This project is implemented through the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme co-financed by the ERDF.

CONNECTING HABITATS. INTEGRATING PEOPLE.

Dialogue-led approach for spatial and regional development along the Central European Green Belt.
FOREWORD

Dear readers,

the European Green Belt crosses borders and connects nature and people in 24 countries of Europe. That goes to the heart of what both Europe and sustainable development stands for. It also helps to create another connection: between the European and local level.

The GREENNET project has demonstrated how policy can be put into practice by strengthening stakeholder networks in the Central European Green Belt at different levels and establishing new partnership structures to safeguard this unique natural and cultural European heritage.

GREENNET exemplifies how partners in different countries can join forces to develop and scale up Europe’s Green Infrastructure – including the Green Belt – so that it can benefit the environment, but also local land users and the wider public. This brochure compiles best practice examples of trans-national and cross-border cooperation for the Green Belt, and at the same time, of European integration at work.

We wish you a pleasant reading!

Christine Lieberknecht
Prime Minister of the Free State of Thuringia (Germany)

Janez Potočnik
European Commissioner for the Environment

Christine Lieberknecht
Janez Potočnik
»With the ardent wish for liberty and peace, people in central and eastern Europe brought down the Iron Curtain in 1989. This made it possible to turn this once-impenetrable border clear through our continent into a Green Belt of intact nature and place of human encounter. I welcome all initiatives and all the dedicated work of the many groups such as those in this project in preserving the high symbolic value of the Green Belt, explaining it and communicating it to the younger generation. Standing up for liberty is always worthwhile, as well as cherish the nature and thus to preserve our natural resources.«

Dr. h. c. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Former German Foreign Minister
For nearly 40 years the Iron Curtain divided Europe: A political, ideological and geographic barrier extended from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea. In the shadow of this inhuman border, nature was able to develop largely undisturbed. This Green Belt connects Europe today as a living landscape of memory and a unique ecological network of more than 12,500 kilometers in length. 24 nations and nearly all bio-geographic regions of the continent are touched by it.

The European Green Belt Initiative works for the preservation and sustainable development of this shared natural and cultural heritage. True to the motto "Borders Separate – Nature Unites!", the widest variety of actors from a broad range of disciplines are working together across borders and so making an essential contribution to the future of Europe’s green infrastructure.
»The localisation along the former Iron Curtain contributed to the preservation of a great biodiversity in our countries. With our work we want to contribute to its conservation and see the Green Belt as the opportunity to achieve this in consort with like-minded people. «

Forester Hans Kiessling,  
Forum Pflanzwerkstätte Grafenweiden,  
Austria
The idea behind the GREENNET-Project builds on the result of the previous project GreenBelt (Interreg III B CADSES). This project highlighted and identified areas of particular ecological significance along the Central European Green Belt. It demonstrated that the network of biotopes of the Green Belt is deficient: more than 50 per-cent of it are gaps. These were areas of considerable significance to the ecological network but without adequate protected status.

GREENNET therefore connects the vision of the European Green Belt Initiative with “… preserving our shared natural heritage along the former Iron Curtain and developing it as an ecological network, which connects valuable natural and cultural landscapes, taking also into account the economic, social and cultural needs of the local communities.” (Source: Steering Committee of the European Green Belt Initiative, 2013).

The focus of the project is on the development and restoration of an extensive and continuous network of biotopes. The goal is not to put new areas under protection, but rather to find consensus solutions, which can bring the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage into harmony with the interests of the local owners and users and close the gaps in this way.

The development of consistent strategies for securing the ecological network of the Green Belt and for identification of a perspective for rural development in the neighboring regions is therefore only possible in the close cooperation of all relevant interest groups (stakeholders), which broadens the perspectives.
STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COOPERATION. MAKING PROCESSES TRANSPARENT.

A cooperative joint effort of regional stakeholders demands a decision making process that arranges the multi-layered regional interests, coordinates them and communicates them clearly. The goal is to discover potential for sustainable development. For that reason it is necessary to include all local resources and interest groups in a process that benefits everyone involved. Transparency, objectivity and a fair relationship are the basis for such result-oriented networking. This makes it possible to develop strategies which correspond to the multi-faceted layers of interest, but also allows conflicts to be avoided or resolved. This methodology is characterized by a high degree of self-organization, through informal and voluntary participation as well as a low degree of institutionalization and can contribute to long-term development of a regional identity.

POSSIBLE METHODS TO SOLVE REGIONAL CONFLICTS

By combining the results of the data analysis with landscape/spatial planning instruments, funding instruments and/or other instruments, suitable methods to solve main conflicts in the core areas of the pilot regions will be developed.
OBJECTIVES

› Support and strengthen policies, strategies and approaches to safeguard an interlinked ecological network with a special focus on legally non- or low protected ecologically valuable areas in the Central European Green Belt

› Further enhance nature protection in six GREENNET Pilot Regions in the Central European Green Belt

› Apply local and regional tools, instruments and strategies to enhance nature protection, civil participation and public awareness

› Development and implementation of a joint transnational strategy for management and securing non- or low protected areas in the Central European Green Belt

› Contributing to the coherence of the Natura 2000 network by the closure of gaps between protected areas

› Conservation of an important natural and cultural heritage
IDENTIFYING OPTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT.
INITIATING STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE.

