

Conference Report



10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference

15.-19. October 2018

World Heritage Site

Wartburg, Eisenach
Germany



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1 Introduction

The 10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference 2018 was held from October 15 to October 19 at the World Heritage Site Wartburg in the city of Eisenach/Germany. The conference was jointly organised by BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany), EuroNatur, the Thuringian Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Nature Conservation (TMUEN) and the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN).

More than 120 representatives from NGOs and GOs coming from 21 adjacent countries as well as Korea and Liechtenstein were present. The aim of the conference was to provide a platform to exchange experiences and knowledge, as well as developing further joint activities and partnerships. In addition, the bi-annual General Assembly of the European Green Belt Association e.V. was organized in the context of the Green Belt Conference.

A thematic focus of the conference was the presentation and discussion of the results of the BfN-funded project "The Green Belt as Part of the Green Infrastructure" implemented by BUND and EuroNatur. Furthermore, approaches for better protection and development of the Green Belt Europe from the different regions were presented and discussed in presentations and a poster session on best practice examples. In addition, six workshops offered the opportunity for thematically focused cooperation and networking. As a joint message, the participants of the conference adopted the "Eisenach Resolution on the European Green Belt".

This report gives an insight into the topics discussed and the results elaborated during the conference. The 10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference 2018 was held from October 15 to October 19 at the World Heritage Site Wartburg in the city of Eisenach/Germany. The conference was jointly organised by BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany), EuroNatur, the Thuringian Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Nature Conservation (TMUEN) and the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN).

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Figure 1: Participants of the 10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference, © J.Buldmann/BUND

2 Opening and Welcome Speeches

The following persons opened the meeting, welcomed the participants and gave introductory words.

- Dr. Liana Geidezis, BUND Department Green Belt
- Katja Wolf, Mayor of city of Eisenach
- Dr. Uwe Riecken, German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN)
- Prof. Dr. Hubert Weiger, Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND) and EuroNatur
- Gabriel Schwaderer, EuroNatur
- Anja Siegesmund, Thuringian Environmental Minister
- Svenja Schulze, German Federal Environmental Minister (video message)
- Stefan Leiner, Directorate-General Environment, EU Commission
- Michael Cramer, Member of European Parliament

The video message of Svenja Schulze is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NycCNPgYk1c&feature=youtu.be>



Figure 2: Video message of Svenja Schulze, German Federal Environmental Minister

3 1st session: Update from the four regions of the European Green Belt

3.1 Green Belt Fennoscandia

Aimo Saano, Metsähallitus, Parks and Wildlife Finland

Pavel Petrov, Regional Coordinator, Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia



Figure 3: Representatives of the Green Belt Fennoscandia, © J.Buldmann/BUND

- Since the 9th Pan-European Green Belt Conference in Koli 2016 the focus for the Green Belt of Fennoscandia (GBF) was laid on capacity building and engagement of regional and local authorities.
- The GBF has a visible role in tackling the challenges of climate change. The GBF raises awareness about the threats of climate change to ecosystems and their services. For example, the Finnish Environmental Administration lists the role of the GBF in its plan for adaptation to climate change, in improving ecological connectivity as a north-south connection.
- EU-Russia Cross Border Cooperation Programmes have an important role in enhancing ecological, economic, social, cultural and environmental cooperation between Finland, Russia and Norway. The nature conservation component of the programmes should though be larger than today.
- The trilateral cooperation is based on the Memorandum of Understanding, signed in 2010. The Memorandum should be renewed for another 10 years' period. This would help to further improve the cooperation in the fields of nature conservation, preservation of biodiversity as well as cultural and historical heritage.

3.2 Baltic Green Belt

Jörg Schmiedel, Regional Coordinator, BUND Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Germany

Ekaterina Uspenskaya, Friends of the Baltic, Russia

Janis Matulis, Latvian Green Movement



Figure 4: Representatives of the Baltic Green Belt, © J.Buldmann/BUND

- Since 2016 there were many developments, especially connected with the process of setting up projects that involve external partners in the work on the Green Belt.
- At the Baltic Green Belt special problems regarding nature conservation appear due to the specific characteristics of coastal habitats. It is not possible to acquire property here and conservation measures depend on the good-will of the authorities. It costs a lot of effort to achieve sustainability in nature conservation work.
- Russian legislation is forcing NGOs to find new ways for cooperation. Some partner-NGOs were lost due to inaccurate allegations. The Network established around the European Green Belt is more important than ever, because it can support organisations in flexible ways.
- There are a high number of international and national projects and cooperations. For the future, however, the activities of social and green NGOs must be enhanced. The Baltic Sea is an industrial region, and active and creative NGOs are vital for the development of the Green Belt.

