the river excursion, CEEweb invited the press representatives first to Hotel Silvanus Visegrád to hold a press conference on the topic of the SaveGREEN project and the conflicts between infrastructure development, nature protection and interest of the locals affected by this issue. Representatives of the Zöldbolt Magazin and the GreenAdvisor Youtube channel joined onsite to the discussion, moreover the representative of Tilos Rádió followed the press conference online. After the press conference, the representatives and other relevant stakeholders travelled to visit the Nógrád fortress, meanwhile discussing the land-use change and impacts of railway and road infrastructure on ecological corridors, conflicts of nature protection and rural development. CEEweb has organised the activity, led the discussions and held press conferences and press trips to promote the SaveGREEN project.

Summary of follow up activities

During the event CEEweb has managed to give a comprehensive and thorough picture on the subject of the wildlife at the Duna-Ipoly pilot area in Hungary. We have introduced the SaveGREEN project in details to the media representatives, so they were able to deeply understand the situation and context of ecological corridors and conflicts of nature protection and infrastructure development. The information was provided to the media representatives at the press conference could be a strong base for a comprehensive article/radio podcast on the project. The goal was to gain insight of the subject to help media representatives preparing an article/radio podcast which helps to promote the activities and the results of the SaveGREEN project. The article/radio podcast will hopefully be able to gain insights on the project on a national level and will help to start public discussions on the issues regarding habitat protection, wild wading, importance of ecological corridors, social conflicts, etc.

4.8.2 Walk shop 2 “Walking adventure to Pilis Mountain”

The excursion took place in the surroundings of the conference venue, in the Pilis Mountain. The weather conditions were still not the best, but a few of the registrants took part in it despite it was mostly raining. During the trip the attendees visited the Salamon-torony and the Visegrád Castle as well.

The excursion was led by Dr. Filepné Kovács Krisztina (*Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences*). During the excursion attendees visited the main spots of the Pilis Mountain relevant to the ConnectGREEN project while discussing the topic of forestry, wildlife management on ecological corridors, nature conservation endeavours in the past and possibilities in the future, also the flora and fauna of the Pilis Mountain was explained and all these topics embedding to spatial planning. Marton Miklós (*St Steering Group Member of EU Danube Region Strategy, Priority Area 6 - EUSDR PA6*) explained the issues of preserving biodiversity, landscapes and ecological connections in the region.

During the excursion attendees were introduced the ecological, cultural and economical aspects and issues of the region such as preserving and restoring natural areas, conflicts between rural development goals and nature protection pursuits. Also, attendees could gain insight in the region's cultural inheritance while visiting the exhibitions in the Visegrád Castle and Salamon-torony, while also discussing the economical and political aspects of nature protection endeavours and possibilities in the region.

5. Invitation



Save-the-date invitation

to the International Conference on

"Protected areas – corner stones of ecological connectivity in the
Carpathians and beyond"

event of ConnectGreen project

28-30 September 2021

Physical event (if possible) in Visegrád + additional national events +
on-line event + YouTube broadcast

Dear Sir/Madam,

As responsible organizer partner of the International Conference on "Protected areas – corner stones of ecological connectivity in the Carpathians and beyond" event of the *ConnectGREEN project – Restoring and managing ecological corridors in mountains as the green infrastructure in the Danube Basin* we have the pleasure to invite you to the project closing event that takes place on 28-30 September, 2021 in Visegrád, Hungary together with the possibility to join on-line to the conference, take part in several side events in the participating countries and follow on YouTube Broadcast.

The 3 days long conference will contain high level policy discussions, workshops to present tools and application to spatial planners and nature protection experts, field visits and many more side events.

