



BESTbelt Conference

1.–4. November 2022

Ulcinj

Montenegro

BESTbelt



More power for the European Green Belt

Report on the results of the working group session: Sharing of knowledge and experiences

Session 7 – parallel working groups: Sharing of knowledge and experiences

The participants of the BESTbelt Conference 2022 were invited in session 7 to participate in four different working groups. Main objectives of the working group session were to enable all participants to contribute, to exchange and to jointly elaborate relevant topics for the further development of the European Green Belt and BESTbelt. Two rounds were offered so that all conference participants were able to choose two different workshops.

1. Promotion of the EGB Days and discussion how to improve the performance
2. Spatial delineation of the EGB: Presentation of methodological approach in Italy and exchange of experience
3. Workcamps and youth exchange
4. Future Workshop: European Green Belt - Challenges and potential for the next 30 years

1. Promotion of the EGB Days and discussion how to improve the performance

Lead and documentation: Anne Katrin Heinrichs (EuroNatur), in cooperation with Dea Zyruku & Stephanie Gentle (PPNEA), Gradimir Gradev (Green Balkans)

Background

During the European Green Belt Days every year in the period of 18 to 24 of September, people from north to south demonstrate with all their heart and strong commitment what the European Green Belt is about: An international peace and conservation project. In this period, the European Green Belt Initiative celebrates the European Green Belt Days (EGB Days). The European Green Belt Days were initiated to celebrate the European Green Belt and to actively involve the local population. The first European Green Belt Days events were organised at the Balkan Green Belt in 2016 as part of a project but in other regions



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similar activities have been happening, too. From now they were organized under the umbrella of the European Green Belt Days. In the year 2019 the European Green Belt Association (EGBA) initiated a small funding scheme to foster the uptake of the concept in all four regions.

But still the highest interest remains to be existent at the Balkan Green Belt. Therefore, the objective of the working group was to reflect on the concept and discuss opportunities to make the European Green Belt Days more known and how it can be stimulated in all four regions. The main results of the discussion in the group were:

Clarify and sharpen the objective of the EGB Days

- What exactly is the objective of the EGB Days?
- What is the expected impact of the EGB Days, what do we want to reach?
- Which topics reflect the objective of the EGB Days?
- How to avoid repetition of events?

Broaden the concept

- Think about target groups - could it be also people from outside the EGB (e.g. tourists)?
- How about organizing events even outside of EGB (e.g. in the capital) in order to reach more people?
- Foster exchange of knowledge amongst partners implementing an event
- Build up a network: Provide information to other organisations implementing an EGB Days event on what else is happening for inspiration, or even visit other events to exchange

Improve communication and visibility

- Present list of happening events on the website
- Journalists to be invited
- Provide communication material about the event as such (e.g. general texts provided by EGBA)
- Prepare basic exhibition about the EGB (with specific additions if needed)
- Arrange a permanent information stand in museums
- Use ArcGIS story maps

Further ideas for unfolding the potential of the EGB Days

- Consider that there is an “event oversaturation” as a huge number of events takes already place on the local level

- Involve municipalities, possibly even with a co-funding to demonstrate their commitment
- Link better with other activities or existing structures, e.g. combine with the Municipality Award, or with BESTbelt to inform about projects during EGB Days
- Concentrate on twinning municipalities
- Think about an increased budget (2.500 EUR can be very low in some countries)
- Review administrative procedures of European Green Belt Association Grant for EGB Days
- Are there training needs to implement better events, e.g. impact-oriented approaches, stakeholder involvement
- Think about timing, in the North it is already very cold end of September!

The collected ideas shall be considered by the Board of the European Green Belt Association during the implementation of the Programme of Work 2023-2024.

2. Spatial delineation of the EGB: presentation of methodological approach in Italy and exchange of experiences

Lead and Documentation: Francesca Visintin and Davide Scridel (Rete Italiana European Green Belt APS)

Background

In 2018 (Eisenach, Germany) the General Assembly of the European Green Belt Association (EGBA) approved the decision on the indicative **spatial reference area of the EGB** (as per Box 1). The Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (Governmental Organization and Italian National Focal Point) accepted the spatial reference area of the EGB. At the same time, it was recognized that it does not reflect all relevant areas and asked for reconsidering the reference area. This is in line with the approach of the spatial reference area of the EGB and so the General Assembly deliberated that in general, “the suggested reference area is seen as core area (references areas) and may be narrowed down or widened according to specific *questions*” (refer to the Eisenach General Assembly minutes, 18th October 2018).

