

# BESTbelt

## More power for the European Green Belt

BESTbelt Balkan Regional Conference 2024

13-16 May 2024, Haskovo, Bulgaria

Samuel C. Fernandes, EuroNatur



BESTbelt



With financial  
support of the  
European Union









© EuroNatur – Katharina Grund

Operates at different levels:

- People and projects on the **local level**: gather experiences, gain inspiration, practical implementation
- **Regional level**: reflects diversity of the European Green Belt and offers platform for exchange and common action
- **Pan-European dimension**: adds value to the local and regional levels, develop common approaches, set experiences in a broader context, platform for exchange and common learning on the European level



## Our vision

“The European Green Belt, our **shared natural heritage along the line of the former Iron Curtain is to be conserved and restored**, to function as an **ecological network** connecting high-value natural and cultural landscapes whilst respecting the **economic, social and cultural needs of local communities.**”

- Protecting and restoring wildlife and habitats
- Ensuring the value of the European Green Belt is reflected in decisions made by local communities, governments and businesses
- Highlighting the importance of the European Green Belt and its direct contribution to preventing biodiversity loss in Europe
- Exploring Europe's cultural and ecological history and promoting the European Green Belt as a model for local communities and nature to grow together

- **Bridging** ecological, cultural and geographical **borders to protect and develop Europe's longest green network**
- Framework for **cross-border cooperation** on regional and municipal level as well as for protected areas
- Framework for **exchange and cooperation on a pan-European level**
- **Opportunities for sustainable development** from the very North to the very South of Europe
- **Unique memorial landscape** along former Iron Curtain and example how Europe and its diverse cultures can truly grow together

# BESTbelt European Green Belt and BESTbelt

- 1989: Fall of the „Iron Curtain“
- 2003: Formation of the European Green Belt Initiative
- 2014: Establishment of the European Green Belt Association (EGBA)
- 2019: Breakfast debate with Members of the European Parliament and the EGBA
- 2020: Members of the European Parliament introduced the idea of a special program for the European Green Belt
- 2021: BESTbelt started



**BESTbelt**

- Main objective: Provide support for biodiversity action along the European Green Belt
  - Unlock and strengthen initiatives and potentials on local level in the fields of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of ecosystem services
  - Increase capacity of local actors to access and manage EU-funds
  - Strengthen local capacities
  - Increase visibility of EGB and its contribution to biodiversity conservation
- Duration of 5 years
- Total budget 3,673,684 Euro (95% EU funding)
- All four regions of the EGB are included
- Lead: EuroNatur as chair of EGBA and Project team



- Budget: 2,200,000 Euro
- Purpose: fund projects that have effective measures on the ground
- Goal: up to 55 funded projects with a maximum of \*60,000 Euro
- 3 BESTbelt Calls for proposals
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Call 2022 → 11 Projects
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Call 2023 → 17 Projects
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Call 2024 → “work in progress”

- Communication activities to
  - Highlight the biodiversity along the EGB
  - Promote BESTbelt
  - Inform about results of funded projects
- Three BESTbelt Conferences to increase the visibility of BESTbelt and to disseminate success stories

- Two training workshops to train organizations and young volunteers so that they are capable of managing and leading European Green Belt Youth Work Camps (input for Small Grants Programme)
- Webinars, capacity and workshops for BESTbelt applicants and grantees
- Four regional conferences to foster exchange and knowledge transfer amongst current and former grantees



- Analysis of potential of green jobs for EGB
- Sharing of best practices for job creation in different regions
- Explore opportunities for green job creation on the ground through six local/transboundary fora in Bulgaria plus another country addressed to administration, business and other stakeholders
- Input for Small Grants Programme