3.3 Central European Green Belt

Dr. Liana Geidezis, Regional Coordinator, BUND Department Green Belt, Germany

Giuseppe Oriolo, Rete Italiana EGB / Friends of the Italian Green Belt, Italy

Stanislava Dešnik, Nature Park Goričko, Slovenia



Figure 5: Representatives of the Central European Green Belt, © J.Buldmann/BUND

- Due to two new EU-Projects (Interreg "DaRe to Connect" and LIFE "Life for Mires") new GOs and NGOs are integrated in the stakeholder and partner network for the European Green Belt.
- New protected areas have been established at the European Green Belt: The Styrian Mur in Austria on the border with Slovenia on 19 June 2019 was added as the last constituent to the future five-country UNESCO Biosphere Park Mur-Drava-Danube, covering also areas in Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia.
- Some of the many public relations activities were: Leopoldschlag in Austria was awarded as a model municipality. Several activities during the GB-Days took place. Several press trips caused a great response in the media. An animated movie with the German Green Belt mascot Bely was produced and will have its premiere at this conference.
- The Rete Italiana EGB was founded in 2016 to take care of all EGB activities in Friuli Venezia Giulia. Good cooperations with the regional coordinator and the national focal point are already established. Exhibitions, local events, and excursions to the ecological and cultural heritage of the border area took place to raise awareness of the EGB among the local population. Exercise material for schools is also planned. The role of the EGB is now officially recognized in the Landscape Protection Plan of Friuli Venezia Giulia as part of the Ecological Network and main international corridor.
- Main obstacles for NGOs to initiate and implement large trans-national projects:
 - (1) The financial and human resources required for the preparation often exceed the capacities of an NGO.
 - (2) Especially for Interreg projects, the costs must be pre-financed for one year or longer. For smaller NGOs this is nearly impossible.
 - (3) For LIFE projects the own financial contribution necessary can be up to 40%. This is very high for an NGO. In Bavaria for example, regional funds help to overcome these obstacles. This is usually not the case in other regions or countries and should be reconsidered.

3.4 Balkan Green Belt

Anne Katrin Heinrichs, Regional Coordinator, EuroNatur, Germany

Despina Kitanova, Macedonian Ecological Society, North Macedonia

Adhurim Kasapi, Environmentally Responsible Action (ERA) group, Kosovo



Figure 6: Representatives of the Balkan Green Belt, © J.Buldmann/BUND

- Several projects on local and regional level were implemented.
- Measures in communication and awareness raising were taken: Events in almost all countries were carried out during the EGB days. In two photo competitions in 2016 and 2017 beautiful pictures could be collected, which may be used for future communication.
- One of the most important events in the framework of the European Green Belt Days was a hike with participants from Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro to the border triangle. Such a hike was unimaginable 20 years ago and means a lot today.
- The Balkan Regional Conference was held in Strumica (North-Macedonia) in June 2018 with 9 participating countries. It enabled an exchange about nature, nature conservation, culture and cultural heritage. By learning from each other, work can be improved and joint activities can be planned.
- The award for the Municipality of Peja (Kosovo) as a “Model Municipality at the EGB” has a great importance: From all over Kosovo, people visit Peja to experience unspoiled nature. The municipality took many steps towards environmental protection and sustainable development. For example, for many years the mayor of Peja has unwaveringly been refusing to approve the construction of five hydropower plants in the Rugova Canyon right in Bjeshkët e Nemuna National Park. Furthermore, cooperation between Peja and the city of Plav (Montenegro) was established.
- The very committed and enthusiastic partner-network of the Balkan Green Belt is a main factor for successful cooperation. In several countries the EGB is supported by GOs. A strategic framework could give the work direction and help to ensure future funding. Furthermore, it is important to expand the partner network to sectors outside nature conservation.

4 2nd session: European Green Belt as model for EU-level Green Infrastructure

- Definition of a spatial reference area of the European Green Belt, Petko Tzvetkov, Board of the European Green Belt Association and Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation
- Contribution of the European Green Belt to the implementation of EU-level Green Infrastructure, Werner Rolf, Landwärts

The presentation slides are available at:

https://www.europeangreenbelt.org/index.php?id=49&no_cache=1

5 3rd session – panel discussion: The European Green Belt as Green Infrastructure: challenges, strategies and partnerships



Figure 7: Panel Discussion, © J.Buldmann/BUND

Participants (from left to right):

Prof. Dr. Joachim-Felix Leonhard, member of the German UNESCO Commission (DUK) and chair of the German National Committee of the UNESCO Memory of the World

Anja Siegesmund, Thuringian Minister of Environment, Energy and Nature Conservation

Martin Geilhufe, Landesbeauftragter of BUND Bavaria; Moderation

Stefan Leiner, Head of the Biodiversity Unit, DG Environment, European Commission

Gabriel Schwaderer, Executive Director of EuroNatur Foundation, chair of the European Green Belt Association

Main Statements of the Panel Discussion (summarized):

Anja Siegesmund

- Declaring the Green Belt in Thuringia a National Nature Monument would give opportunities to foster both memorial work and nature conservation; e.g. it would enable the government to fund local authorities to create conservation-infrastructure and tourism.

- Local authorities and their needs were involved in the process of working towards the declaration; it was essential to demonstrate how economic and ecological aspects can successfully be connected.
- Memory must not be allowed to fade. Today as new fences and walls are being discussed all over the world our memorial responsibility towards future generations becomes obvious. The European Green Belt shows that former death strips can be lifelines. Fulfilling these responsibilities is a “Herzensangelegenheit” [Ger.: “Matter of the heart”].
- The idea of an application for the nomination of the EGB as UNESCO World Heritage is good and should be pursued further. This can only be achieved as the outcome of the work of everyone dedicated to the EGB. Given the special character of the EGB, being World Heritage would strengthen its role as a symbol to preserve memory in the future.

Gabriel Schwaderer:

- Earmark-funding for Green Infrastructure (GI) in the EU budget and a general increase in funding for nature conservation and biodiversity would be very important. This would highlight the importance of biodiversity and make sure investments in GI are made. This is a joint responsibility of the EU-Parliament, the member states, the EU-Council and the EU-Commission.
- Installing a TEN-G concept (Trans-European Network for Green Infrastructure) unfortunately failed up to now. To copy the concept of grey infrastructure to connect Europe would have been an opportunity to have a number of outstanding examples for Trans-European biodiversity-networks.
- New fences being built along the former Iron Curtain is harmful to both nature and people.
- Usually societies decide in favour of infrastructure projects and against concerns of nature. EGB should be a space where decisions are usually taken with a reversed priority. Countries along the EGB should consider the EGB as a core area for ecological development.
- The EGB is a very convincing statement for European friendship and understanding.