To solve conflicts and close gaps in the Green Belt, a packet of interdisciplinary measures needs to be developed and implemented. The most important field of action is related to linking the individual stakeholders and their instruments with each other, especially that of the regional strategies and administrative bodies, the economy and civil society.

Moving in this joint, constructively shared conflict resolution and development process, is the core of the methodology developed in the GREENNET-Project. To that end an instrument was developed that provides for transparency for the actors toward each other and toward the interested public: By means of a geo-information system (GIS) with web application, all data relevant to the interests is recorded in order to identify potential conflicts. This makes planning and implementation of local measures possible, which include the various interest groups from the very beginning.

The first foundational step is to establish the greatest possible openness and readiness for dialogue. Recognizing the values and the requirements of each
other stakeholder group, consider them without prejudice and comprehend it, can bring to light synergies and options for development.

Six Pilot Regions were selected for the sample implementation, which reflect the dominant landscape types in the Central European Green Belt and can be identified as bridge areas for regional and national administrative borders. Stakeholder dialogues were initiated in these regions, approaches to solutions were developed and in part implemented in various activities.

The Pilot Regions were defined using the following criteria:

› The Pilot Region is not legally protected but is an area with high potential for ecological networks.

› The Pilot Region is already legally protected, but the status is insufficient or it is not adequately administrated.
CREATE UNDERSTANDING.

COOPERATE TRANSNATIONAL.

The six selected Pilot Regions served as a »laboratory«, for developing management processes and instruments for competing land use interests or spatial problems. They represent different types of landscapes for comparable problem areas and serve as examples for the general endangerment of barely protected or unprotected regions along the Green Belt of Central Europe.

THE PROJECT PARTNERS:

Association for Rural Development Thuringia, Erfurt (DE)

University of Applied Sciences Erfurt, Transport and Spatial Planning Institute, Erfurt (DE)

BUND-Project Office Green Belt, Nuremberg (DE)

Ametyst – Environmental Protection Association, Pilsen (CZ)

Austrian League for Nature Conservation Lower Austria, Vienna (AT)

Regional Environmental Center Slovakia, Bratislava (SK)

University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (AT)

Regional Management Burgenland GmbH, Pinkafeld (AT)

Austrian League For Nature Conservation Styria, Graz (AT)

Nature Park Goričko, Public Institute, Grad (SI)

C.E.T.A. – Centre for Theoretical and Applied Ecology, Gorizia (IT)

PILOT REGION 1
GRABFELD

In between agriculturally used fertile soils exist peaks, slopes and wetter parts of floodplains housing valuable habitats like wet and dry grassland, orchards or forests. The Green Belt is an important linking element between those valuable habitats. Parts of the biotopes are legally protected. Unprotected areas are affected by competing land use interests. Impairment of migration corridors exist due to the land fragmentation, especially due transport corridors. During the GREENNET runtime several communication measures like workshops and round tables were implemented to work out a suitable management concept in cooperation with farmers and other land users to gain acceptance towards the protection and sustainable use of the Green Belt.

PILOT REGION 2
OBERPFÄLZER WALD / ČESKÝ LES

Vast forests, but also open and semi-open grasslands, mire and peatlands are typical for this region of the Green Belt. By central European standards, the area is largely undivided and intact; it has a very low population density but is still endangered by new border crossings and intensive industrial agriculture (production of biomass). In spite of its variety of valuable habitats and species, such as the European otter and the black stork, large areas do not enjoy adequate legal protection. During the GREENNET-Project, there was a cross-border dialogue at various levels between communities, national authorities and local inhabitants. Through recording and evaluating scientific data it was possible to make concrete suggestions for more sustainable protection.

PILOT REGION 6
JULIAN PREALPS

This Pilot Region is characterized by limestone formations and a submontane climate. The mountain regions around Monte Canin and Monte Robon is karstic and has many caves. The vegetation varies with the altitude, starting with spruce forests to grassy landscapes and snowy cliffs. The Green Belt in this area was threatened by planned expansion of tourist facilities and the connection of existing ski areas and building of new ski lifts and pistons. In order to resolve these conflicts, the future of this area was discussed with the help of participatory processes such as round tables, and the various demands of tourism and nature conservation were balanced. As a result, the plans for the expansion of a cross-border ski area were dropped in favor of a more sustainable development of the area with a focus on eco-tourism.
PILOT REGION 3
NÖRDLICHES WEINVIERTEL / SOUTH-ERN MORAVIA / JAROVCE RUSOVCE

The Nördliches Weinviertel is dominated by arable land together with viticulture and some orcharding. Dry fallow land and (semi-)arid grassland with a high proportion of endangered plant and animal species are of great importance. These highly bio-diverse habitats are endangered by the intensification of agriculture, but also through an absence of local management, the fragmentation of the eco-systems, the expansion of renewable and non-renewable energy supplies and the urban sprawl in the proximity of the agglomerations. With the help of various means of communication and a close exchange between the land holders, it was possible to raise awareness for the needs of the valuable habitats in the Green Belt. Ecological studies were carried out and suggestions for the future sustainable management could be developed.

