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Connecting the green lines – what is the current state of play of green infrastructure elements in the Visegrad countries and what does it tell us about future opportunities?

19/03/2012, Budapest - 30% of significantly and moderately fragmented area, 22% of mammals in the danger of extinction and only 17% of favorable conservation status of habitats within the Natura 2000 network. These are some of the sheer numbers that show our biodiversity is in extreme danger – even in the relatively biodiversity rich four Visegrad countries of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The continuous crawl of grey infrastructure along with the spread of unsustainable land use practices trigger the number one factor of species, habitats and ecosystem services' loss: fragmentation. This issue on the other hand will soon be addressed by the new Green Infrastructure Strategy. However, to see whether this tool would be truly efficient to halt biodiversity loss or to see where it may be amended, we have to analyze those elements at first, which are already in place. To show the assessments of these elements along with an update on recent relevant policies and an indeed inspiring panel discussion on potential tools to save our natural heritage, CEEweb for Biodiversity organizes a meeting to all relevant stakeholders in Brussels on March 27, 2012.

As fragmentation takes a more and more serious form, it is crucial to address it along with unsustainable land use. The acknowledgement of the highly dangerous fragmentation, landscape polarization and biodiversity loss is reflected now on various new EU policies including the new Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and the forming Green Infrastructure Strategy. The latter wishes to enhance connectivity and ecosystem resilience through creating a network of natural and semi-natural assets. This in turn will enable ecosystems and natural areas to function better and continue to provide us with various services and benefits including providing food and resources and mitigating climate change impacts or natural calamities.

The new integrative Green Infrastructure Strategy aims to involve all sectors in order to effectively tackle the encroachment of grey infrastructure and unsustainable land use. On the other hand, Green Infrastructure (GI) is not a brand new idea: the networks of elements of Green Infrastructure, including protected areas, parks, ecoducts, migration corridors, etc., are already in place also in the four Visegrad countries. To test and assess whether these elements are prioritized, managed, financed and function appropriately, an evaluation was made in the four countries with the main aim to provide input to the forming strategy. The result indicates that although the networks of GI elements are mostly in place by national legislation, their actual functioning and beneficial effects are sometimes highly limited.

Therefore, some questions remain – would this new tool of Green Infrastructure – even if at European level - be enough to turn back these disturbing trends without addressing the main drivers behind land use change? Shall we think about additional and more innovative tools? Or shall we only apply these policy means at the maximum rate to yield results?

We hope to answer these and further questions or at least initiate a very inspiring discussion by stakeholders and land use experts on 27 March, 2012 in Brussels at the Balassi Institute.



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www.ceeweb.org/work-areas/priority-areas/sustainability/land-use/

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