- 11 Projects
- Duration: Nov 2022 – latest Oct 2024
- 3 Projects concluded





The quest for a Code of Conduct in the wild Latvian coastline

**Lead:** Latvian Country Tourism Association (Lauku Celotajs)

**Duration:** Oct 2022 / Nov 2023

**Topic:** Code of conduct for tourists (sensibilization)



Eco-tourism solutions for small rural entrepreneurs in Lithuania

**Lead:** Lithuanian Countryside Tourism Association

**Duration:** Nov 2022 / Oct 2023

**Topic:** Local ecotourism with focus on nature and culture



Reduction of eutrophication in grey dune habitats in Latvia

**Lead:** Latvian Green Movement

**Duration:** Oct 2022 / Sep 2024

**Topic:** Protection of grey dune habitats and biodiversity





Mapping and restoring fens and wet meadows in Austria

**Lead:** Naturschutzbund Niederösterreich

**Duration:** Oct 2022 / Dec 2023

**Topic:** Conservation and renaturation of moors and wetlands



Exmoor ponies help local biodiversity in Czech Republic

**Lead:** Gemeinde Krasna

**Duration:** Nov 2022 / Aug 2024

**Topic:** conservation of biodiversity in pastures and wet habitats, sensibilization



Protection of the Eagle Owl in Western Slovenia

**Lead:** DOPPS

**Duration:** Jan 2023 / Jun 2024

**Topic:** protection of the Eagle Owl from electrocution



**BESTbelt**



With financial support of the European Union



Restoring biodiversity along the Italian Green Belt

**Lead:** Rete Italiana

**Duration:** Oct 2022 / Sep 2024

**Topic:** bunkers as refuge for biodiversity, ponds and alpine pastures (conservation and sensibilization)

# BESTbelt BESTbelt-funded projects (Balkan)



Old mountain - new practices:  
Circular economy in Serbia

**Lead:** TEAM

**Duration:** Oct 2022 /  
Nov 2023

**Topic:** circular economy  
and waste management  
(sensibilization)



Bees & greens in the Serbian  
Green Belt

**Lead:** ORCA

**Duration:** Oct 2022 / Sep 2024

**Topic:** Assessment of pollination  
aspects and recommendations for  
management



Towards improved protected  
area management in Montenegro

**Lead:** Montenegrin  
Ecologists Society

**Duration:** Oct 2022 / Apr  
2024

**Topic:** Recommendations  
for nature protection and  
protected area  
management



Micro wetlands: restoration of  
fountains of life in Bulgaria

**Lead:** Gemeinde Topolovgrad

**Duration:** Jan 2023 / Jun 2024

**Topic:** Assessment and  
restoration of micro-wetland  
areas; sensibilization

- 17 Projects
- Duration: Nov 2023 – latest Oct 2025
- 6 Transboundary projects





Preserving highly biodiverse boreal forests in South Karelia in Finland

**Lead:** Finnish Association for Nature Conservation (South Karelia district)

**Duration:** Mar 2023 / Oct 2025

**Topic:** Assessment of status and management recommendation of forests



Concrete actions for biodiversity (CONABI) in Finland

**Lead:** Association for Rural Culture and Education

**Duration:** Feb 2024 / Oct 2025

**Thema:** workshops for sensibilization and networking about natural biodiversity

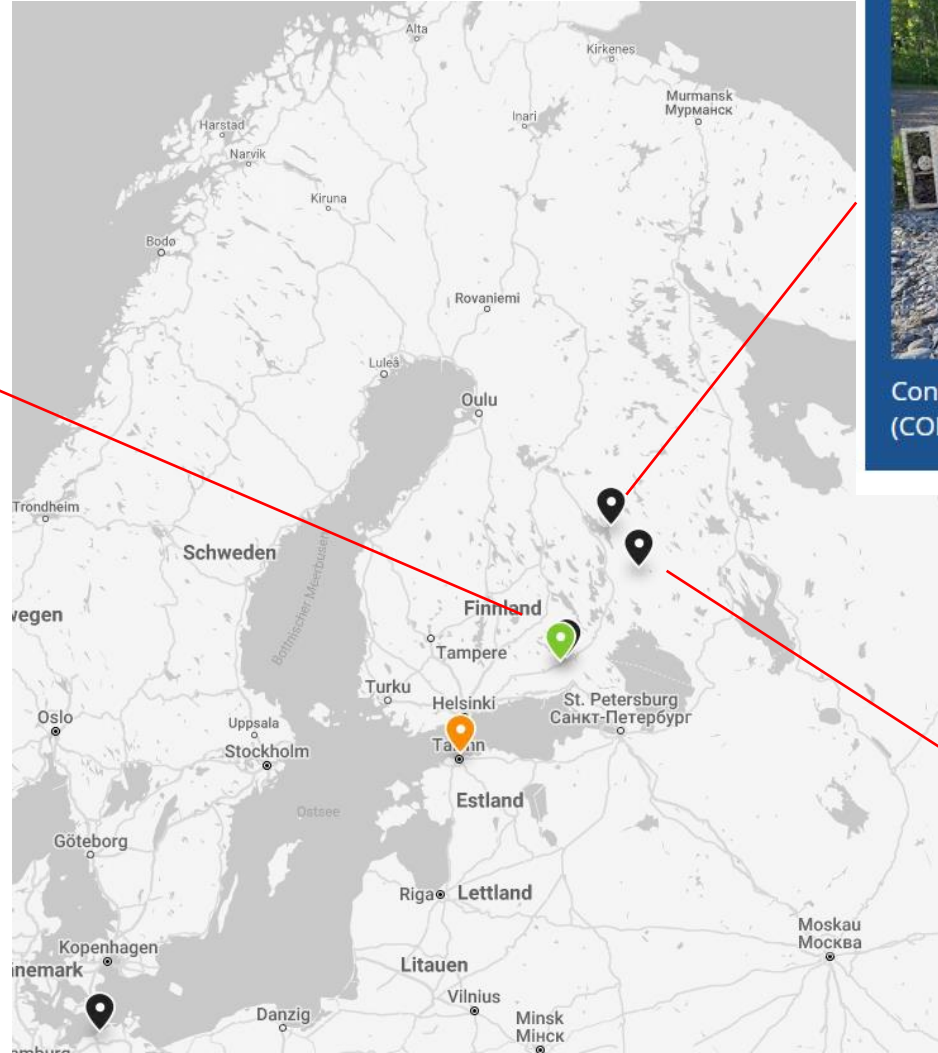


Positive publicity for North Karelia's threatened mires (Finland)

**Lead:** Finnish Association for Nature Conservation

**Duration:** Jan 2024 / Mar 2025

**Topic:** Sensibilization about mires with local participation



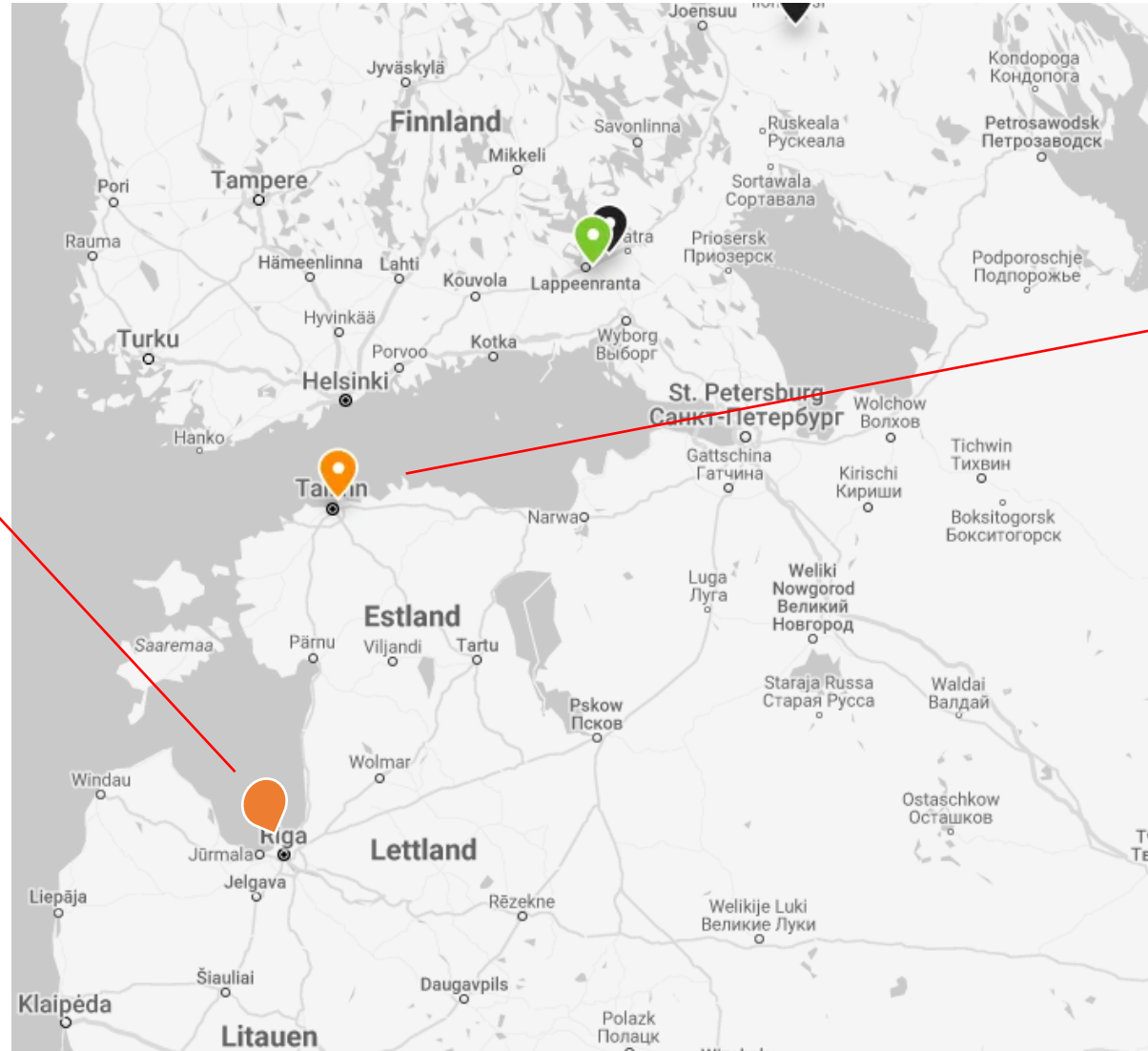


Restoration & sustainable management of meadows at Lake Engure in Latvia

**Lead:** Lake Engure Nature Park Fund

**Duration:** Nov 2023 / Aug 2025

**Topic:** restoration of bird habitats involving volunteers



Tallinn old-growth forest trail: educational trail on woodland key habitats in Estonia

**Lead:** Estonian Fund for Nature

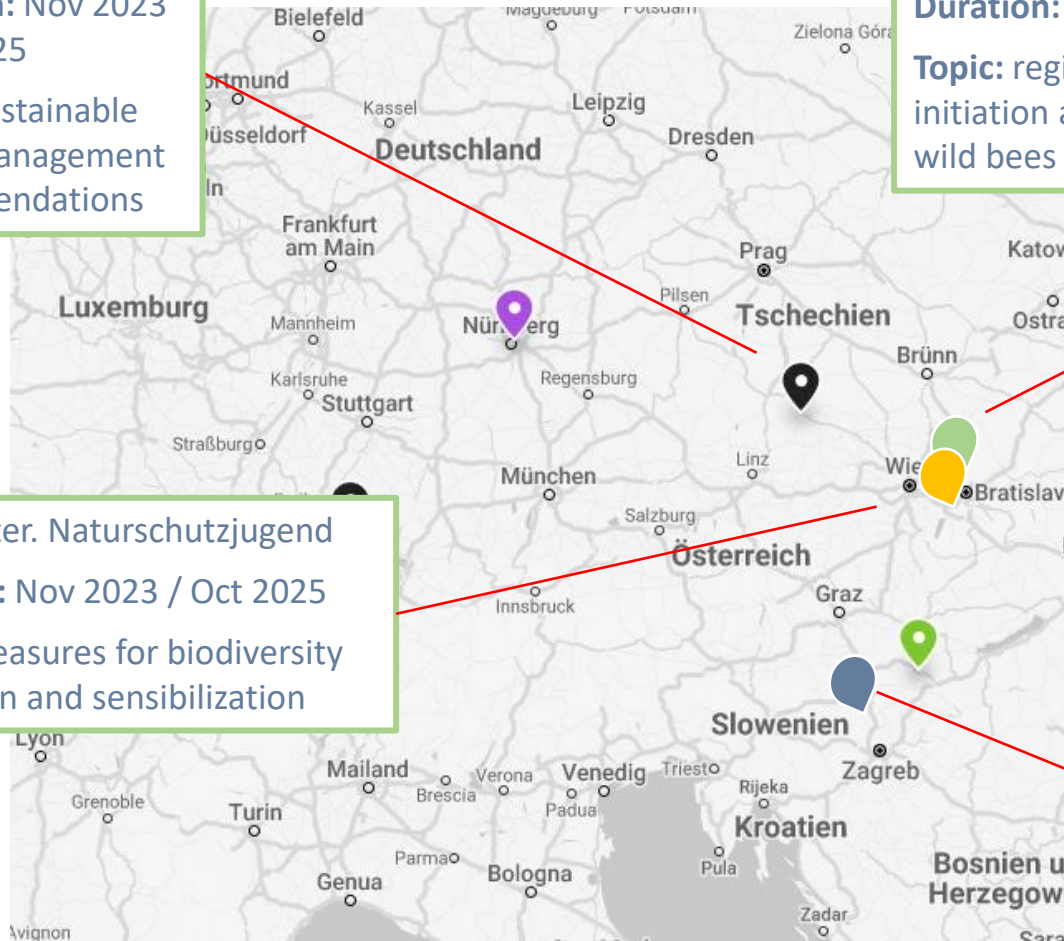
**Duration:** Nov 2023 / Oct 2024

**Topic:** sensibilization about primary forests with educational paths



Systematic protection of high biodiversity value forests in the Czech Republic

**Lead:** Hnutí DUHA  
**Duration:** Nov 2023 / Oct 2025  
**Topic:** sustainable forest management recommendations



**Lead:** Bienenzentrum Wien  
**Duration:** Dec 2023 / Oct 2025  
**Topic:** regional networking initiation and protection of wild bees