PILOT REGION 4
KUČNICA / KUTSCHENITZA-MURA

Geographically, the Pilot Region Kučnica/Kutschenitza-Mura includes the hilly landscape with rocks of different geological ages in the north and with mostly sandy and gravel soils in the south. The core area of the Pilot Region – River Kučnica/Kutschenitza – was completely canalized in late 1960s and 1980s due to intensification of agriculture in the River Valley. Land consolidations and agricultural reclamations were carried out in many areas. A lot of farms have stopped to breed dairy cattle in recent years and many plots of grassland were turned to arable land for maize and biogas production. Surplus of fertilizers, phyto-pharmaceuticals and household sewage are still polluting Kučnica/Kutschenitza River. During the GREENNET project solution approaches were developed together with land users, farmers, water management and spatial planning agencies. An implementation concept of suitable measures was prepared in a trans-boundary way as basis for future implementation projects.

PILOT REGION 5
SÜDLICHES BURGENLAND

This Pilot Region is characterized by limestone formations and a submontane climate. The mountain regions around Monte Canin and Monte Robon is karstic and has many caves. The vegetation varies with the altitude, starting with spruce forests to grassy landscapes and snowy cliffs. The Green Belt in this area was threatened by planned expansion of tourist facilities and the connection of existing ski areas and building of new ski lifts and pistons. In order to resolve these conflicts, the future of this area was discussed with the help of participatory processes such as round tables, and the various demands of tourism and nature conservation were balanced. As a result, the plans for the expansion of a cross-border ski area were dropped in favor of a more sustainable development of the area with a focus on eco-tourism.
BRIDGING THE GAPS THROUGH STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

Successful dialogue thrives on ideas, perspectives, subject information and emotions. For the conservation of the Green Belt, awareness raising crossing all social boundaries is necessary. Becoming familiar with and experiencing the specific values in the individual GREENNET-Pilot Regions was at the center of numerous actions, excursions and workshops. This allowed not only an exchange of thoughts and viewpoints, but also neutral and open dialogue which fostered a joint learning process. Directly confronting the very specific state of knowledge of the local stakeholders with respect to their own situations and conflicts brought to light many unconventional approaches to problem solving. These approaches met with high public acceptance and helped to integrate other stakeholders.

PRESENTING AND DISCUSSING OPTIONS. RAISING SENSITIVITY AND BRINGING PEOPLE CLOSER.

ROLLUP TOURING EXHIBITION

Nine Rollup-Banners provide insight into the GREENNET-Project and its Pilot Regions

Many local stakeholders don’t have any daily interaction with conservation-related matters. So, to convey basic knowledge of the GREENNET-Project to everyone participating in stakeholder-meetings, e.g. round tables, a touring rollup-exhibition was developed. At various project-related events, this exhibition informs people about the most important questions related to the European Green Belt. Nine displays present the key ideas behind the individual Pilot Regions of GREENNET. These in turn provoke discussion among individual stakeholders and prompt them to enter dialogue with each other.
GREENNET ON TV

River-restoration and protection of endangered species in the Pilot Region Kučnica/Kutschenitza-Mura

The GREENNET-Pilot Project on Kučnica/Kutschenitza, the river that borders Austria and Slovenia, was the central focus of an episode of a TV-series on Slovenia national television about waterways. The film makers presented the vivid history of the river – its degradation and the activities to restore the natural state – and provided insights into its biodiversity from the river mussel to the dragonfly. Especially the work in connection with the GREENNET-Project was dealt with tours of the Gorščko Nature Park and the Styrian Conservation Association.

»It is a chance of projects like GREENNET, that measures will be developed in dialogue and in consensus with those using the land and that purchasing land will not be the sole or exclusive focus.«

Albert Seifert, Farmer’s Association of Thuringia

CROSS-BORDER SCHOOL FIELD TRIPS

Joint field trip with grade school students from the Czech Republic and Germany in Oberpfälzer Wald/Český Les

Czech and German grade school children explore their region on the Green Belt in the Pilot Region Oberpfälzer Wald/Český Les within workshops. They encountered relics of the border, abandoned towns and richly varied natural habitats, waking their interest in the unique history and culture along the landscape of the former Iron Curtain. The workshops met with terrific interest so that special educational materials for the topic will now be developed.