Stefan Leiner:

- The idea of the EGB fits 100% to EU policies for GI, biodiversity and environment. The stories behind it - like concrete projects and successes and achievements and the idea of GI – it should be brought to a broader public and members of EU-Parliament.
- What would be needed to better support GI-Initiatives is a better incorporation of the environment in EU policies in general; currently environment is not included in the existing Priority Areas. Taking sustainable development goals as a basis for overall EU policies would lead to incorporation of GI into environment- but also transport-, regional development-, fishery- agriculture policies. GI needs to be more binding and accepted to solve incoherence of EU financing projects protecting as well as projects destroying nature.
- The concept of TEN-G is difficult to sell, as objective criteria need to be developed first.

- To have earmark-funds being established everyone has to work in his/her member-state, arguing that such funding is wanted.

Prof. Dr. Joachim-Felix Leonhard:

- Being responsible for the memory of the world means to also think about lost memories. Preserving memories for coming generations is a necessary duty.
- The declaration of the Thuringian part of the inner-German Green Belt as National Nature Monument is a pilot-action, as it is focussing on nature, education, science and culture. Something that is thought about in the UNESCO as well.
- UNESCO will be following the discussions and outcomes of this conference. The conference is a good place to think about a nomination as world heritage for the European Green Belt. Up to now already two former borders are world heritage sites: The Chinese Wall and the Limes. Both –as the European Green Belt – share the common thought of leaving the symbol for separation behind and be a bridge.
- A joint application of all 24 countries for the nomination would be an interesting approach.
- More exchange programmes for young people are needed for them to learn about cultures and nature. The Green Belt would be a good place for such programmes.

As a joint message, the participants of the conference adopted the "Eisenach Resolution on the European Green Belt". All decision-makers and actors from the European to the local level are called upon to support and implement the necessary measures for the conservation and development of the Green Belt as part of the Green Infrastructure, backbone of a pan-European ecological network and living cultural heritage.

The Eisenach Resolution is available at:

https://www.europeangreenbelt.org/fileadmin//user_upload/Eisenach_Resolution.pdf



Figure 8: Anja Siegesmund, Thuringian Minister of Environment, and Gabriel Schwaderer, Chair of the European Green Belt Association, signing the Eisenach Resolution, © J.Buldmann/BUND

6 4th session: Instruments to secure and improve the functionality of the European Green Belt

The following presentations were held to share successful examples to improve the functionality of the European Green Belt.

- The Green Belt on the way to a National Nature Monument – BUND Thuringia´s campaign for local acceptance, Karin Kowol, BUND Thuringia
- The European Green Belt Factor – Dare to Connect, Melanie Kreutz, BUND Department Green Belt
- Stakeholder involvement in activities of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM): lessons and prospects, Mikhail Durkin, HELCOM
- Feasibility study: Green Belt Region Upper Palatinate (Bavaria) - Czech Republic, Peter Blum, Planning office Dipl.-Ing. Blum, landscape and spatial development
- The Prespa-Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) – Financing transboundary conservation in Southeast Europe, Vasiliki Roumeliotou, Society for the Protection of Prespa, Greece
- Spectrum of actions along the Fennoscandian Green Belt - examples of implemented, ongoing and planned projects, Mikko Tiira, Metsähallitus, Parks and Wildlife Finland

The presentations are available at:

https://www.europeangreenbelt.org/index.php?id=49&no_cache=1

7 5th session – poster session: Sharing best practice examples

Best practices about different activities along the European Green Belt were presented at a poster session:

- The Green Belt, Predators and semi-domesticated Reindeer, Alfred Colpaert, University of Eastern Finland
- Fragmentation of Western Capercaillies's Biotope in the Šumava Mountains and the Bavarian Forest, Ondřej Volf, Eva Volfová, Ametyst
- Goricko Landscape and guided hikes for nature experience, Gregor Domanjko, Stanka Desnik, Goricko Nature Park Public Institute
- Einsatz für das Grüne Band Thüringen, Stiftung Naturschutz Thüringen
- The return of white-tailed eagle, Ivan Darco Grlica, Natural History Society Drava
- Use of History in Ecotourism and Conservation in the Fennoscandian Green Belt, Maria Lähteenmäki, University of Eastern Finland
- Survey for a return of the European mink (*Mustela lutreola*) along the Bavarian-Czech Green Belt, Lisa Deak, University Göttingen, Dr. Liana Geidezis and Melanie Kreutz, BUND Department Green Belt
- D2C - DaRe to Connect: Supporting Danube Region's ecological Connectivity by linking Natura 2000 areas along the Green Belt, Martin Kuba, BUND Department Green Belt
- Feasibility Study Green Belt Region Upper Palatinate (Bavaria) – Czech Republic, Peter Blum, Planning Office Dipl.-Ing. Blum, landscape and spatial development
- Improving the European Green Belt Initiative with an international photo contest: a preliminary proposal, Philippe Fayt, School of Forest Sciences, University of Eastern Finland
- Large-Scale Conservation Project, Green Belt Rodachtal-Lange Berge-Steinachtal, Stefan Beyer, Zweckverband Grünes Band Rodachtal - Lange Berge – Steinachtal
- Green Belt in Virovitica Podravina county, Croatia, Tatjana Arnold Sabo,
- Spatial distribution of protected areas in Balkan Green Belt, border of Serbia with Romania, Tea Požar Department of Geography, University of Bamberg
- Closing Gaps in the Green Belt Germany, Uwe Friedel, BUND Department Green Belt