BEE-BIO-NET: Blooming landscapes for wild bees & pollinators (Marchfeld, Austria)



Youth Experience European Green Belt

**Lead:** Öster. Naturschutzjugend  
**Duration:** Nov 2023 / Oct 2025  
**Topic:** Measures for biodiversity protection and sensibilization



Sustainable water-based sports solutions in Slovenia and Croatia (TB)

**Lead:** Međimurje Nature  
**Duration:** Nov 2023 / Apr 2025  
**Topic:** cross-border protected area management and watersports

# BESTbelt BESTbelt-funded projects (Balkan)



Rebuilding the Lower Bojana Basin and Ulcinj Ecosystem Complex in Montenegro

**Lead:** EnvPro

**Duration:** Nov 2023 / Oct 2025

**Topic:** Mapping, restoration and sustainable management

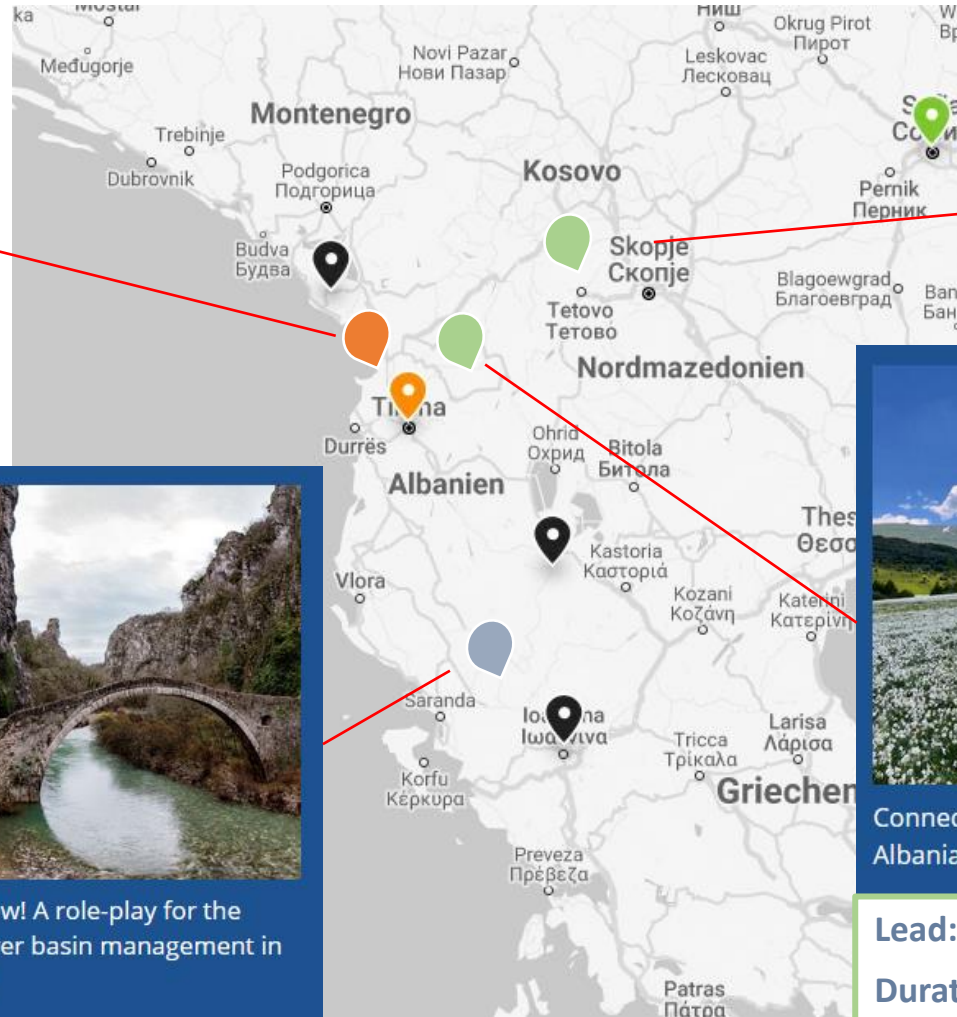


Let it flow! A role-play for the Aaos river basin management in Greece

**Lead:** MedINA

**Duration:** Dec 2023 / Nov 2024

**Topic:** Role-playing game about river protection and knowledge transfer



Connectivity through pastures in Albania

**Lead:** REC Albania

**Duration:** Nov 2023 / Oct 2025

**Topic:** Inventory and sustainable management of grasslands and pastures



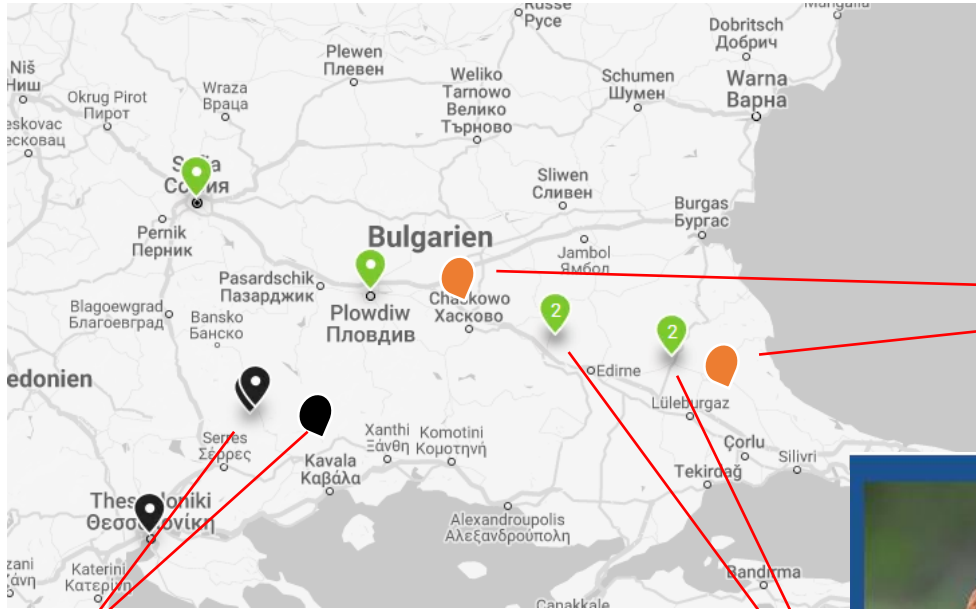
Empowering Shar Mountain communities for sustainable management in North Macedonia and Kosovo (TB)

**Lead:** CED

**Duration:** Nov 2023 / Feb 2025

**Topic:** Sustainable tourism in countryside with connection to protected areas and locals

# BESTbelt BESTbelt-funded projects (Balkan)



**Lead:** DOKU

**Duration:** Nov 2023 / Oct 2025

**Topic:** Protection of the Imperial Eagle

Ancient Lands of the Flying Emperor in the Republic of Türkiye and Bulgaria (TB)



BirdsBELT in Republic of Türkiye/ Bulgaria (TB)

**Lead:** Green Balkans

**Duration:** Nov 2023 / Oct 2025

**Topic:** Protection of rare species and capacity-building



Connecting people and wildlife on the Balkan Green Belt in Greece and Bulgaria (TB)

**Lead:** CALLISTO

**Duration:** Jan 2024 / Jun 2025

**Topic:** Ecological corridor monitoring and effectiveness (large animals)

## Conclusion

- Implementation of measures in all four regions
- Funding of small stand-alone projects
- Strengthen initiatives and potentials on local level
- Increase capacity of local actors to access and manage EU-funds
- Increase visibility of EGB
- Contribute to biodiversity conservation