GREENNET IN KINDERGARTEN

Tracking the Bush Cricket and its habitat in Grabfeld

The so-called bush cricket Polysarcus denticauda – one of the characteristic animal species in the Pilot Region Grabfeld – was the mascot for a kindergarten-field trip in summer 2013 to the nearby Green Belt. Together with the BUND Thuringia, the 5–6 year olds from the village Milz went on a journey of discovery on the path of the bush cricket and its habitat.

The children learned how the Green Belt serves as the (main) habitat for the bush cricket. The identification with the animal helped the children to understand the topic of conservation in an easy way.

GREENNET-PARTNERS ON A TRADESHOW

International endorsement of the project at various tradeshows in Europe

Visitors to tradeshows dealing with the topics of conservation or tourism were fascinated by the idea of the Green Belt. There were lively interchanges with the public at the tradeshows, supported by the Touring Exhibition. The idea of transforming what was once the »Deadly Border« into a living belt and with it transforming the retained memories of the former divisions of Europe was very well-received.

Nevertheless one felt that the topic is not very well known among those who do not deal with conservation-related topics routinely.
PHOTO CONTEST AND CALENDAR

«From Iron Curtain to Lifeline – the Central European Green Belt»

According to this motto the Association for Rural Development Thuringia and BUND Project Office Green Belt initiated a special photo contest in 2013. Amateur and professional photographers were asked to submit photos that captured and reflected the landscape and its habitats for people, animals and plants, but also border relics and border land art objects along the Central European Green Belt.

The international jury consisting of 10 persons selected 12 winning pictures out of 75 submitted pictures from Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Czech Republic and Germany for the GREENNET calendar.

All photos submitted, especially the prizewinning pictures showed quite impressively the unique history of the regions along the former Iron Curtain, their rich variety of species and habitats but also those areas where the landscape intersected with development. The example of the European Bee-Eater, Merops apiaster (photo centered), indicates that the Green Belt is often a last retreat for endangered species. The white stork, Ciconia ciconia, following the mower – seen on the picture by Karl Chladek (photo below), show exemplarily that in traditional cultural landscapes conservation and land use are no contradiction but can benefit from each other. The remains of border facilities, such as the former watchtower on the border between Slovenia and Italy (photo above), reminds one of the peaceful resolution of the Cold War and the growing together of the regions of Europe.

STAKEHOLDER-WORKSHOPS – LOCAL ACTORS IN CONVERSATION

Workshop and hiking with Thuringia’s Minister for Agriculture and the Environment in Grabfeld

The GREENNET-Project facilitated dialogue on the local, national and international levels for the implementation and development of the Green Belt. This was also accomplished by the practical examples of sustainable land use and the cooperation of agriculture and conservation provided in September 2013, the main focus of a hike with Thuringia’s Minister for Agriculture and the Environment, Jürgen Reinholz.

The goal of the hike in the Pilot Region of Grabfeld was to promote the exchange of ideas about the Green Belt between the Minister and the local actors and draw public attention to the Green Belt. The subsequent workshop gave the local actors a forum in which they could express their views on specific questions and present possible solutions. It soon became clear that the farmers and conservationists have come to see each other as partners, but that financial compensation for lost earnings that result from conservation-driven restrictions on use must be brought more into the focus of public policy.

Cross-Border Stakeholder-Workshop in the Oberpfälzer Wald/Český Les

A workshop was held in the Pilot Region Oberpfälzer Wald/Český Les in Přimda (Czech Republic) with representatives of the communities from the German and Czech sides. Mayors and civil servants were able to exchange ideas with each other on a local level – in some cases for the very first time – thanks to the simultaneous interpretation and have a truly cross-border discussion of the conflicts in their region. This helped a lot to put the focus on what is important in the Pilot Region.

Further trans-boundary workshops with special topics followed, such as a meeting of representatives of the nature parks administrators and agencies for nature conservation in the Centrum Bavaria-Bohemia in Schönsee (Germany). The main topic was the future cooperation along the Green Belt with respect to sensitive tourism and sustainable regional development.
SCHOOL OF LANDSCAPE AWARENESS
IN ALL PILOT REGIONS

Learning to perceive the local landscape – developing shared visions

The School of Landscape Awareness is a workshop format for citizens, along with local and regional decision-makers, intended to train them in awareness of the uniqueness and particularity of the local landscape.

The workshops were carried out between August 2012 and early 2013 in all six Pilot Regions for the GREENNET-Project, guided by experts from ECOVAST Austria, who belong to the »European Association of Villages and Small Towns«.

The workshops were based on the following method:

1. Excursion into the landscape to record its traits and characteristics
2. Developing a detailed description into a landscape matrix on the basis of the results of the excursion
3. Formulation and weighting of the most dominant characteristics and specifics of the landscape

When the landscape is being recorded, the recorded areas are not sorted into «good & valuable» and «bad & worthless». Through a value-neutral approach to the landscape, this format makes it possible to bring all of the interest groups and their needs together on a neutral level and initiate conflict solving processes in practical, open cooperation.