Figure 9: Participants of the poster session © J.Buldmann/BUND

8 6th session – parallel working groups: The European Green Belt – today, tomorrow and beyond

8.1 Introduction to Working Groups

Main objectives of the working group session were to define and further elaborate joint fields of cooperation on the Pan-European level to drive further and bring forward the European Green Belt Initiative and to offer the opportunity for concrete planning of (joint) activities throughout the European Green Belt. Another important objective was the facilitation of exchange and knowledge sharing of conference participants. Eventually, the working session was also intended to define key tasks for the Programme of Work (PoW) of the European Green Belt Association for the period 2019-20.

The topics for the working groups were selected by the Board of the European Green Belt Association, based basically on the results of the Balkan Green Belt Regional Conference. During the Balkan Green Belt Regional Conference enabling conditions for strengthening cooperation in the frame of the European Green Belt Initiative were identified. The results have shown that a strategic framework is required to provide a basis for further cooperation and to improve effectiveness. This strategic framework should refer to several closely interrelated elements (see Figure 1) and is considered to be of equal significance for the cooperation in other regions and on the Pan-European level. Accordingly, the working groups addressing individual elements of the strategic framework were a first step to elaborate contributions for a strategic framework of the European Green Belt.



Figure 10: Elements of a strategic Framework for the European Green Belt

The three-hour session was facilitated by an external consultant, Felix Cybulla. Facilitation during group work was supported by Board members and participants.

The concept was elaborated by the facilitator in close cooperation with EuroNatur Foundation and the Board of the European Green Belt Association. Detailed concepts for each of the working groups, including methods of moderation, tasks and questions have been developed. The given tasks were specific so that results were concrete and tangible and suitable to be transferred to the PoW, if needed. All groups were asked to follow a similar knowledge capture structure to streamline the result format and facilitate easy presentation of results.

Participants were able to decide for one of the following six working groups:

- Competent and dedicated Partner Network Across Sectors
- 1. Engaging Public & Local Authorities & Protected Area Administrations
- 2. Synergies of Nature Conservation & Historic Preservation
- Communication Strategy
- 3. Stepping up European Green Belt Communications
- 4. 30 years after the Iron Curtain
- Scientific Justification of the importance of the European Green Belt
- 5. Calling the Science Community
- Programmatic Funding
- 6. What if we were rich?

8.2 Results Working Groups

Group 1: Competent and dedicated partner network across sectors - Engaging Public & Local Authorities & Protected Area Administrations

Group Moderators: Aimo Saano (Metsähallitus) and André Maslo (Ecological educational institution Upper Franconia)

Guiding Question: "How can we mutually support and benefit from each other to create a maximum of synergies?"

In a first step the moderators gave a short introduction into the working group as well as time for an introduction round. After that an exchange about examples and experiences took place in order to get a picture of what has happened so far and what is today's situation. During the exchange different types of authorities, agencies and administrations were collected in order to better understand relevant stakeholders.

Local Authority	State	Protected areas including Cultural Heritage Management
Municipality	Water Ministry	Church (Serbia)
Competent Authority	Forest Ministry	Forestry Company
County Authority	Border Guards	State Organisations
Public Enterprises	State Foundation (2 in Russia)	NGOs
"land owner groups"	International Conservation Agreements	Military Institutions
		Religious organizations
		Culture
		Municipality

In a next step the group collected ways of how the different stakeholders can support the European Green Belt as well as mutual benefits:

Actors	Activity	Benefit (for Authorities etc.)
PA Managers Municipalities NGOs Tourism Companies Educators	Spreading knowledge on EGB	economic benefits easier work better quality of media work educational goals

Cultural Institutions Municipalities Forestry Land owners Farmers PA Managers Fishing and Hunting Organizations Reindeer Herders Volunteers Scientific Institutions	Managing EGB and species	Better Standards Best Practices Cheaper Sustainable Management
	Enhancement of competences	
	Monitoring species	

As possible next steps two activities were defined:

Next Steps	Who volunteers to guide / lead?
Approaching municipalities in EGB periphery – find the appropriate platform first	Engaged local EGB actor
Propose management and investment projects together with municipalities	EGB Partner who are already connected with local stakeholders

Conclusion

The participants had a lively and valuable exchange to better understand the different settings of engaging public and local authorities as well as protected area administrations. It became obvious that the topic is relevant in all regions and that stakeholders vary between countries, e.g. role of the church in Serbia. The list of relevant institutions on the different levels is rather long. Municipalities were seen as important partners. The elaborated results will be helpful for all partners who are currently active in this field of work or who intend to be more active.

From this working group no tasks were addressed to the European Green Belt Association as the results are more relevant on the local level.



Figure 11: Group 1 immersed in discussions © Felix Cybulla

Group 2: Competent and dedicated partner network across sectors - Synergies of Nature Conservation & Historic Preservation

Group Moderators: Melanie Kreutz and Martin Kuba (BUND Department Green Belt)

Guiding Question: "How can we protect the European Green Belt as common natural and cultural heritage, taking into account today's political and social context and perspectives?"

In a first step the moderators gave a short introduction into the working group as well as time for an introduction round. After that an exchange about examples and experiences took place in order to better understand what has happened so far and what the situation is. During this exchange existing projects and relevant topics as well as related challenges and opportunities were collected.