# BESTbelt



European  
greenbelt

# Recent activities of the European Green Belt Association

## Balkan Green Belt Regional Conference 2024

Jessica Bitsch & Anne Katrin Heinrichs, EuroNatur

14<sup>th</sup> May 2024

## The European Green Belt Initiative

- Official starting point in 2003 at the International Conference „Green Belt Europe - Connecting Europe’s Biodiversity“ when regional initiatives merged into one
- Wide range of GOs, NGOs, and expert groups involved
- Organisations from the European to the local level
- Framework for trans-boundary exchange and cooperation on a European level

**→ open network of all organisations who commit themselves to conserving and restoring the European Green Belt**

## **The European Green Belt Association**

- Has a clear mandate and the legitimation to get involved with the European Green Belt
- Is able to take decisions and to pursue a coordinated approach in a transboundary and Pan-European context
- Is able to define roles and responsibilities
- Is able to officially represent and lobby for the European Green Belt
- Can rely on a basic funding generated by the membership fees

**→ formal governance structure**





european  
greenbelt

---

BESTbelt



## **Capacity Building and Exchange**

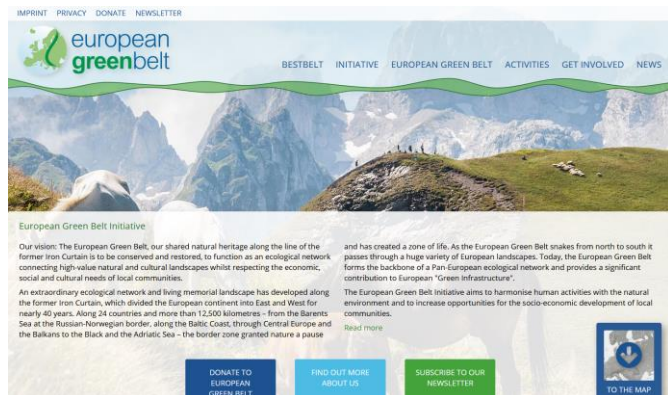
- Pan-European Green Belt Conference as face-to-face conference in October 2024
- Regional Conferences in each region

## Lobbying

- Half-day event in Brussels to mainstream the EGB
- Potential World Heritage nomination

## Communication and Awareness Raising

- Website
- Newsletter
- News
- Trademark
- Model Municipality of the European Green Belt
- European Green Belt Days



## **Cooperation on Pan-European level**

- Stimulate initiatives in pan-European level
- Continuation of BESTbelt

## Support our joint work for the EGB

- Celebrate the European Green Belt Days – grant available
- Regularly share news about your activities and projects to promote the European Green Belt via [www.europeangreenbelt.org](http://www.europeangreenbelt.org)
- Become member in the European Green Belt Association
- Suggest an active and committed municipality for the award



# **Nomination of representatives of the Balkan Green Belt to the Board of the European Green Belt Association 2024**

1. National NGO Partner: Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (BBF), Bulgaria, Board member since 2014
2. Regional Coordinator: EuroNatur, Germany, Board member since 2014





**BESTbelt**



With financial  
support of the  
European Union

# Potential of green jobs for the Balkan Green Belt in Bulgaria,

Petko Tzvetkov

13-16 May 2024, Haskovo



BULGARIAN  
**BIO**DIVERSITY  
FOUNDATION

# What are green jobs?

Generally, the green jobs address the two defining challenges of the 21st century:

- 1) green jobs play a role in averting environmental degradation and climate change:
  - reduce the environmental impact of enterprises and economic sectors by improving the efficiency in the use of energy, raw materials and water;
  - de-carbonizing the economy and bringing down emissions of greenhouse gases;
  - minimizing or avoiding all forms of waste and pollution;
  - protecting or restoring ecosystems and biodiversity; and supporting adaptation to the effects of climate change.
- 2) Secondly, green jobs also play a role in delivering development in social aspects of the labour market and contributing towards ensuring decent work for all.

# Green jobs in the context of the EGB

In the context of the EGB, green jobs are jobs that **‘avert climate change and environmental degradation and, at the same time, contribute to social development and delivery of decent work for all’**. These can be further divided into direct and indirect green jobs:

- **Direct green jobs** directly contribute to preserving and/or restoring the area of the EGB (e.g. nature conservation jobs, jobs supporting protection and restoration of natural habitats along coasts or jobs within sustainable forestry / agriculture with positive impact on the EGB; and
- **Indirect green jobs** (to some extent) have been created thanks to the existence of the EGB and do not have a detrimental impact on the environment (e.g. eco-tourism or marketing/sale of local products).

# Best practices in relevant sectors

A number of initiatives in Europe initiatives that led to the creation of green jobs can be found across Europe in sectors such as:

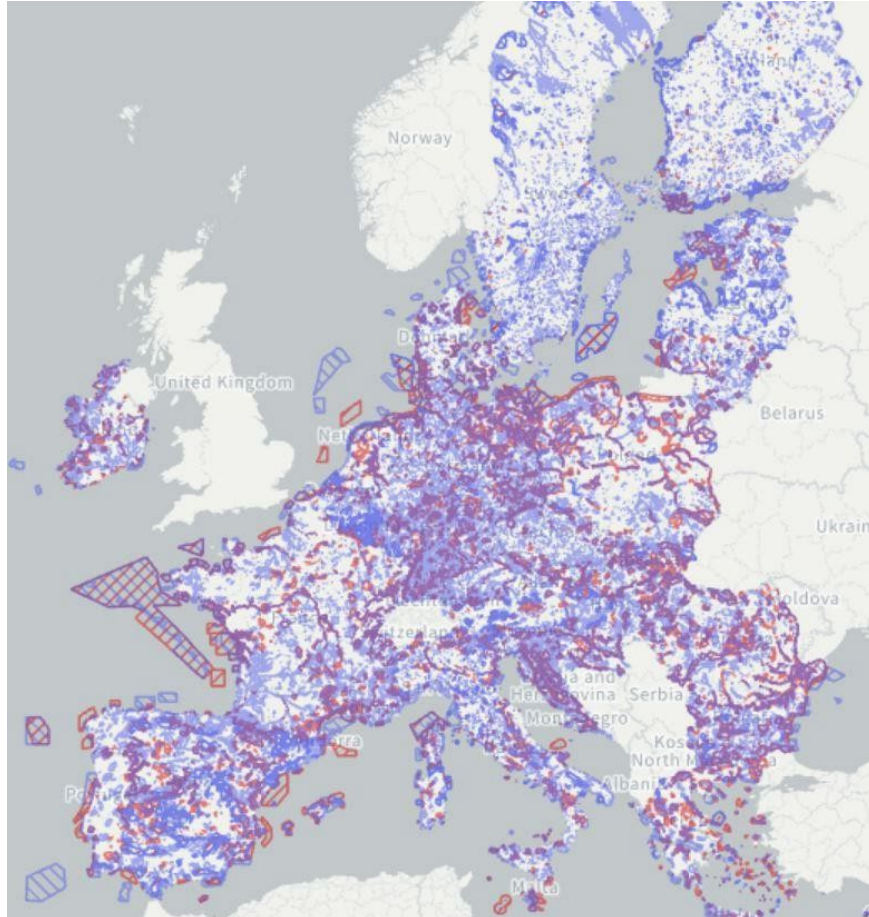
- land and soil protection and restoration,
- wetlands and water protection and conservation,
- coastal conservation and restoration,
- sustainable forest management,
- sustainable agriculture, and
- sustainable tourism.

Some best practices can create opportunities for disadvantaged groups, and green jobs can be fostered by Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes

Jobs in these sectors do not all fall in the definition of a green job, making it important to carefully assess how the activities impact climate and the environment before labelling them as “green”.

Moreover, well-designed public policy is an important tool for public authorities to facilitate green job creation, notably by foster youth (green) employment and other important aspects such as skill development, entrepreneurship promotion and innovation.

# Best practices in relevant sectors



Natura 2000 network in Europe

18 % from the terrestrial area of EC and more than 8 % from the marine area.

2016 - 52 000 jobs, if implemented 104 000 direct jobs and 70 000 indirect.

281 LIFE projects

**10 jobs per project , half - 5 years later**  
**Specialised jobs**

# General findings

Interesting examples of green jobs can be found in each region of the European Green Belt, demonstrating that

EGB initiative is helping to support green jobs, particularly in rural regions.

