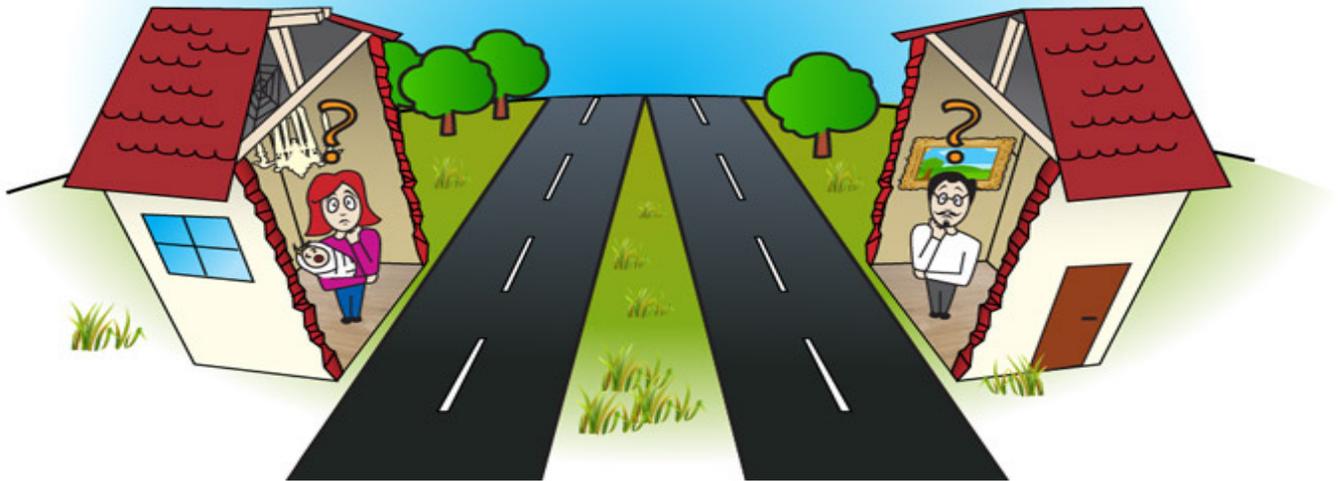


HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF YOU HAD TO CROSS THESE LANES EVERYDAY IN ORDER TO GET TO THE OTHER ROOM IN YOUR HOUSE?

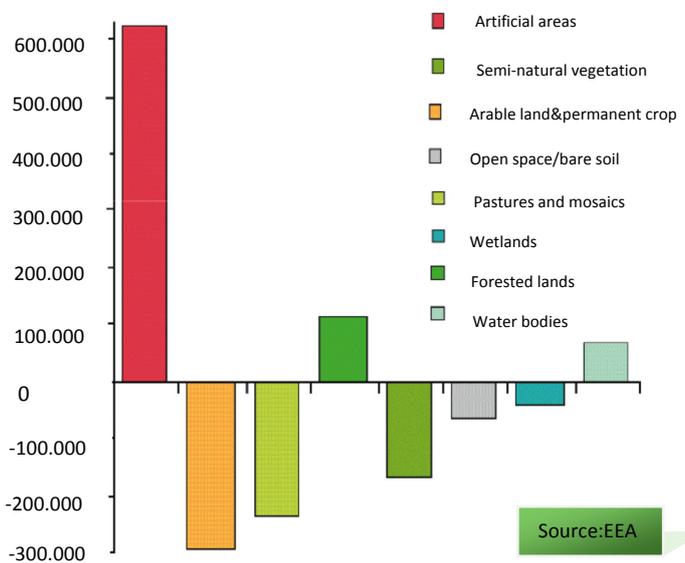


Presumably not well... In spite of this, many animals have to do this on a daily basis to fulfil their basic needs and survive. This trend will only worsen unless we act now and save the remaining European ecosystems from habitat loss and fragmentation.

30% of the area of Europe is highly fragmented due to the level of urbanisation and intensive land use. In the last decades, vast lands have been transformed into urban zones or cut up by infrastructure. Some 8,000 km² were concreted over during the 1990s, representing a 5% increase in sealed areas within only ten years. In addition, 15,000 km of new motorways were constructed in the EU between 1990 and 2003. Built-up areas have grown faster than Europe's total human population, indicating an increasing space claim per person¹.

The spreading of infrastructure and unsustainable land-use practices cause **habitat fragmentation and destruction**, which are **main causes for the loss of biodiversity** and ecosystem services (e.g. food production, recreation, flood prevention, pollination, etc.). It is essential to shift towards sustainable land use within the **whole area of Europe** through adequate national and EU policies that **preserve all remaining (semi-) natural habitats, restore degraded ecosystems and change damaging land use practices**. Within this framework, the Council Conclusions are to be adopted about the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy during the **Polish Presidency**. In the light of this, the Polish Presidency **is regarded as a milestone**, where **Natura 2000, Green Infrastructure and habitat restoration** are important elements.

Net change in land cover 2000-2006 (ha)



¹ European Environmental Agency. 2010. The European Environment. State and Outlook. Land use.

Within the **Green Infrastructure study** on the **four ‘Visegrad Countries’** (Czech Rep., Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), CEEweb for Biodiversity analysed the legal, administrative, monitoring and financial background of the existing national Green Infrastructure elements. The study revealed that although some good examples exist on the integration of such elements into policy, numerous gaps can still be found. Hence, amendments are needed especially in terms of complex, integrated legislation and effective financing and implementation.

In **Slovakia**, small ponds and embankments as well as dry polders were constructed. During heavy downpours, water is kept in the ponds and out of human settlements to hinder heavy floods and their impacts, which were very common over the last few years triggering huge economic and social detriments.



In **Poland**, some projects of restoring river ecological corridors are implemented: namely, the construction of the ecological corridor of Biala river to enhance water wildlife, the conservation of Visztula’s wild river and alluvial forests in Warsaw as elements of urban ecosystems and the blue corridor of Ina River.



In spite of the efforts done, there are still huge challenges to tackle otherwise we face the further loss of our natural heritage also as a threat to our well-being!

If we are to reach efficient and effective biodiversity conservation through Green Infrastructure policies, where all elements are adequately covered by EU and nation-wide legislation and strategies, **it is time to integrate the various related concepts into a common framework with the following requirements:**

- The **GI shall not be separated from grey and black infrastructures**, but shall be **regulated through** an integrated policy aiming at **the reduction of total environmental pressures**. This shall stop the current practice that pressures from unregulated use to cancel conservation efforts in other areas.
- The **regulation** of different land uses shall be significantly improved, which **shall cover all land users**. Standardised monitoring and information systems shall be elaborated at an appropriate scale. The monitoring shall be linked with proper responses in case of unfavourable changes along with the clear identification of responsibilities.
- There **shall be a moratorium for land use with significant negative impact on ecosystems** and cross-border connectivity of habitats shall be significantly improved.
- **Financial mechanisms shall be developed** for the GI, which creates revenues within a scheme. This mechanism shall give direct feedback on the environmental performance of land users, who shall be subsidised or discouraged depending on whether they create positive or negative externalities to nature conservation and the society.

CEEweb will continue its work on Green Infrastructure and land use planning. Please, follow www.ceeweb.org for more information.

The project is financially supported by the European Commission and the International Visegrad Fund. The content of the leaflet does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinions of the donors.