By means of this method, it was possible to pursue an exchange of ideas between various stakeholders from a broad range of areas of responsibility in all of the Pilot Regions and ultimately show people new ways to view landscapes. This approach fostered sympathy for different approaches to the same landscape from new perspectives and generally raised awareness.

This made it possible to successfully establish the School of Landscape Awareness as a tool for solving conflicts over land and for international cooperation. This makes the format into a valuable instrument in securing unprotected areas along the Green Belt without, however, deploying it to solve concrete land use demands in various countries.
STUDENT WORK IN THE ERFURT UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES FOR THE GREENNET-PILOT REGION GRABFELD

In the context of the GREENNET-Project, three students in the field of landscape architecture at the Erfurt University of Applied Sciences wrote final theses about the Pilot Region Grabfeld. The works written by Anna Gramsch and Ralf Ganswindt deal with the spacious network of important habitats in the proximity of the Green Belt. Both works discuss options of alternative corridors as well as species-specific corridors. The works can be viewed — for interested parties the supervisor Prof. Dr. Ilke Marschall, is available as contact at the Erfurt University of Applied Sciences.

Bachelor’s thesis on the topic of «Cultural Historical Landscape Elements within the Green Belt in Grabfeld in Thuringia – recording of historical border relics and assessment of their experientiality in the landscape.»

Alexandra Prinz carried out a comprehensive inventory of the existing relics such as border markers and watch towers of the former inner-German border. It was possible to determine that many of them are hard to access, damaged and can hardly even be experienced any more. There is copious literature on the subject, but very little exchange between planners and other areas of specialization with reference to this cultural landscape (protection of monuments, local history, etc.). The preservation of these elements is considered an essential aspect of the experientiality of the unique history of the former border.

Master’s thesis on the topic of «Closing Gaps in the Green Belt – Green Infrastructure as connecting facility regarding the motorway A71 in northern Grabfeld»

The master’s thesis by Ralf Ganswindt was supervised by the Erfurt University of Applied Sciences and by the BUND Thuringia, and brought to a conclusion at the end of February 2014.

The student dealt with the barrier effects of the motorway A71 in northern Grabfeld, which has connected Thuringia with Bavaria since 2006. Additionally, the work identified the main species and the possibilities for reducing the cutting off effects of that section of the motorway in this part of the Green Belt by means of connecting facilities. To this end both variants for forest and for open land species were presented.

Bachelor’s thesis on the topic «Measures and Strategies for links for the European Wild Cat in the Green Belt»

Anna Gramsch investigated the connecting function of the Green Belt for forest species such as the European wild cat in southern Grabfeld. In the result she developed different variants for closing the existing gap for the wild cat corridor in the proximity of Streufdorf. Based on the significance of the Green Belt in this area for open landscape species, an alternative corridor was developed on the Bavarian side. It contains along with the existing wooden structures, new facilities made of wood and strips of cultivated land. Additionally, the development of informational materials as well as the coordination of large scale local conservation projects were promoted.

Master’s thesis on the topic of «Closing Gaps in the Green Belt – Green Infrastructure as connecting facility regarding the motorway A71 in northern Grabfeld»

The master’s thesis by Ralf Ganswindt was supervised by the Erfurt University of Applied Sciences and by the BUND Thuringia, and brought to a conclusion at the end of February 2014.

The student dealt with the barrier effects of the motorway A71 in northern Grabfeld, which has connected Thuringia with Bavaria since 2006. Additionally, the work identified the main species and the possibilities for reducing the cutting off effects of that section of the motorway in this part of the Green Belt by means of connecting facilities. To this end both variants for forest and for open land species were presented.

Bachelor’s thesis on the topic «Measures and Strategies for links for the European Wild Cat in the Green Belt»

Anna Gramsch investigated the connecting function of the Green Belt for forest species such as the European wild cat in southern Grabfeld. In the result she developed different variants for closing the existing gap for the wild cat corridor in the proximity of Streufdorf. Based on the significance of the Green Belt in this area for open landscape species, an alternative corridor was developed on the Bavarian side. It contains along with the existing wooden structures, new facilities made of wood and strips of cultivated land. Additionally, the development of informational materials as well as the coordination of large scale local conservation projects were promoted.
WORLD HERITAGE SITE GREEN BELT

Feasibility study for nominating the Green Belt as a World Heritage Site

The significance of the Green Belt as European Natural and Cultural Heritage Site is being rightly emphasized. But whether the Green Belt Europe or parts of it can be identified as a UNESCO-World Heritage Site in the future, is no easy question to answer. For that reason the University of Freiburg is conducting a feasibility study supported by the German Federal Office for Conservation (BfN) – in close coordination with GREENNET and its partners. Together with experts, the essential pre-conditions for a possible nomination as a World Heritage Site are being discusses and developed.