Opportunities exist to create more employment along the European Green Belt, as well as to green existing jobs (e.g., in the tourism industry).

A strong potential exists in

- (i) creating employment in nature conservation and/or restoration activities by expanding protected areas or allocating more resources to existing protected areas;
- (ii) Developing nature tourism / sustainable tourism; and
- (iii) greening jobs in the agricultural and forestry sectors, and creating jobs in related industries.

# General findings

Interesting examples of green jobs can be found in each region of the European Green Belt, demonstrating that

EGB initiative is helping to support green jobs, particularly in rural regions.

Opportunities exist to create more employment along the European Green Belt, as well as to green existing jobs (e.g., in the tourism industry).

A strong potential exists in

- (i) creating employment in nature conservation and/or restoration activities by expanding protected areas or allocating more resources to existing protected areas;
- (ii) Developing nature tourism / sustainable tourism; and
- (iii) greening jobs in the agricultural and forestry sectors, and creating jobs in related industries.

# General findings

Interesting examples of green jobs can be found in each region of the European Green Belt, demonstrating that

EGB initiative is helping to support green jobs, particularly in rural regions.

Opportunities exist to create more employment along the European Green Belt, as well as to green existing jobs (e.g., in the tourism industry).

A strong potential exists in

- (i) creating employment in nature conservation and/or restoration activities by expanding protected areas or allocating more resources to existing protected areas;
- (ii) Developing nature tourism / sustainable tourism; and
- (iii) greening jobs in the agricultural and forestry sectors, and creating jobs in related industries.

# Creating green jobs along the EGB

Six practical recommendations that can be directly implemented by the European Green Belt network have been identified:

- 1. Communication activities targeted at relevant stakeholders
- 2. Assistance for the development of sustainable tourism
- 3. Support the greening of agriculture and forestry jobs
- 4. Labelling of trails and services around them
- 5. Use the EGB logo as a quality label
- 6. Obtaining more financing for projects that benefit green jobs

# Creating green jobs along the EGB

Four additional recommendations focus specifically on public authority lobbying / cooperation:

- 1. Advocate for the creation of additional protected areas along the EGB
- 2. Advocate for limitations on mass tourism
- 3. Advocate for policies to attract workers to relevant sectors
- 4. Advocate for a strategic shift towards green jobs to support rural employment

Next steps should be focus on further examining which recommendations are most relevant to take forward at local or regional level, and to design and roll out plans to implement the most promising actions to create green jobs and green industries along the EGB.

# Green jobs along EGB in Bulgaria

Three model regions: Strandzha, Belasitsa, Zapadna Stara Planina

Interviews with potential best practices in the regions

STRANDJA - 12 interviews, 3 good practices

BELASITSA - 13 interviews, 6 good practices

WEST STARA PLANINA - 9 interviews, 5 good practices

3 Regional Forums, 20 participants each (2 already held)

1 National Forum, 50 participants

# Best practices in Strandzha

Kosty Forestry Unit they combine their work in the forest with hive honey production (130 hives situated on the border in a clean and hard-to-access region) and tourism accommodation.

They are FSC certified. ges: 13% of the forest is behind the border fence, border police is not collaborative and they see it as problem

- honey is not so cost-effective and there is no interest in wholesale
- loss of motivation to be FSC certified as there is not so big economic interest
- lack of staff - small team, seasonal workers, the forestry workers are also covering the work with bees and accommodation

Certified honey producer (Manol) - honey with a certificate for geographically protected name of origin “Strandzha honeydew honey/ Strandjanski manov med”

Main challenges:

- only 5 people are certified
- the certification process is hard and there is not so much support (financial and administrative by the state), the bio certification is more stimulated but it is expensive
- tourism promotion of Tsarevo is only with sea and beach, not including local production and mountain as a destination
- regulation 26 is very problematic and prevents to sell freely

Green Strandja (Vlado) - organizer of different tours and activities in Strandja, an active guide that works with all local people, Nature park directorate and focuses on the development of the region as a tourism destination with variety of events.

Main challenges:

- Migrant wave and all the pollution, border police everywhere (this is not attractive for tourists) Border police occupying most of the accommodation

# Best practices in Strandzha



# Best practices in Belasitsa

The main challenges:

- active people are getting older and they are afraid no one will continue their work
- not good marking infrastructure in the mountain - hiking routes need to be marked properly, the more active tourism businesses are volunteering and supporting financially to improve it. The Nature park directorate doesn't have capacity (5 people staff, low financing for tourism infrastructure)
- conflict mountain biking and hikers - the destination is becoming more popular for mountain biking as more sports events include it and many people are coming back
- the promotion of the region is mainly with historic and cultural focus and wines, the mountain and local food and traditions are neglected by the municipality
- small vegetable and fruit producers are reducing their land as they work alone (becoming older, no young people, only Roma/ gipsy population are supporting them in the high season but they are seasonal workers), large fragmentation, no local farmers markets, most of the producers are working with resellers and don't know where their production goes
- not well-regulated chestnut and blueberry picking - too much exploitation from the Roma community and a lot of pollution after the pickers
- not well-regulated tree harvesting - Roma community with wagons
- leak communication between the Municipality and local tourism business

Organized one local event (fora) in April with 5 participants, more than 100 invited.

# Best practices in Belasitsa



# Best practices in Belasitsa

Guest house “Orchid” - accommodation with workshops and degustations of local dishes, participant in all culture events and representer of Slow food

Main challenges:

- the owner is getting older, her family is not so involved in the business, they have their own businesses (1 of her sons-in-law is building big accommodation with a lot of facilities, higher class with less focus on local cuisine)
- Non-active mayor and a lot of problems with infrastructure that local people need to find a way to cover
- Non-active nature park directorate - now one really active staff member is back and it seems better but she is only one.

Bike center “Bella Extreme” - bike center that developed Belasitsa as mountai for active people. They organised events, including sports contests for running, and mountain biking and created a new look of the mountain as it was seen as the only hiking destination.

- Main challenges:
- small team, big ideas

Young hiker (Mlad planinar) - NGO that started to engage young people from Petrich and the region with activities in the mountains. They work with all the huts, Nature park directorate and tourism businesses. This year they have project for marking of hiking trails and are looking for ways to find solution about the conflict between mountain bikers and hikers - all have the same routes.

Main challenges:

- not good marking of hiking routes, conflict between mountain bikers and hikers, lack of support from the Municipality
- not active tourism information center - it is in the center of Petrich and it's not working properly

# Best practices in Zapadna Stara Planina

The region is covered by 8 municipalities and there is no Nature or National park directorate. Nature park proposal - initiative of environmental NGOs that is looking for support from the locals. The region has well preserved nature as it is not so much industrialized. There are many well working farms, mostly for dairy products. They are traveling to Sofia for farmers market organized by agro NGO that was working together with BBF, WWF and other environmental NGOs on a big project supporting the region (guidebook)

Main challenges:

- Big region, a lot of municipalities that need to talk more
- Not common vision for a tourism destination
- Lack of staff in the tourism accommodations and farms
- Han “Madona” (Radoslav, Falkovets village) - family hotel and campsite for caravans and tents. The accommodation is investing in solar panels, natural purification of wastewater, no single-use plastic, local food and wines (including an option to buy products from local farmers and wineries), bike rental, and guiding in the region. The owner is actively supporting networking in the region and presenting products of local producers to each tourist.
- AgroFitness (Borovtsi village) - wine producer who has been buying old wine yards and is preserving authentic sorts of grapes. He and his family organize wine tours and degustations of any kind. Now they are renovating old building that will become a guesthouse with 4-5 rooms.
- Adventure.bg (Belogradchik) - touroperator that organizes different adventures with main focus on travel balloons, multi activity holidays (balloon, cycling, biking, hiking, etc.). They became most popular tourist attraction of the region and they work with all the accommodations and tourism providers in Belogradchik and the region.
- Paleopark



# Enhancing Connectivity at the Balkan Green Belt in Albania and North Macedonia

**Emir Gjyzeli, PPNEA & Anne Katrin Heinrichs, EuroNatur**  
**14<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

**Balkan Regional Conference, Haskovo**

# Contribution of the EGB to EU-level Green Infrastructure

- *European Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy* => Enhancing Europe's Natural Capital
- GI: a **strategically planned network** of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features designed and managed to **deliver a wide range of ecosystem services** [...] is present in rural and urban settings.<sup>1</sup>
- GI contributes to protecting biodiversity, promotes ecosystem services and societal health and considers economic aspects



European Union 2013: Building a Green Infrastructure for Europe<sup>1</sup>

→ Today, the European Green Belt is widely recognized as the most outstanding example of EU-level GI-projects.