Questions should be justified on the base of well-founded issues.

Box 1. Spatial reference area of the European Green Belt

Objective

The spatial reference area of the European Green Belt specifies its spatial location. Thus, the spatial reference area of the European Green Belt defines the area where the activities of the initiative are concentrated. The purpose of the spatial reference area is to support the work of the European Green Belt Association and the European Green Belt Initiative, e.g. as a base for analysis and implementation of connectivity and Green Infrastructure. Naturally, this reference area may be narrowed down or widened according to specific questions.

Definition

The spatial reference area of the European Green Belt comprises the total area of municipalities located directly at the European Green Belt Line or located with their midpoint within a specific corridor around the European Green Belt Line. Also protected areas (all categories) located with their midpoint within a specific corridor around the European Green Belt Line are considered with their total area.

For protected areas having their midpoint not within a the specific corridor around the European Green Belt Line only the area within the selected municipalities is considered for the spatial reference area of the European Green Belt. Thus the protected areas form natural connections to the surroundings of the European Green Belt.

The width of the corridor varies between the four regions:

Balkan: 50 km

Central Europe: 10 km

Baltic: 20 km

Fennoscandia: under preparation

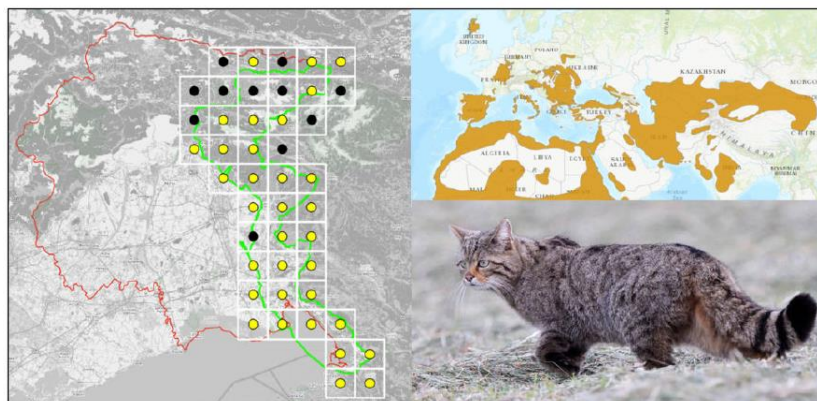
For the coastal waters seawards at the Baltic Sea the spatial reference area is defined as 12 nautical miles (22,2 kilometers; 13,8 miles) from the baseline according to the definition of territorial waters of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Other coastal waters are considered to be within the spatial reference area of the European Green Belt until a distance of 5 km (equivalent 3,11 miles) from the coast.

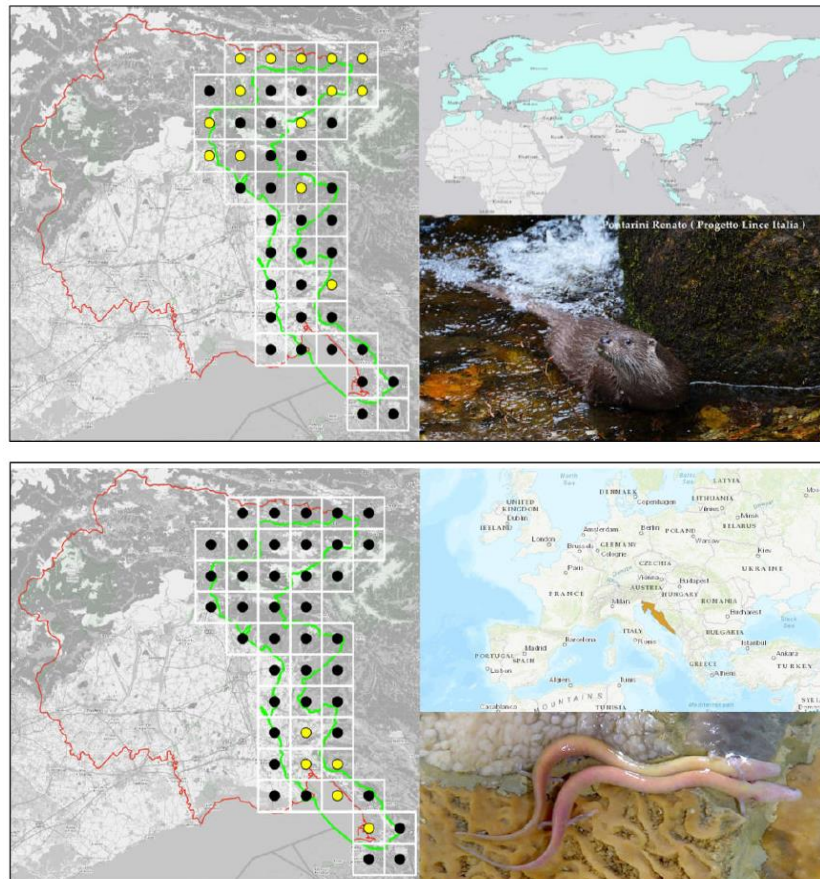
Source: Annex F “Draft indicative spatial reference area of the European Green Belt”, General Assembly, 18th October 2018.