BILINGUAL GREENNET-FLYER

Multi-lingualism is a Trump Card

In international projects, it is not easy to reach the local people in English, the "working language" of trans-national programs. If one wants to generate enthusiasm for something, one will achieve the best results in the mother tongue of the target audience. For that reason bilingual or multi-lingual informational materials are worth their weight in gold, like the German-Czech flyer from the GREENNET-Project partner Ametyst. It helps to inform people on both sides of the border and across the language barrier. A good starting point for awakening interest for the neighbors and the entire border region, and for developing joint strategies as well as to be inspired to learn the language of the neighbors better.

DIALOGUE FROM THE LOCAL TO THE EU-LEVEL

Exchange between local actors and EU-decision makers in Brussels

Most of all the communication between the local base and the governing agencies in Brussels, such as the Directorate General for the Environment of the EU-Commission, is a deciding factor in the long-term successful implementation of the joint project Green Belt Europe. Because long-term success depends primarily on the EU-member countries who must integrate the Green Belt as a core piece of a European green infrastructure in their land use planning. GREENNET offered special workshops for experts from the regional land use planning authorities in Slovenia or representatives of the Nature Park administrations in Germany.

GREENNET AT »DBU-WEEK OF THE ENVIRONMENT« IN BERLIN

Project presentation in Castle Bellevue with President Joachim Gauck

The »Week of the Environment«, organized in June 2012 by the German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU) was one of the largest tradeshows for conservation and environmental technology in Europe, with 200 exhibitors and around 15,000 visitors. The GREENNET-Project also made a presentation in the park of Castle Bellevue, the main office of German President Joachim Gauck, who opened the event. For two days, the BUND Project Office Green Belt informed the professional audience about the goals and activities of the GREENNET-Project.

»In the joint excursion to the Green Belt students of a Czech and a German high school were exploring how the history of their countries is projected onto the landscape. The work in pairs with the coeval from the other side of the border was interesting not only as a training of language skills.«

Klára Tydlitátová
Lector of Environmental Education, Pilsen
»The lynx shows us how tolerant our society is, how ready we are to stand back even in favour of our wild animals. Letting the lynx return to its territory should be seen as a cultural achievement today, just as the eradication of the Lynx once was.«

Sybille Wölfli
Biologist, Bavarian Lynx Project
CREATING ACCEPTANCE AND RAISING AWARENESS.

Problem
The Pilot Region Oberpfälzer Wald/Český Les has extraordinary value for conservation purposes but hardly enjoys any protection on the German side along the Green Belt. Due to the massive expansion of industrial biomass production that has been accelerated by Germany, significant habitats in the Czech part are also facing the threat of being lost. On the Czech side there is a very large landscape conservation area, but the smaller areas inside, especially the mires and wetlands, cannot be adequately restored and managed, so that their existence is endangered. On either side of the border, the consciousness among the local population and authorities was still very underdeveloped with respect to the conservation of natural and cultural treasures. The perspectives on sustainable development were hardly known.

Proposed Solution
Through a variety of cross-border informational resources and options for dialogue, it was possible to create an awareness of the value of the Green Belt and the acceptance of long-term security of this memorial landscape could be increased. The goal is to develop the region sustainably in such a way that both people and nature profit equally. Various actions to promote participation and experience, such as family days out or workshops on the history and nature of the border region for school children, as well as direct trans-boundary exchange between representatives of local communities and the authorities were able to generate significant impetus.

SAMPLE PROJECT
OBERPFÄLZER WALD / ČESKÝ LES

The Lynx, ambassador for the Green Belt

The Region Oberpfälzer Wald/Český Les is an important stepping stone and travel corridor for species such as the Lynx lynx. After being nearly hunted to extinction by people around 150 years ago, it is now slowly expanding its territory again – starting from the National Parks Bavarian Forest/Šumava. Admittedly, the lynx is a »native species« in this region, but its return is raising some anxiety among local people and causes conflicts with human uses such as hunting, forestry and agriculture.

Events like the excursion »On the tracks of the Lynx« contribute to cause sympathy for its habitat and resettlement along the Green Belt and to reduce fears. Over the long term, the lynx can become a species characteristic of this region – perhaps even a symbol and mascot for the unique nature along the former Iron Curtain.
SAMPLE PROJECT
KUČNICA/ KUTSCHENITZA-MURA

Preserving species and habitats in urgent need of protection

The GREENNET-Pilot Region Kučnica/Kutschenitza-Mura encompasses the Slovenian-Austrian-Hungarian Nature Park Goričko-Raab-Orség, the southern Austrian hill country and the area along the rivers Mura and Kučnica/Kutschenitza. The region is marked by its richly varied cultural landscape, which is a home to numerous habitats for various plant and animal species. Due to the numerous watercourses, there are many species of dragonfly here which are under special protection. In 2012, quite unexpectedly, 130,000 specimens of the river mussel Unio crassus were discovered in the Kučnica/Kutschenitza in the course of the GREENNET-Project. A species of mussel that was originally native almost everywhere in northern and central Europe, it was 90 per-cent wiped out in many areas through intensification of agriculture.