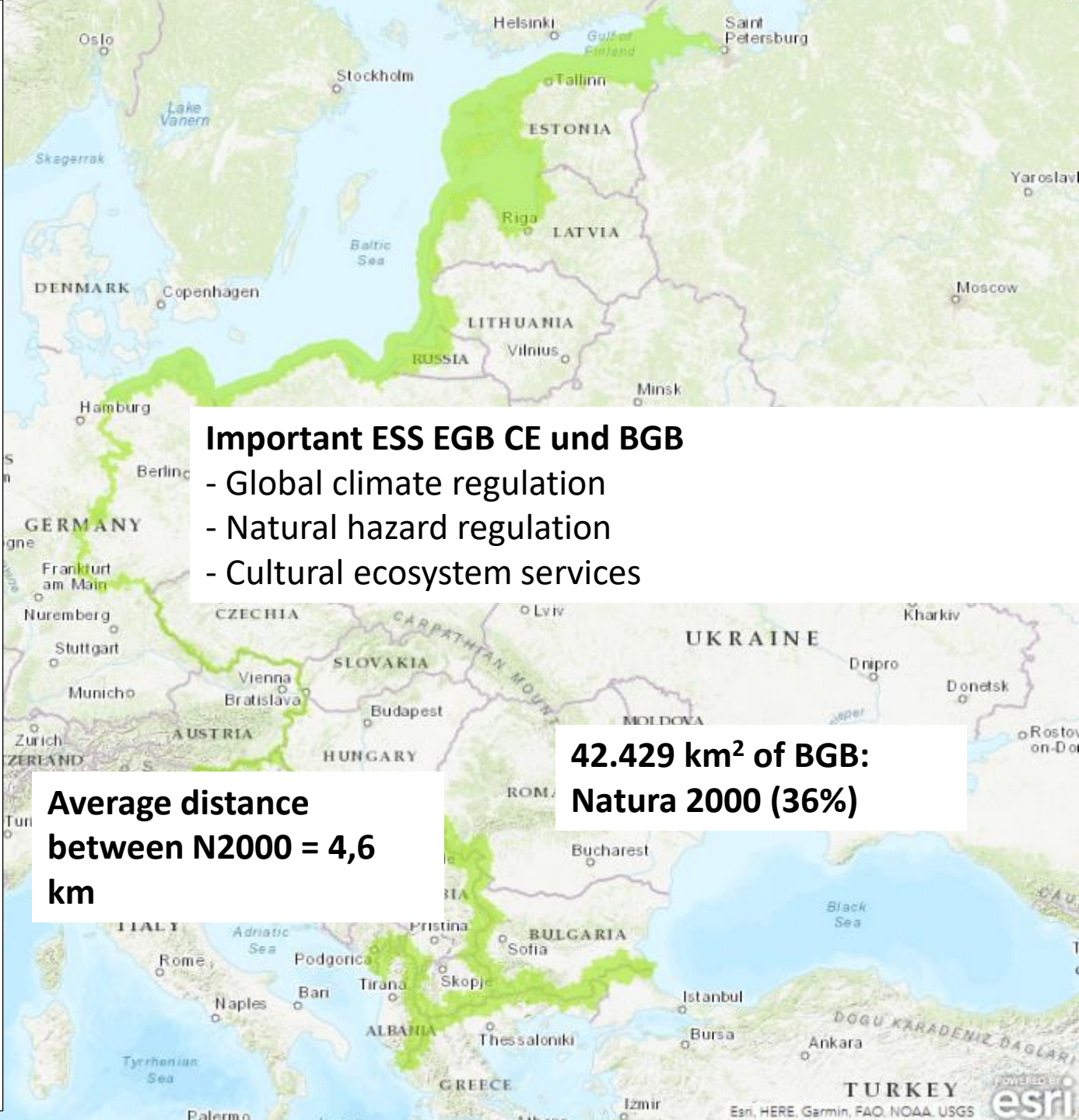
<sup>1</sup> EU Strategy on Green Infrastructure, 2013

**Spatial Reference Area of the European Green Belt (Fennoscandian under construction)**

It defines area where activities of the initiative are concentrated. 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. It 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

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 (equivalents 3,11 miles) from the coast.



**Important ESS EGB CE und BGB**

- Global climate regulation
- Natural hazard regulation
- Cultural ecosystem services

**42.429 km<sup>2</sup> of BGB:  
Natura 2000 (36%)**

**Average distance  
between N2000 = 4,6  
km**

Secure ecological connectivity by implementing Green Infrastructure as part of land use / spatial planning

How to plan and secure a coherent and functional ecological network along the Balkan Green Belt?

Main problem: Concept of GI largely unknown





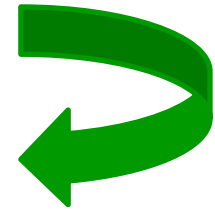


european  
greenbelt

# Approach



**Elaborate context  
given by EU  
legislation**



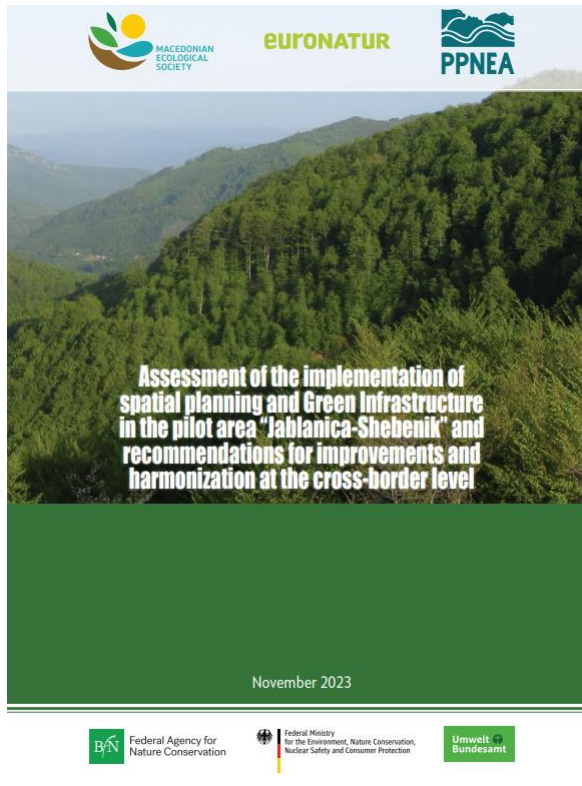
**Transfer to Albania and North  
Macedonia to identify gaps and  
needs for adaptation of  
national legal frameworks**

**Recommendations  
for improvement**



europa  
greenbelt

# Approach



**Elaborate context  
given by EU  
legislation**

**Transfer to Albania and  
North Macedonia**

**Transfer to transboundary  
pilot region Jablanica-  
Shebenik**

**Recommendations  
for improvement**



european  
greenbelt

# Approach



**Capacity Building through  
training courses, study  
tour, etc.**





## **LAW ON SPATIAL PLANNING**

### **I. Introduction part**

#### **Article 1**

##### **Subject to the law**

This law regulates the conditions and system of spatial planning, documentation, the procedure for creating and adopting the same implementation of the conditions in the space and the work of the spatial information system.

**Draft a new Law on Spatial Planning in North Macedonia**

# Approach



**Information and  
exchange local people**

**Celebration of  
European Green Belt  
Day**





european  
**green**belt

---

## **Experiences & Results**



## Recommendations – National level

- **Legislative Integration:** Incorporate GI into national legislation and relevant spatial planning documents.
- **Law enforcement:** Implement existing laws that support the development of GI.
- **Capacity Building:** Enhance the knowledge and strengthen the capacities of relevant ministries and subordinate authorities to effectively implement and monitor existing GI legislation.
- **Strategic planning:** Develop national GI strategies that prioritize areas with high biodiversity and a significant risk of habitat fragmentation, ensuring a systematic and coordinated approach to GI implementation.
- **Build on existing networks:** Use existing national ecological networks and potential Natura 2000 sites as a foundation for the further development of GI and national strategies.
- **Integration in infrastructure projects:** Whenever there is an investment in gray infrastructure, implement existing legislation on compensation measures in favour of GI.
- **Education:** Assess the need for the creation of additional education in spatial planning, in consultation with the relevant institutions and organizations.