The work presented by Rete Italiana European Green Belt (from here on “Rete Italiana”) suggests a potential approach currently under discussion by the Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia.

The approach is based on the following criteria:

1. Delineation of the Italian EGB based on natural and ecological values:
 - a. **Geomorphological/Hydrological values:** we used the Soča/Isonzo and Natisone rivers in combination with local relieves, valleys and other topographic aspects to create a baseline.
 - b. **Habitats:** We included habitats that best represent the value of the EGB based on CORINE Land Cover Biotopes.
 - c. **Flora:** We included areas holding flagship and endemic floristic species (N=7) that best represent the value of the EGB based on the last national report of the Habitats Directive (92/43/ECC).
 - d. **Fauna:** The selection of flagship fauna species was done using existing biodiversity Atlases and citizen science data. Species and their relevance to the proposed EGB were performed according to the following criteria:
 - i. We included species which distribution aligns along the censused in the Italian-Slovenian border areas which were most likely favored by the “climate of geopolitical tension” that has for decades disfavored and minimized the anthropic presence in these areas (i.e. otter *Lutra lutra*).
 - ii. Species censused due to the peculiar biogeographical distribution reaching in this region their westernmost distribution (i.e. Olm *Proteus anguinus*).
 - iii. Species that have used and are using the European Green Belt area as a starting point for colonization or recolonization (i.e. wild cat *Felix sylvestris*).
 - iv. Multitaxa approach: we selected species (N=17) representing insects, crustaceans, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.





2. Inclusion of existing Protected areas/N2000 sites:

- a. Delineation was modelled to include at best natural sites of regional value established on the basis of the Regional Laws (RL n. 42/1996 modified by RL n. 20/2021, the Sites of Community Interest i.e., Special Areas of Conservation and some SCIs) and Special Protection Areas, the State Reserves, as well as the permanent meadows as identified by Regional Law n. 9/2005.

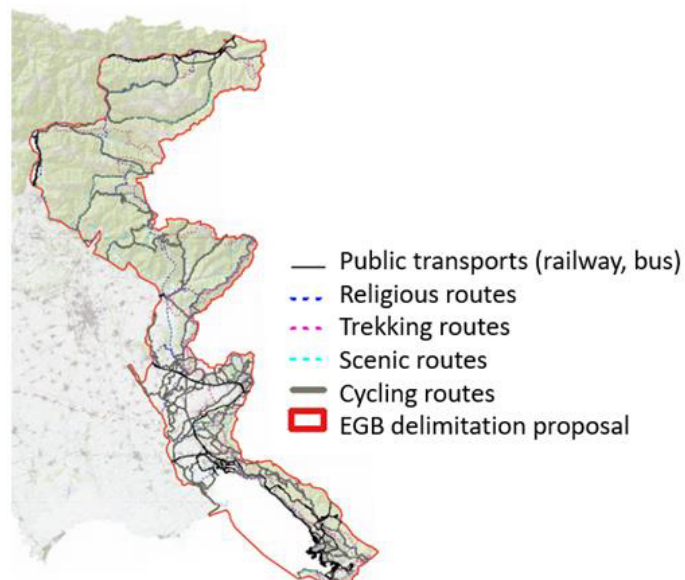
3. Evaluation of historical and cultural values:

- a. We verified that the proposed delineation matched well the historical asset based via Regional Landscape Plan tool.
- b. We verified the presence of a high proportion of military artefacts associated with the Cold War period using existing webGIS.