PROMOTING ECOLOGICALLY VALUABLE HABITATS.

Problem
The expansion of agriculture on a large scale has led to a regulation of streams and rivers in the Pilot Region Kučnica/Kutschenitza-Mura, fertilizer-driven discharge of nutrients, erosion and input of contaminated water. Intensive intervention in the eco-system as well as the disregard for water guidelines, such as increased water use for irrigating orchards, resulted in the disappearance of meadow wetlands and erosion of natural riverbanks. The core problem however was that there was no international land-use planning existent in the border triangle Austria – Slovenia – Hungary; with the help of such planning it could be possible to solve the ecological problems stemming from water management. The catchment area of Kučnica/Kutschenitza, where species such as the river mussel Unio crassus are native, was most in need of urgent protective efforts on all sides of the border.

Proposed Solution
The guiding idea of a naturally flowing Kučnica/Kutschenitza shall be implemented. Detachment and purchase of areas shall provide nature sufficient room to regenerate its wetland meadow vegetation and allow meandering; natural reed treatment plants shall be built. This required close cooperation between landowners, communities, water management authorities, project partners and scientists, which was promoted by GREENNET. Special recommendations for measures to preserve the river mussel in the Kučnica/Kutschenitza were developed in the project and forwarded to the water management authorities in order to be able to advance future projects in accord with the international efforts at conservation. Numerous measures to protect the river mussel have been realized in the past in the Pilot Region of Grabfeld. In the course of the exchange of knowledge among the stakeholders in the GREENNET-Project, experiences and insights from the actors in Kučnica/Kutschenitza were shared. This made it possible to generate efficient synergy effects.
“Most helpful was the exchange of knowledge concerning special conservation measures in remediation of structural deficits in bodies of water. The experiences of the actors along the Milz can be directly integrated into the development of the Kutschenitza.”

Markus Ehrenpaar,
Austrian League for Nature Conservation
"The innovative ‘GREENNET approach’ it is a cultural challenge: Until now the aims and objectives of land use management of the various institutional departments and actors have been defined by the legal framework but independently from each other, in an asynchronous way and without a shared strategy."

Dott. Manlio Petris,
Director of Regional Agency Promotur
Problem
In the Julian Prealps, GREENNET-Pilot Region number six, the typical layers of interest collide: Conservation of the landscape and the tourist economy. The essential point of conflict is the creation of a cross-border ski area that is planned to extend from the Italian region to the Slovenian side of the Triglav-National Park. Along with the economic advantages for the entire region, this also means a deep intervention into the form of the local landscape and its ecological system. Some of the newer ski slopes already border Natura-2000-areas, protected areas under the strict Fauna-Flora-Habitat-Guidelines of the EU.

Proposed Solution
With a fair dialogue free of prejudices between the various stakeholders concerning the different points of view with respect to regional land use planning, it was possible to stimulate lively discussions. Future perspectives and expectations in landscape development were discussed openly. The focus was primarily on the compatibility of socio-economic development models and the conservation of nature and ecosystems. It was possible to hold discussions in light of the innovative approach of a synergistic decision making strategy as well as the opportunity to overcome and solve potential conflicts with an approach that was viewed positively by all sides. The regional administration pledged in advance to expand the Natura-2000-Area along the Italian-Slovenian border.
BRINGING INSIGHTS TOGETHER.
PLEDGED TO GREATER RESPONSIBILITY.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the European Green Belt Initiative, stakeholders from 24 countries along the former Iron Curtain met in May 2013. In the framework of festivities arranged by the German Ministry of the environment, there was the opportunity to sign – *The Joint Declaration of Intent on the European Green Belt* – to promote and care for the European Green Belt and thus strengthen the political commitment to protect it. So far, 15 countries have signed this declaration and two additional countries have submitted letters of support.

The GREENNET-Project partners have successfully worked to have their countries officially commit to the European Green Belt. It was therefore possible to win all of the countries in Central Europe except for one as signatories to the declaration. Additionally, the project partners themselves pledge with the GREENNET-Charter, to work for the preservation and development of the Green Belt as an unique, shared natural and cultural legacy beyond the end of the project.

A common transnational methodology, in order to define regional goals and landscape quality objectives for the Pilot Regions.

A GIS-Tool for visualizing and evaluating the data collected in regional surveys and inventories.

*Raising awareness on the EU, national and regional levels.*

*A «Charter of the Green Belt», which shows both an international conservation and management strategy and new instruments for protecting ecological networks.*

*Promoting the European Green Belt as a World Natural and Cultural Heritage Site.*

THE RESULTS IN DETAIL
"The European Green Belt is a best practice example for successful cooperation between local people, stakeholder, GOs and NGOs in a transboundary context. International projects like GREENNET play an important role to support these goals and transnational cooperation. It also contributes to further enhance the European Green Belt Initiative."