Topics & Projects		Challenges	Opportunities
Local specific knowledge (to get it from locals)	Traditional Cultural Landscapes	New borders & new border fortifications	Special Funds (Tourism Fund; Rural Development Fund)
Collecting data on nature monuments	Italy: Discussion of spatial relevance	Demographic problems in border regions	Cultural Heritage = Emotions -> your history
Regional Specific Situations	Guided tours on nature including historical aspects	Keep it narrow? Widen up?	New use of old structures

Promotion of local products	Visibility through landscape preservation	Gap of knowledge?	Include annual festivities in nature conservation activities?
Structural Changes	Bridge meetings (TK-BG)	How to raise awareness?	Nature helps history – history helps nature
Material vs. immaterial heritage	30 th Anniversary Activities	Politics	Nature conservation as history preservation
	Older borders along the European Green Belt	Funds	UNESCO World Heritage
		Competition	
		Responsibilities	

In the following section the participants of the working group were asked to list concrete target groups, potential new cooperation partners as well as topics that are needed to be dealt with to combine nature conservation and cultural heritage.

Target Groups	New Partners	Future Topics
Sustainable Tourism	Time witnesses	Interconnection “Nature helping history – history helping nature”
“Helping” Tourism (landscape protection measures) -> Educative	Institutions on national memory (SK, CZ, HH)	Protected nature as agent for history
Future Generations	Old/Traditional generations (Knowledge Preservation)	Material vs. immaterial level of European Green Belt
Locals	Institutions on history	Knowledge preservation
Authorities	Institutions on Iron Curtain Victims	

As possible next steps two activities were defined:

Next Steps	Who Volunteers to guide / lead?
Project development with cultural focus (Interreg Europe)	All, EGBA
Long term (10-20 years) -> UNESCO World Heritage	



Figure 12: Group 2 engaged in the knowledge capture phase © Felix Cybulla



Figure 13: Results of Group 2 © Felix Cybulla

Conclusion

In this working group a valuable and interesting exchange between participants from different regions and countries took place. It became obvious that the topic is relevant for all regions, despite the different circumstances now and during Cold War times.

New ideas and partners were identified. This can help partners of the initiative, which are currently active in this field or intend to be more active. In addition, the group also recommended including a task on strengthening of synergies between nature conservation and historic preservation into the Programme of Work of the European Green Belt Association (e.g. Initiate Interreg Europe project on Nature and Culture).

Group 3: Communication Strategy - Stepping up European Green Belt Communications

Group Moderators: Robert Dürhager and Lotte Harlan (WIGWAM)

Guiding Question: “What is the current status of the communication strategy and what has yet to come?”

Background of this working group was an assignment given by EuroNatur as current chair of the European Green Belt Association to the communication agency WIGWAM. Objective of the cooperation was an assessment of current communication as well as the development of recommendations for improvement and practical support in formulating messages and statements.

Prior to the Eisenach conference WIGWAM drafted a first analysis of the communication about the European Green Belt on the pan-European level. Based on the analysis four main narratives used in the current communication were elaborated. In addition, WIGWAM developed three “Why are we here”-Statements to describe what the European Green Belt Initiative is doing. The conference was an important platform to collect feedback on the narratives and the statements and generally on the current communication efforts. For this purpose, WIGWAM was conducting interviews with the participants of the conference.

In addition, the working group offered the opportunity to get more involved into European Green Belt communication and to contribute to the further work of WIGWAM. Content and process of the working group have been developed by WIGWAM. It had a creative and inspirational character so that here only a short summary of main aspects is given.



Figure 14: Part of the process and results of group 3 © Felix Cybulla

In a first step different attributes associated to the European Green Belt were collected and the most important ones were ranked:

Feelings	Overall impression	Be famous for...
Love	Successful cooperation between states	Learning from history for the future
Enthusiasm	Connects people	Connecting people
Curiosity	Learning from history for the future	Wilderness
Responsibility	Be aware of history	Ecological networking
Freedom to walk	Connects culture, history, and nature	Connecting Europe, nature and history
History of our region	Experience of nature	
Pride	Passion for nature	
	Unique	
	A call for action	
	Participate	

A finding of the exchange was that currently the communication is too technical and not very emotional.

In the following the group concentrated on the narratives which have been elaborated by WIGWAM as currently used main narratives:

- 1. Natural treasures:** Like pearls on a string. An enchanted nature with unique wildlife and landscapes. This has to be conserved and restored.
- 2. Living memorial:** The former border zone of the Iron Curtain granted us with an extraordinary ecological network and a living memorial landscape. This has to be conserved and restored.
- 3. Border-crossing activism:** Conservationists from 24 countries are working together to preserve and restore the EGB. Borders separate. nature unites!
- 4. Europe's largest nature conservation initiative:** 24 countries, 12 500 kilometres, more than 3000 protected areas with thousands of endangered species. Almost 150 GOs and NGOs are working together to close the remaining gaps in the EGB, whose importance has been confirmed by institutions such as the European Commission and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

The participants were asked to create collages for each of the four narratives. For this purpose, four small groups were formed and equipped with different materials to be used for the collages. Each group contributed to each narrative.



Figure 15: Collages of group 3 © Felix Cybulla

The results were surprising – the collages and the feelings and pictures each of them were evoking were completely different. This approach underlined in an impressive way the different character and power of the four narratives.