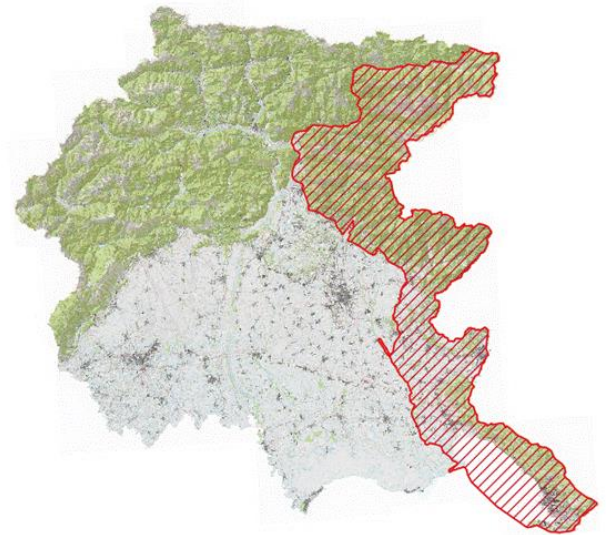
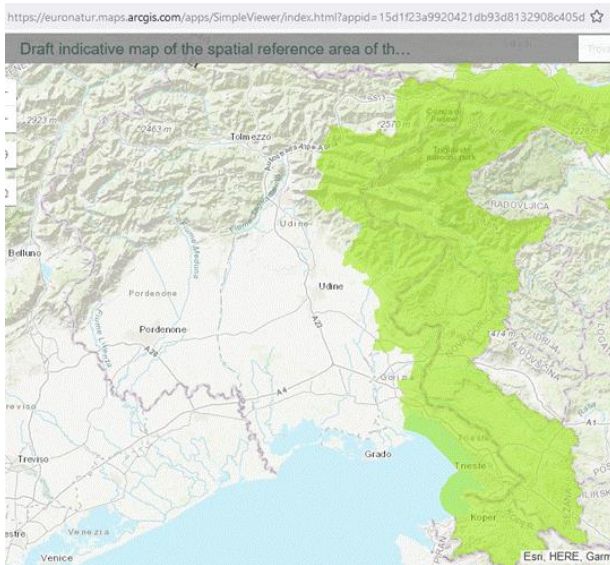


4. The presence of infrastructures for sustainable tourism.

- a. The regional system of slow mobility,
- b. Footpaths and cycle paths.



Consequently, the spatial reference area of the European Green Belt is compared with the area defined by the proposed spatial delimitation approach.



Source:

<https://euronatur.maps.arcgis.com/apps/SimpleViewer/index.html?appid=15d1f23a9920421db93d8132908c405d>

Outcome

During the workshop session, the following points were raised by the audience:

- The approach was appreciated and may provide a strong foundation for more detailed delimitation also for other countries along the EGB, because it takes into account the nature conservation aspect as well as the cultural-historical aspect of the border region/former Iron Curtain.
- A more detailed delimitation considering above mentioned aspects could support the vision of the EGB as UNESCO World Natural and Cultural Heritage site.
- The approach can also be particularly useful for western adjacent countries along the EGB to define a more appropriate delineation of the EGB in the respective country.
- Slovenian partners should be involved to assess if similar guidelines were followed.
- Endemism is an important aspect to assess if a species can be defined as flagship, but also species representing some sort of connectivity values should be included as valuable representative of the EGB.
- Assuming funding availability, this work should be followed by an analytical work to evaluate:
 - Connectivity and gap analysis of habitats and values along EGB (e.g. using satellite data);

- Edge effect evaluation: assessing the positive influence of EGB values (i.e., biodiversity) in the surrounding landscapes, by calculating its effects based on the distance from the border.
- Map alien and invasive species to assess whether the EGB is an area that protects against invasive invasion.
- Assess transboundary connectivity along the EGB and connectivity of EGB to further national and international habitat network axes.
- Starting from the reference area, countries can draw a more detailed delimitation if the reference area does not fully represent the values in the area. Some countries already did it.
 - North Macedonia adapted the EGB by monitoring the presence of the brown bear and other species;
 - Kosovo is working on a more precise delimitation in order to adopt it into the national spatial planning;
 - Thanks to an in-depth analysis, Germany assessed that the positive influence along the EGB on the presence of protected areas reaches out to about 10 km on the former BRD (Bundesrepublik Deutschland) side and to about 15 km on the former DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik) side. Also, in Germany, the federal state of Hesse has developed a delimitation of the Green Belt by dividing the Green Belt Hesse into different nature conservation zones and cultural-historical memorial points; the aim is to designate the Green Belt Hesse as a National Nature Monument.