The main topics of the event:

- Management of ecological corridors
- Restoration of ecological corridors
- Ecological corridors and ecosystem services
- Identification of ecological corridors
- Integration of ecological corridors into spatial planning
- Training of Trainers on habitat suitability modelling, GIS Linkage Mapping, functional and structural connectivity modelling
- EIA / SEA workshop for feasibility study of official Fitness Check of EIA Directive
- Cross-sectoral cooperation and stakeholder engagement

Project co-funded by European Union Funds (ERDF, IPA)



Tentative agenda:

DAY 1 - 28th of September, 2021
Welcome coffee
15.00-18.00 Welcome session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture • Carpathian Convention and CNPA • Alpine Convention and ALPARC
Press conference + on-line press corner broadcasting (constant coffee corner)
Keynote speeches topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of ecological connectivity for biodiversity conservation (including large carnivores) and provision of ecosystem services • Role of protected areas as core areas for ecological networks, overview in Europe including policy • Spatial planning, need for cooperation, importance of planning systems be ready to integrate ecological connectivity into strategic planning
Welcome ceremony & Gala Dinner – Video Contest award ceremony
DAY 2 - 29th of September, 2021
9:00-13:00 Workshops/trainings topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and restoration of ecological corridors • Ecological corridors and ecosystem services (Centralparks ecosystem services toolkit) • Identification of ecological corridors – training on the methodology developed by ConnectGREEN Project Partners • Integration of ecological corridors into spatial planning – training on the necessary steps, discussion of gaps (roadmap, legal aspects, capacity need) – Introducing the Guidelines, DST and CCIBIS (by SPECTRA University for Excellence) • Training of Trainers on habitat suitability modelling, GIS Linkage Mapping, functional and structural connectivity modelling by ConnectGreen and SaveGREEN projects • EIA / SEA workshop for feasibility study of official Fitness Check of EIA Directive by ConnectGreen project • Cross-sectoral cooperation and stakeholder engagement
Buffet lunch

Project co-funded by European Union Funds (ERDF, IPA)



<p>14:00-16:00 CNPA Conference chaired by Mircea Verghet and moderated by Isidoro De Bortoli</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Views / visions of CNPA future - open discussion between CNPA members
<p>14:00-16:00 In parallel, Video Contest show-room with coffee corner for those participants who do not attend the CNPA Conference session</p>
<p>17:00-18:30 High level policy experience exchange session with Mountain Ranges</p>
<p>Day closing dinner</p>
<p>DAY 3 - 30th of September, 2021</p> <p>9:00-11:00 ConnectGREEN Final conference, presentation of results, panel discussion on lessons learnt, experiences made, recommendations for maintaining and improving connectivity</p>
<p>Brunch coffee break</p>
<p>11:30-20:00 Walk shops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - River adventure on River Ipoly - Walking adventure to Pils Mountain - Train adventure to Castle of Nógrád

Project co-funded by European Union Funds (ERDF, IPA)



ConnectGREEN final conference: "Protected Areas – Cornerstones of Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians and Beyond" – 28-30/09/2021.

www.interreg-danube.eu/ConnectGREEN
Project co-funded by European Union funds (ERDF, I)



We kindly ask you to save the date of the event hoping for a healthy and joined conference for the benefit of nature and for the cooperation of the region.

For more information, please visit www.interreg-danube.eu/connectgreen.

Sincerely yours,

Mircea Vergholet
Carpathian Network Of
Protected Areas
SC Chair

Harald Egerer
Secretariate of the Carpathian
Convention
*Head, Vienna Office
UN Environment Programme*

Isidoro De Bortoli
EURAC Research
*Lead Partner representative of
Centralparks project*

Cristian Remus Papp
WWF Romania
*Lead Partner representative of
ConnectGreen project*

Hildegard Meyer
WWF-Central Eastern Europe
Programme
*Main organizer of CNPA
Conference*

Gabriella Mária Nagy PhD
CEEweb for Biodiversity
*Main organizer of CNPA
Conference*

Project co-funded by European Union Funds (ERDF, IPA)



6. Annexes

List of annexes:

- Annex I – Photo documentation of the event
- Annex II – Registration sheets