Based on this experience the group concentrated on the four “why are we here” statements of the European Green Belt Initiative which have been developed by WIGWAM prior to the conference. In a joint process the group tried to decide for one of the statements:

1. Protecting Europe's Largest Ecological Network
2. We Let Life Flourish In The Iron Curtain's Death Zone
3. Connecting East and West With A Haven For Wildlife

The process was very emotional and complex and showed that the understanding of what the European Green Belt Initiative is actually doing is rather diverse. The aspect of history and remembering and the strong relation to the Iron Curtain and its precise spatial delineation once again turned out to be more important for the representatives of the Central European Green Belt and especially of the German part than for others.

Conclusion

This group work was more creative and intended to offer an opportunity to support the work of WIGWAM. In addition, it allowed WIGWAM to better understand the Initiative and its diversity. The group work also showed the complexity of developing a joint communication strategy for the European Green Belt which acknowledges the diversity of partners and opinions and at the same time formulates strong messages which are short and precise enough to be convincing. The participants of this working group addressed an important request to the European Green Belt Association and the entire Initiative – to improve communication to be more emotional and personal in order to touch people.

Group 4: Communication Strategy - 30 years after the Iron Curtain

Group Moderators: Uwe Riecken (BfN) and Christine Pühringer (Austrian League for Nature Conservation)

Guiding Question: "How can we make use of the anniversary and increase the visibility of the European Green Belt?"

This group work also started with a short introduction into the working group and time for an introduction round. In the following the participants collected existing plans for projects or events especially around the 30-year anniversary in 2019 as well as additional ideas for the anniversary.

Happy New European Green Belt Year 2019

First step: Definition of what is being celebrated, consider special situation of Fennoscandia

List of ideas:

- Family Day at the European Green Belt
- International Youth Camp in Probstzella, maybe exchange with Stanka
- Multivision show in schools and counties
- Thuringian meeting with different actors along the Green Belt
- Start Project on Connectivity (DE)
- Hiking Trips (DE)
- Hiking App (DE) (Providing hiking routes digital, possibly via [Komeet](#))
- Press Trip (DE) (Press trip along the inner German Green Belt)
- Baumkreuz (Tree Cross) 2.11.
- Green Belt Camps (invitation to former participants (AT))
- Local Events "Move 4 Green Belt" (AT)
- 30 years' event at Neusiedler See (AT)
- Illmitz Declaration (AT, Austrian Federal Government and the Austrian Federal States on the Green Belt jointly committing themselves to the European Green Belt)
- Action School Day
- Facebook Campaign
- Regional Green Belt fairs

Possibly dates to make use of:

- 20 May: Bee Day
- 21 May: Day of Natura 2000
- 22 May: Day of Biodiversity
- 23-26 May: European elections
- 24 May: Day of Nature Parks

In a next step the group elaborated proposals for the upcoming 30 years anniversary as well as responsibilities:

Strengthen European Green Belt Days

Target Group: Broad Public

What	Who
Fix the date/span of time → time is already defined on 18-24 September each year	European Green Belt Association
Definition of joint activity	European Green Belt Association
Implementation of joint activity (on low level, e.g. stapling gathered stones on public places near the border)	National Focal Points, Partners
Joint press work	European Green Belt Association, Regional Coordinators, National Focal Points, Partners
One European Green Belt award per region, awarded during European Green Belt Days	European Green Belt Association, Regional Coordinators, National Focal Points, Partners
Planting trees / give small tree to awarded municipality (combined with awarding of municipalities)	European Green Belt Association, Regional Coordinators, National Focal Points, Partners

General communication measures dedicated to 30 years anniversary

What	Who
find proper name of “what are we celebrating”	European Green Belt Association
Modification of logo → 30 years anniversary	European Green Belt Association
All activities in 2019 shall be connected to 30 years anniversary	Partners
Early motivation of European Green Belt community and partners	Regional Coordinators, European Green Belt Association
General press text in all languages (short!) explaining the anniversary	European Green Belt Association

Event Calendar on Website	European Green Belt Association, Partners
Joint letter to Finnish EU Presidency (June)	European Green Belt Association
Joint letter to the new European Parliament (19.08.)	European Green Belt Association
Joint letter to the new European Commission (09.11.)	European Green Belt Association

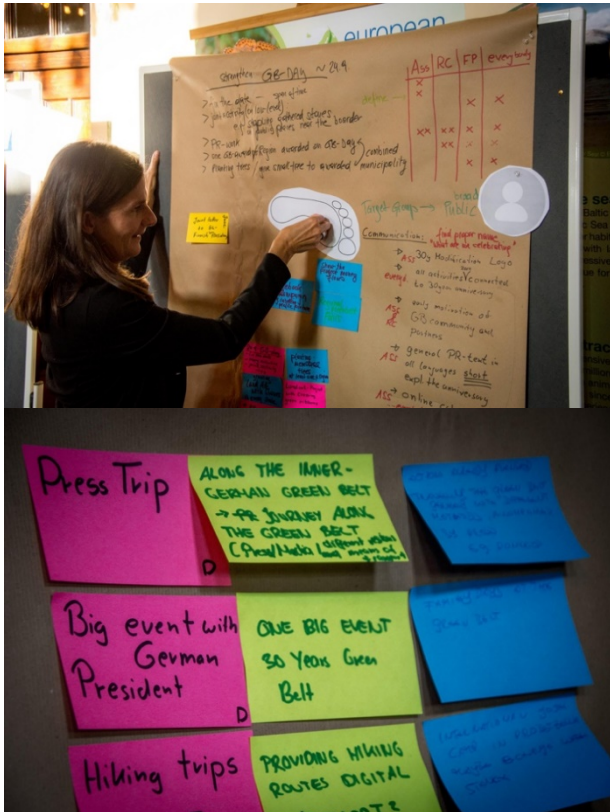


Figure 16: Group 4 capturing ideas © Felix Cybulla

Conclusion

In this working group the focus was on exchange in order to get a better picture of what is being planned where and by whom. This is the basis for a joint approach and an increased visibility of the European Green Belt in the year of the anniversary. Next to exchanging ideas and plans the group also developed concrete tasks to be implemented by different actors. The group recommended to include several tasks related to the celebration of the 30 years anniversary into the Programme of Work of the European Green Belt Association 2019-2020 (e.g. motivation of the European Green Belt community, development of specific communication material for anniversary (modified logo, text; translation by national partners if needed), joint concept for European Green Belt Days in 2019 (implemented as joint/coherent activity)).