## Recommendations – North Macedonia

- **Timely adoption of legislation:** Adopt the new Law on Spatial Planning in North Macedonia as soon as possible, along with its necessary by-laws.
- **Synchronization between different levels:** Synchronize planning documents on local level in North Macedonia with the existing legislation.



## Recommendations – Pilot Region Jablanica-Shebenik

- **Transboundary coordination body:** Establish a transboundary coordinating body on GI comprised of a core group of stakeholders for the pilot region.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Engage all relevant stakeholders throughout the planning process to ensure inclusivity, transparency, and ownership of GI initiatives goals.
- **Shared vision:** Develop a shared vision for the implementation of GI that emphasizes sustainable development and biodiversity conservation.
- **GIS mapping:** Elaborate a common GIS map of the pilot area, to facilitate precise planning of GI.
- **Joint Action Plan:** Formulate a joint action plan detailing specific tasks for the implementation of the joint vision.
- **Financing mechanism:** Establish a financing mechanism to support the implementation of the GI plan.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Monitor the effectiveness of the action plan.



# HIDDEN WORLDS:

A JOURNEY OF  
DISCOVERY INTO  
SUBTERRANEAN  
SPELEOLOGY  
spanning four generations

SOFIA GÂLCEAVĂ  
BOGDAN BĂDESCU

EXPLORERS SPELEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION  
ROMANIA





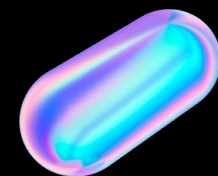
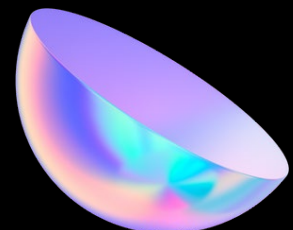
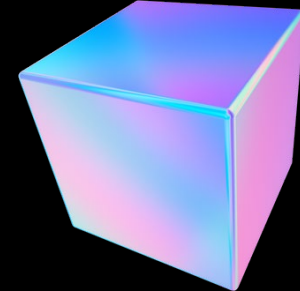
# RURAL KARST PROJECT

## 2022 - 2024

- The first large - scale, nation - wide project to approach issues of karst understanding and protection

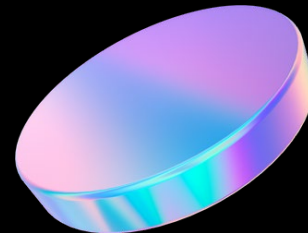
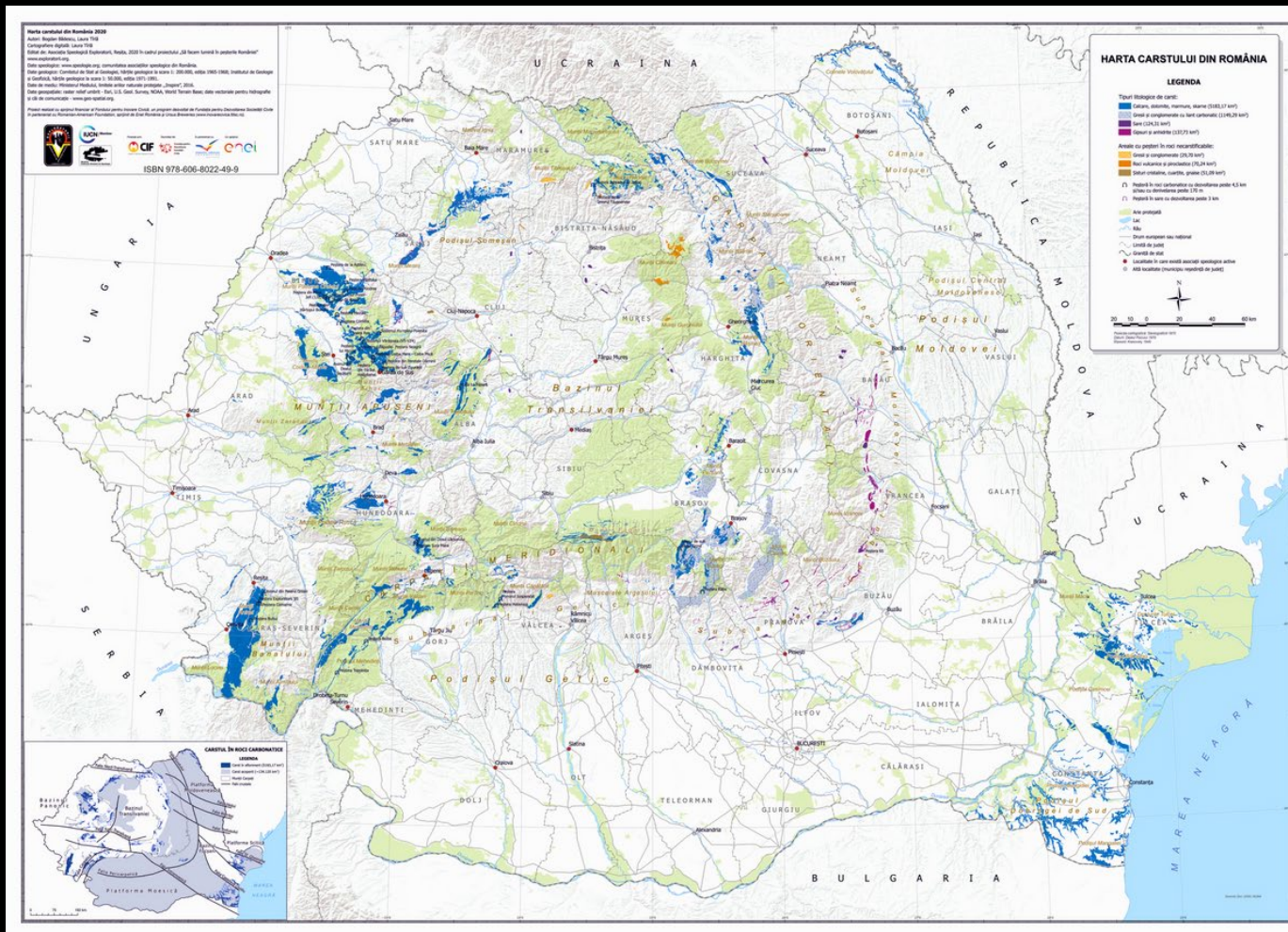
### Aims:

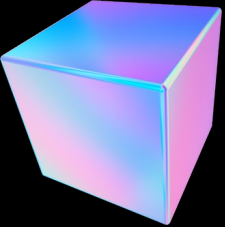
- to share our knowledge with 6000 people from different backgrounds and ages, from researchers and speleologists, to school children from local communities
- to reach a common vision that karst relief is a valuable natural resource to the community



Karst relief is found in 27 counties in Romania, mostly rural areas.

Our ambition was to offer good quality education in each one, with information gathered by our organisation in 65 years of practice.

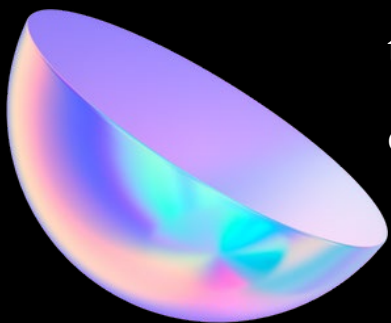




We also used this opportunity to grow as an organisation, by exploring new and innovative technologies that have the potential to become the new best practices in the field of speleology.

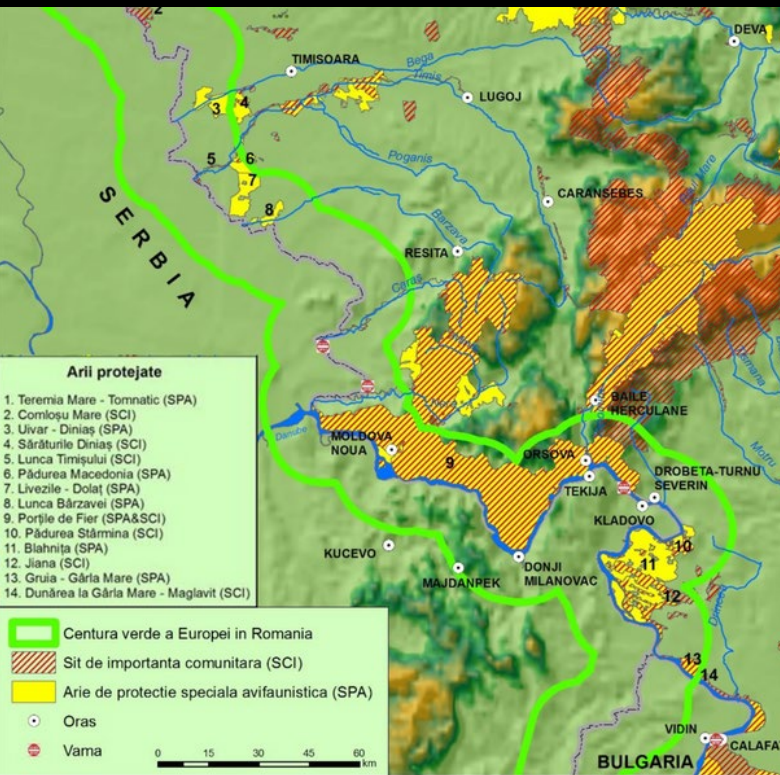


To the right:  
3D Scanning using Matterport  
technology with our  
colleagues from Scanbox.ro



# Green Belt region of Romania

- Close to the Serbian border
- 543.5 km long, half of which being the Danube river
- 310 km of borderland with limited human access
- abundant karstic wild environment
- islands that are rarely visited





- In this region, we own a location that is known as the Ecological Education Centre in the village of Carbunari
- Designed to house our participants, with the purpose of organising courses, study visits and summer camps.

