



# **BESTbelt Conference**

1.–4. November 2022

## **Ulcinj**

Montenegro

# **BESTbelt**



More power for the European Green Belt

## Report on Session 5: Working groups on the road

On 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022 a field trip was organized to the Salina Ulcinj, the Museum of the Salina Ulcinj and the beach in front of Ada Bojana. The 66 participants were divided into three smaller groups, to allow them to interact with one another and visit a unique project site of the European Green Belt. The division into smaller groups encouraged the mixing of the participants and gave them an opportunity for individual exchange with others who they have not yet worked or cooperated with. It also made it possible to visit several locations and work on specific questions per station.

### Salina Ulcinj

Alexandar Perović from CZIP, Montenegro, gave a brief overview of the thrilling history of the salina as well as an introduction on the importance of the salina for wildlife and nature, despite it being man-made. The nature park is unique in Europe and an important example of biodiversity and nature protection. The area of just around 15 km<sup>2</sup> is now flooded and today an essential habitat for over 250 different bird species, among them around 20 endangered species, as well as amphibia, reptiles, fish and plants. Equipped with binoculars, the participants were able to get a picture of the bird life in the saline for themselves.

In addition to the ornithological discoveries, this station provided an opportunity to talk about nature conservation in general, about nature restoration and protected habitats along the European Green Belt. The participants were encouraged to share examples of their working areas and exchange about challenges for restoration projects, solutions and experiences.



Picture 1: Birdlife at the Saline Ulcinj © N.Moussa/ EuroNatur

## Europa Beach and Aloha Beach

As part of the Long Beach in front of the peninsula Ada Bojana, this station was very close to the border region between Albania and Montenegro. Ksenija Medenica from CZIP and Alexandra Ivanović from the public enterprise for coastal management, explained how parts of the once overused sand dunes on the beach were transformed into a protected area during the run of a restoration project.

Part of this station was a visit to **Aloha Beach**, which showed the groups in how far threats like erosion and washed up human plastic waste put the beach in great danger, as it is literally disappearing and spoiled. This station showed that challenges of tourism and human use of sandy beaches can be overcome by trying to make tourism more sustainable as well as by allowing sand dunes to grow back naturally. However, solutions need to be found to stop erosion, which is linked to the hydropower stations on the Albanian side. The participants discussed and exchanged about different challenges related to the border situation and tourism along the European Green Belt as well as strategies which could be implemented to overcome them. Part of the conversation was also to think of or share opportunities that arise through the transboundary context.



Picture 2: Small working groups discussion questions at the Aloha Beach © F.Hofmann/ EuroNatur

### **Museum of the Salina Ulcinj**

The museum at the entrance of the Salina is still being established. It is situated on the now abandoned factory premises, where the extracted salt was once stored, packaged and boxed for transport mainly to countries of former Yugoslavia. Inside the main building, Jovana Drobnjak (CZIP) explained about past glory and new approaches of the Salina Ulcinj and the work of CZIP.

Besides a small exhibition of paintings dealing with the topic of the Salina and its amazing wildlife, a small fair of local businesses ideas supported by CZIP was presented to the participants. The small mainly women-led businesses explained the concepts of their hand-made products, which ranged from natural soaps, biscuits and felt works in shape of birds to local pasta. Combining the natural value of the Salina and business ideas, the fair showed efforts to support regional green jobs and gave some ideas about the possible future of the Salina as a natural park and its impact and work possibilities for locals around it. Following this input at the museum, the groups discussed necessary framework conditions of green jobs and the challenges of developing them in fragile regions, as well as business opportunities for local residents along the European Green Belt and sustainable tourism.



Picture 3: Small fair of local business ideas in the museum of the Salina Ulcinj © F.Hofmann/ EuroNatur