Figure 17: Group 4 discussing ideas © Felix Cybulla

Group 5: Scientific justification of the importance of the European Green Belt - Calling the Science Community

Group Moderator: Jörg Schmiedel (BUND Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)

Guiding Question: "Defining our main scientific fields of interests & research questions to provide evidence for our European Green Belt Vision!"

This group work also started with a short introduction into the working group as well as time for an introduction round. In the following the participants reviewed the vision of the European Green Belt. As a next step, the group was asked to identify scientific fields of interest that help prove the importance of the European Green Belt as well as scientific research questions that should be answered by the scientific community that help us to prove the importance of the European Green Belt.

Scientific disciplines/fields of interest	Research topics
Natural sciences/ecology/biodiversity	River protection (and relation to biodiversity)
	Lynx population
	More data on connectivity
	Definition of common umbrella species
	Importance of cultural landscape for nature conservation
	Extensive land use
	Data base on rare species
	Importance of European Green Belt for adaptation to climate change” – Dies war nicht gemeint oder ist nicht zusätzlich adressiert worden?
	European Green Belt as area for reference ecosystems (pristine areas)
	Introducing testing areas with regards to different management practices
	Impact of new fences
How green is the European Green Belt outside of protected areas?	
Cultural/historical sciences	Scientific data about history
Tourism sciences	Socio-economic value of tourism
	Negative impacts of tourism
	Comparative studies on soft and commercial tourism
	Opportunities of Eco-tourism
	Tourism strategies
	Profit of local communities from tourism

In the following the participants identified most important fields for cooperation with the scientific community:

- a) Mapping ecosystem services
- b) Habitat mapping
- c) Sharing scientific data and experience

Fortunately, there are currently ongoing activities along the European Green Belt which are supporting to find answers in most important fields for cooperation. The Interreg project “D2C - DaRe to Connect” at the Central European and Balkan Green Belt is mapping ecosystem services and sharing scientific data and experience. In the Prespa Region in Albania, Greece and North Macedonia habitat mapping activities are ongoing.

As common challenges in regard to their work the group identified bad standards of nature protection and lack of capacities (staff etc.). Important tasks are the mapping of potential projects and tracking tourism.

In the following the group listed possible next steps:

Next Steps / Tasks	Who is responsible
<p>For defined fields for cooperation the following questions need to be answered in order to define methods and expected results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • which sub-topics do we want to target (e.g. umbrella species, fish migration, relations between climate change and connectivity)? • what is the purpose, which results do we want to reach? • spatial localization of planned activities? • which scientists can we approach? <p>After that detailed planning and establishment of relevant contacts can start.</p>	?
<p>Workshops to be held at future European or Regional Green Belt conferences for the development of further necessary steps and the clarification of methods, expected results and the establishment of contacts and cooperations. Selected experts and scientists should preferably be invited to these workshops.</p>	<p>Organisation teams of Regional and Pan-European Green Belt Conferences</p>
<p>Development of a project focusing on scientific exchange</p>	?

Conclusion

The exchange in this working group showed that the suggested approach is new to most actors in the European Green Belt network. It also seemed rather difficult for most participants to approach the issue on a meta level, e.g. by tying in with the vision and thinking of how we can “provide evidence for our EGB vision”. Most participants focused more on the local level and relevant topics in their daily work. So the focus was especially on applied field research.

Accordingly, the actual anticipated activities and topics varied widely between actors and sites, depending mainly on the current on-site problems and activities. Most of the activities which were relevant for the participants are strongly connected to the EGB vision, though not necessarily in providing evidence, but rather mainly in transposing it. Quite a few of the EGB actors are already engaged in scientific work and many seem to be missing scientific exchange and common data repositories.

As the Board of the European Green Belt Association considers the topic of intensifying cooperation with experts and the scientific community to be relevant, the PoW already included the task to identify and promote research on topics of relevance for the EGB in order to improve scientific justification of the EGB. The group did not address any further tasks to the European Green Belt Association.



Figure 18: Group discussion and results of group 5 © Felix Cybulla

Group 6: (Programmatic) Funding - What if we were rich?

Group Moderators: Gabriel Schwaderer (EuroNatur) and Petko Tzvetkov (Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation)

Guiding Question: "Brainstorming and Prioritizing to build strategies for programmatic fundraising!"

The group work started with a short introduction into the working group as well as time for an introduction round. In the following the participants had the task to imagine that the European Green Belt Initiative had 10 Million € - and to think what they would do with the money. Three of the selected ideas were elaborated into a "Theory of Change" in order to explain the process of change by outlining causal linkages between results. The question here was "If we implemented that specific idea, THEN what would we get from it"?