- Within the Rural Karst project, we invested time and effort in improving this centre, with the ultimate goal of organising youth summer camps.

We welcome any initiative for an international collaboration from those of you who find our work interesting.



## Challenges within the rural areas of Romania:

- neither local communities, nor the local institutions do not have sufficient understanding of the particular importance that karstic relief plays in their life



Karstic relief is both the most vulnerable, and the least visible, much of it being underground caverns

Home to particular types of wildlife habitats

It is the MAIN WATER SOURCE for some communities



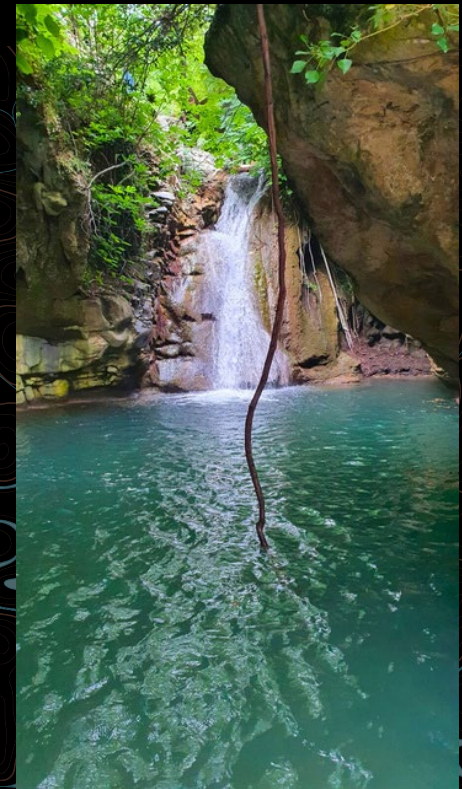


## As a main water source:

Karst aquifers are connected to water springs that some local communities use for drinking water.

Any source of pollution, as well as animal grazing in the proximity of the karst aquifer may lead to long term pollution of the water source.

Local people from such communities are usually not aware of the possibility to test the quality of the drinking water.



## The bigger problem:

- Low quality education in rural areas
- A vicious cycle : poverty -> low education -> a second generation of poverty
- Parents struggle to provide basic school supplies, cannot students with school work

The result: Half of young people drop out of school



# Rural Karst Project 2022 - 2024, main components:

I ) 6000 students from across the country to receive new and innovative STEM lessons with educational materials produces by us

II ) To organise a scientific conference to bring together researchers and speleologists, as well as students, for interdisciplinary discussions on issues of karst protection and exploration.

III) To organise summer camps with youth from the Green Belt region at Carbunari Ecological Education Centre.

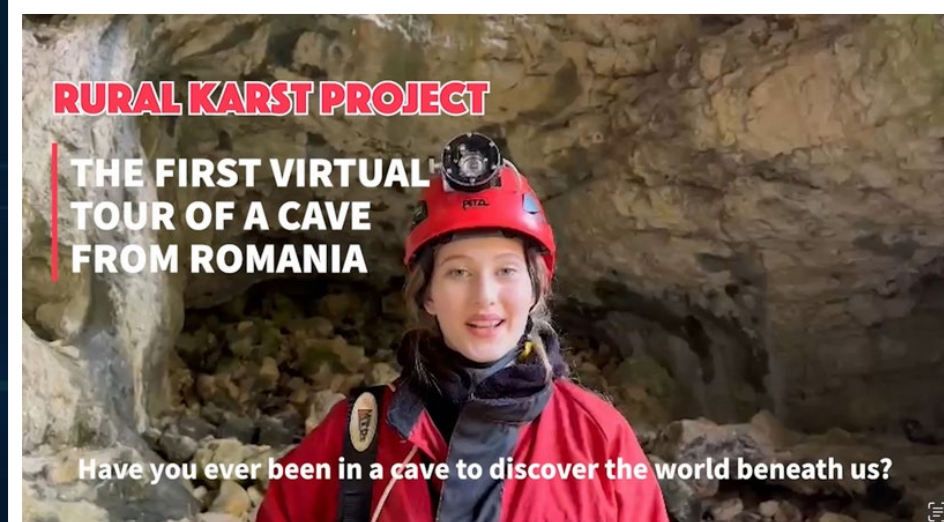


# The First Edu Tech 3D Model of a Cave

- an experiment to produce a unique educational software
- choosing the right equipment (Matterport scanner) and the right team to descend down a vertical cave and work in harsh, wet, dark and uneven environment (Scanbox.ro)
- LiDar technology + cloud computing and storage = it can be opened from any device



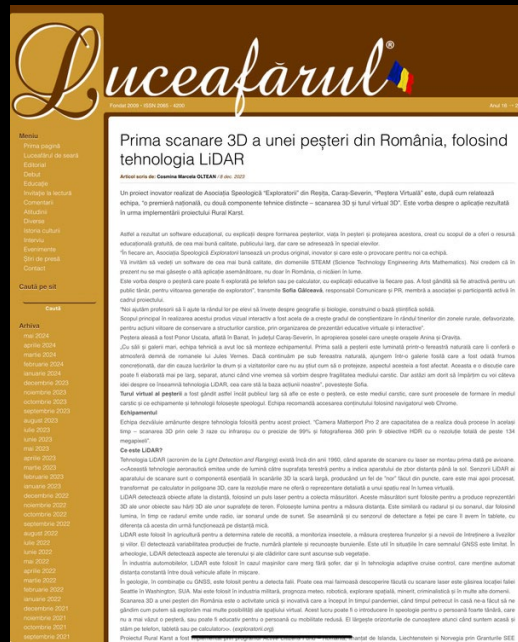
VR  
here



# Beyond the project:

It quickly became popular, not just among the people involved in the project, but also with teachers and students who found out about it indirectly.

The 3D Tour was picked up by newspapers across the country, and by speleology blogs from other countries.



# Beyond the project: Digital Twin Awards Competition 2023





Educational materials for schools and for specialists, created through the Rural Karst Project:

1 ) “3D Tour of Ponor Cave in Romania”

2 ) “Speleology for Beginner Cavers”

3 ) Manual on Karstic Aquifers, authour Phd. Adrian Iurkiewicz, researcher for the Department of Environmental Geology and Geophysics, Faculty of Geology and Geophysics, University of Bucharest

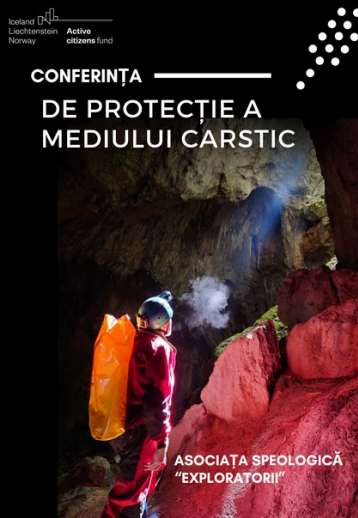
4) Classroom posters : “The Karstic Environment and Vulnerability” and “The underground environment - Caves”





# CONFERENCE ON THE PROTECTION OF CAVES AND KARST

SEPTEMBER 2023

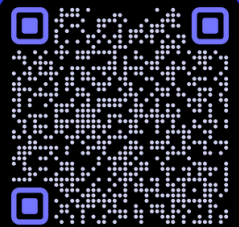


Conference

Summary



SCAN ME



SCAN ME