Dr. Uwe Riecken,
German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation,
German National Focal Point for the Green Belt
»The European Green Belt is the existing model project for the implementation of trans-boundary Green Infrastructure through the continent. At the same time it is a central axis of a future trans-European network of intact living spaces to secure indispensable ecosystem services for all of us.«

Dr. Liana Geidezis,
Director of BUND Project Green Belt,
Regional Coordinator for Green Belt Central Europe
IDENTIFYING CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS.
DEVELOPING GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IN EUROPE.

The concept of Green Infrastructure depends on the connectivity and long-term preservation of natural and nearly natural ecosystems and their qualitative and economic performance for humans. For example, intact alluvial wetland systems are important for absorbing water and preventing flood disasters. A balance between conservation of nature, environment and agricultural use is the primary precondition for intact food chains and the production of healthy foodstuffs.

In order to build up a pan-European Green Infrastructure, the Green Belt offers exceptional approaches as a backbone for ecological network extending through the entire continent. The positive experiences and approaches developed out of GREENNET-project can be defined as success factors and transferred to other European projects. Supported by the lobbying in the context of the GREENNET-Project, the Green Belt Europe was integrated into the strategy of the EU-Commission for Green Infrastructure as a model project.

The potentials for the Green Belt were demonstrated in a wide variety of informational events, such as a Lunch Debate with members of the EU-Parliament, presentations in the EU-Environmental Committee or for representatives of the EU-regions. The exchange with EU-authorities and decision makers helped to estimate the potential for future development for the Green Belt with respect to Green Infrastructures as well as to initiate the important next steps for implementation in the participating countries.
MAKING EXPERIENCES ACCESSIBLE. TRANSNATIONAL PROJECT NETWORKING.

The experiences and insights derived from the GREENNET-Project as well as the pan-European Green Belt-Initiative as a whole can be transferred to similarly structured regions world-wide. For that reason the exchange of experiences with responsible parties from other parts of the world is especially important.

A region that has developed historically in ways similar to the European Green Belt is the border area between North and South Korea. There, the so-called De-Militarized Zone (DMZ) has split Korea into two politically and socially separate countries for more than 60 years, stretching 250 kilometers and spanning 4 kilometers in width. The nature in the proximity of the southern civil control zone has developed into a largely undisturbed, valuable habitat for numerous endangered species – analogous to the Green Belt in Europe and Germany. From the South Korean side, efforts have been made for years to protect these habitats for natural conservation.

Citizens, business and tourism should be working together – the Green Belt in Europe is deemed an example by the responsible parties. Consequently, there has been an intensive exchange of information on the Green Belt with representatives of the GREENNET-Project as well.

Dr. SHIM Suk-Kyung,
Professional Officer, ICLEI Korean Office (Local Governments for Sustainability)

“It was a good luck for Koreans to be able to utilize valuable experiences of the German Green Belt, which has much in common with the Korean Demilitarized Zone on historical, ecological and emotional aspects. Besides, the European Green Belt Initiative exemplifies the vision of ’green détente’ in Northeast Asia to bring together different countries and people towards safeguarding valuable natural heritages and sustainable regional development.”
FIRST SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE IN ERFURT

Ecological Networks – chances and challenges

The Erfurt University of Applied Sciences was the host of the first GREENNET Conference on January 31st, 2012, at the start of the Project. 75 scientists from Germany, Austria, The Czech Republic, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia, The Netherlands, Turkey, Poland and the USA discussed the topic «The Green Belt as European Ecological Network – Strengths and Gaps».

Well-known and respected presenters gave the public an insight into the broad spectrum of international experiences and approaches in research. The focus was on the challenges and chances for ecological networks. The proceedings of the conference were published by the University of Applied Sciences in 2013.

SECOND SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE IN VIENNA

Preservation of the Green Belt through instruments of land use policy

From February 19th to 20th, 2013, 85 participants from sciences, public administration, NGOs and business from eleven nations, including the USA and South Korea, met for the Second Scientific Conference at the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences in Vienna. The focus of this was the exchange between the various national procedures and instruments, especially the options for bridging gaps as well as for the conservation and management of the Green Belt. The first contributions of the GREENNET-Project were presented and the difficulties between conservation and regional development, made accessible in a practical way by an Excursion to Bratislava, some 65 kilometers away. The proceedings of the conference were published by the Erfurt University of Applied Sciences in 2014.

THIRD SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE IN EISENACH

Perspectives for biological and cultural diversity along the Green Belt

Best-Practices, successful implementation measures and new approaches are the focus of the Third Scientific Conference in Eisenach, which is simultaneously the final conference of the GREENNET-Project. The Erfurt University of Applied Sciences and the Association for Rural Development Thuringia invited participants to the city of the Wartburg from June 3rd to 4th, 2014.

Following the motto «Perspectives on Biological & Cultural Diversity along the European Green Belt – good examples, successful measures and new ideas», the results of the GREENNET-Project will be presented and impetus will be given in the hands of the audience of international participants for the ongoing development of the European Green Belt.