The following three ideas were followed for the Theory of Change:

- Awareness Raising Campaign
- Scientific Evidence
- Land Purchase Programme

Theories of Change

In addition a list of extra ideas was developed:

Other ideas / thoughts	
Advocacy Campaign for EU legal improvement	European Nature Monument
EGB Convention	EGB Youth hike
Model Projects for rural development -> to show benefits	EGB Art Contest
Scientific natural programme	Monitoring of Habitats
EGB Solidarity Corps	EGB Photo Contest
History Research	Develop a long term funding strategy
Pilote restoration projects	Payments for Ecosystem Services
Copy the Goldstein Show	Fund for maintaining the EGB
Education	Re-introduction of big 3 (each region)

Conclusion

The elaborated Theories of Change are a first start to better understand which change we can expect if we implement specific approaches or strategies. At the same time, it becomes obvious that the Theories of Change are not yet complete and that causal linkages between the identified results are missing (e.g. if we own selected areas we do not automatically reach an optimally functioning eco-network as several steps on the way are missing).

In this respect the advantage of formulating a Theory of Change becomes obvious: it helps to be clear about how we think that a specific strategy will help us to achieve our goals. This means that with the Theory of Change we make explicit the assumptions of how we believe our strategies will contribute to achieving our goals. By doing this, we explicitly test how our strategy intends to affect our goals – and are able to identify gaps in logic.

Therefore, the group recommended to the European Green Belt Association to strengthen strategic approaches in planning by including this aspect into the Programme of Work.



Figure 19: Group 6 working on Theory of Change logic © Felix Cybulla

8.3 Conclusion Working Groups

Main objectives of the working group session were to define and further elaborate joint fields of cooperation on the pan-European level, to drive further and bring forward the European Green Belt Initiative and to offer the opportunity for concrete planning of (joint) activities throughout the European Green Belt. Another important objective was the facilitation of exchange and knowledge sharing between conference participants. Eventually, the working session was also intended to define key tasks for the Programme of Work (PoW) of the European Green Belt Association for the period 2019-20.

The Working Group Session supported all intended objectives whereas the different working groups set quite different foci. In all groups the aspect of getting to know active partners from other countries and exchanging and sharing knowledge was taking place. This was an important objective of the bi-annual pan-European Green Belt Conferences. The interactive working session allowed all participants to get active and contribute with their experiences, whereby also the establishment of individual contacts was supported.

At the same time the working groups also offered space to develop joint ideas to drive further and bring forward the European Green Belt Initiative, e.g. by developing and initiating new project ideas and cooperation in general in relevant fields of interest. Looking at the results of the working groups this aspect was not the most important though. It seems that all participants happily contributed their ideas but when it came to the question of who is driving further the topic mostly the spaces stayed blank or the European Green Belt Association or well-known partners of the Initiative, such as Regional Coordinators were filled in. None of the working group participants expressed interest to take over responsibility for one of the defined tasks.

On the one hand, this is understandable as everybody has manifold tasks and demands which need to be fulfilled. On the other hand, this is a major conflict in a network which is alive only through participation and initiative of all members. Since the establishment of the European Green Belt Association the tendency to claim this official body responsible for all identified tasks seems to be even easier. In this context it is important to remember, though, that the activities are jointly performed by all members of the European Green Belt Association (if possible supported by actors of the European Green Belt Initiative who are not members of the Association).

Nevertheless, the Board of the European Green Belt Association welcomed additional key tasks for the Programme of Work of the European Green Belt Association for the period 2019-20 as a result of the working session. Several aspects elaborated during the working group session were added in the PoW as they had not been reflected before and were considered as relevant. In this respect the working group session was an important platform to collect ideas from partners of the Initiative and members of the Association. This reflects the principles of democracy and participation, an important basis for our collaboration.

9 European Green Belt Fair and excursion to the Borderland Museum Teistungen-Eichsfeld

At the **Green Belt Fair** it is already a tradition that the participants present food and drink specialties from their regions. It again served as a tasty platform to meet as well as exchange ideas and experiences. The event showed the cultural richness and diversity of the four regions along the Green Belt: Fennoscandia, the Baltics, Central Europe and the Balkans.



Figure 20: Green Belt Fair, exchange and celebration with the band “Sanduhr Sextett” © J.Buldmann/BUND

The concluding **excursion** to the Green Belt at the Borderland Museum Teistungen-Eichsfeld gave the international conference participants a direct insight into the situation and history of the inner-German Green Belt. Different kinds of stones from the Green Belt countries were handed over from the conference participants to the borderland museum. These are intended to be used for a land-art project.



Figure 21: Excursion to the Borderland Museum Teistungen-Eichsfeld © BUND Department Green Belt

10 Press Conference

A press conference was held during the event to spread the information on the importance and the vision of the European Green Belt further.



22: Participants at the podium of the press conference © J.Buldmann/BUND

Participants at the podium (from left to right):

- Dr. Liana Geidezis, Head of the BUND Department Green Belt, Regional Coordination Central European Green Belt, Board Member of the European Green Belt Association
- Prof. Dr. Hubert Weiger, Chairman of BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany) and an initiator of the European Green Belt
- Anja Siegesmund, Thuringian Minister for the Environment, Energy and Nature Conservation
- Dr. Elsa Nickel, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Head of the Department for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Nature Development
- Dr. Uwe Riecken, Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Head of the Habitat Protection and Landscape Ecology Department
- Gabriel Schwaderer, Executive Director of EuroNatur Foundation, chair of the European Green Belt Association

Related press articles can be downloaded here:

https://www.europeangreenbelt.org/index.php?id=49&no_cache=1