3. Work camps and youth exchange

Lead and Documentation: Karin Kowol (BUND Thuringia), Martin Kuba (BUND Department Green Belt)

Background

Currently there is a high level of activity in conducting work camps and/or youth camps all along the EGB, focussing on various target-groups and with several different activities conducted, some local, others international.

Recent Camps cover target groups from all ages, from kindergarten-children to adults, while the majority of the reported activities focusses on young adults. The activities offered in the camps of course need to be adjusted to the target group, in the following is



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a (non-exhaustive) list of recently conducted actions, partly mixed (young people try different activities) and partly specified:

- Excursions/Nature Exploring/Nature Experience
- Educational Games in field
- Cycling tours
- Intergenerational Exchange about nature and history
- Meetings with contemporary witnesses
- Art Happenings
- Contests with focus on arts, science etc
- Landscape management
- Monitoring (e.g. species)
- Clean-ups
- Survival education
- Climate Change Communication
- International exchange
- Building of shelters
- Scientific education (e.g. trilateral camp for students in the area North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo with specialists for several species and habitats)
- Support for marginalised local groups

The organisers of camps reach their target-groups mainly through:

- Connecting to various youth organisations
- Social Media, youtube-clip: e.g. <https://youtu.be/bNf07OwpZwg>, produced during a joint project of EGB partners in 2020 (German: <https://youtu.be/RLjiQoNFTYc>)
- Cooperation with schools
- "Mouth-to-mouth-propaganda"
- Contact to other Green Belt partners, even to partners in South Korea
- Newspapers, posters and flyers
- Direct contact to multipliers and direct cooperation with other associations are often more efficient for getting participants, than spreading the information widely, although the latter is good for public relations in general

Background

How will the European Green Belt look like in 2044? In two groups with about 30 participants the future of the EGB was discussed in interactive sessions. All participants inspired each other with their thinking. In order not to delete any of these ideas, we kept them all and did not prioritize.

The results in a nutshell:

In 2044:

- 1) Europe will be connected by a trans-European hiking trail along the European Green Belt. This long-distance trail will use existing trails and infrastructure. But it will also stimulate the establishment of new trails and guesthouses.
- 2) The European Green Belt will be a free area with no borders or fences
- 3) The European Green Belt will be a project especially young people are committed to.
- 4) The European Green Belt will be a huge transboundary national park; deep collaboration with Europarc is developed
- 5) The European Green Belt will be a large protected area. In all countries a special legislation is in place to protect the EGB.
- 6) The European Green Belt will be an ecological network with all free-flowing rivers protected and altered rivers restored
- 7) Large parts of the European Green Belt will be protected as UNESCO World Heritage
- 8) The Green Heart will be reality.
- 9) The EGB community has significant influence on EU policies.
- 10) Russia is back in the democratic EGB family and the division of 2022 overcome
- 11) Local communities and small businesses along the EGB identify themselves with EGB
- 12) Baltic coastal hiking trail extended all along the EGB (see #1)
- 13) Environmental issues along the EGB are solved holistically
- 14) If the EGB is the backbone of a European ecological network, by 2044 all rips are considered and the EGB extended.
- 15) EGB twins are in place
- 16) We still have borders (not so optimistic views were also shared)
- 17) The EGB has a strong communication platform, including a concept as a whole, sharing data and information, sharing touristic offers
- 18) The EGB functions as a climate mitigation and migration corridor

- 19) Governments in all EGB countries approved EGB as protected area. These protected areas are well managed and collaborate transboundary.
- 20) The rural areas along the EGB are revived.
- 21) Children and pupils visit the EGB on a regular basis as part of their curriculum
- 22) The EGB will be the core area of one large biosphere reserve
- 23) The EGB will be the BESTbelt to live in
- 24) A comprehensive exchange programme for people along the EGB is in place
- 25) Green jobs are available all along the EGB
- 26) Traditions and cultural identity along the EGB are still alive
- 27) The EGB is seen as a massive carbon sink by decision makers

All these ideas should guide us on our way working for the European Green Belt!



Picture 2: Presenting the ideas of working group 4, © N.Moussa/ EuroNatur