Interreg
Danube Transnational Programme
SaveGREEN

Report

SaveGREEN Kick-Off Meeting

ZOOM Online Meeting

8th-9th of September 2020

Project co-funded by European Union funds (ERDF)

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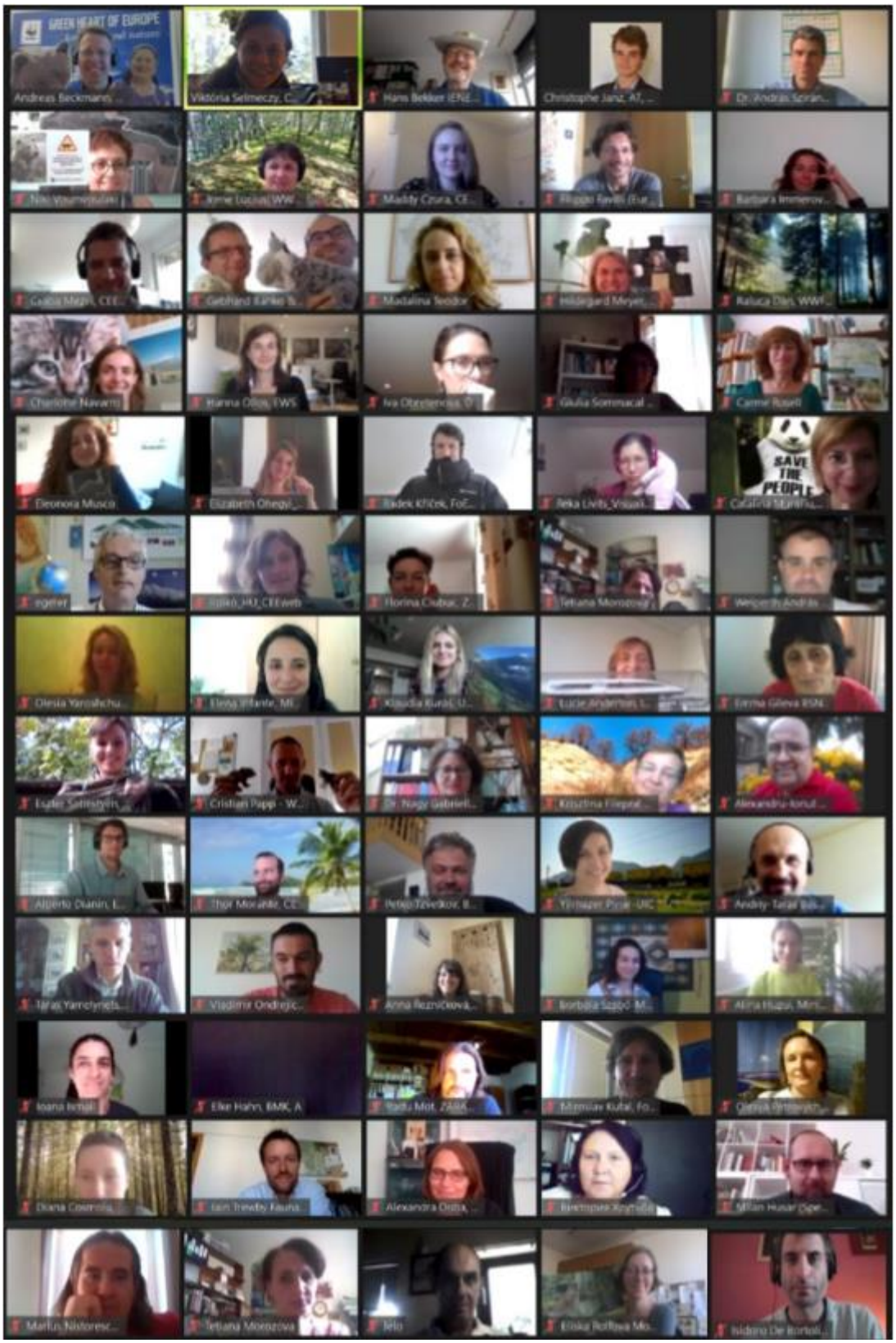
Annex 01.: SaveGREEN Kick-Off Event Agenda

Note: The agenda of Day 2 was altered at the beginning of the meeting. The session on WP Communications, originally planned for 9:45, was moved to the end of the agenda, beginning at 13:15. The other sessions each moved forward by one slot.



Event participants, Day 1, some presenting an object that symbolises their connection to the topic of ecological connectivity.

1. General Outline of the Event

Date:	8.-9. September 2020	**Time:**	8. September 13:00-16:10 9. September 9:00-14:20
Format:	Online ZOOM Meeting		
Event:	Two consecutive half-day events including keynote speeches, breakout-group discussions, workpackage presentations and live accompanying illustrations serving as a launch of the SaveGREEN project		
Purpose of the event:	✓ To officially and publicly launch the beginning of the SaveGREEN project ✓ To raise awareness among different stakeholders about the project as well as to gather feedback and advice regarding the project's goals and their implementation ✓ To provide in-depth introductions to the project's workpackages and lay the groundwork for next steps		
Project code:	SaveGREEN DTP3-314-2.3		
Participants:	Around 100 participants, consisting of project partners, associated partners, and external stakeholders and experts, and representing various fields of expertise joined for the online meeting. Annex 02 – List of participants		
Main topics:	Day 1 – Setting the scene: - Welcome by **Andreas Beckmann** (WWF-CEE, CEO) and **Ana Kobašlić** (EUSDR PA6 Coordinator) - Keynote speeches by **Iva Obretenova** (EU Directorate General Environment) and **Hans Bekker** (IENE) - Introduction to SaveGREEN by **Hildegard Meyer** (WWF-CEE) - Breakout-group brainstorming on expectations and recommendations Day 2 – The project: - Visualisation of expectations by **Réka Livits** (illustrator) - Welcome by the Danube Transnational Programme by **Gusztav Csomor** (DTP) - Introduction to Work Package T1 – Methodology and Tools by **Roland Grillmayer** (EEA) and **Marius Nistorescu** (EPC Consulting) - Introduction to Work Package T2 – Local Actions by **Radu Mot** (Zarand Association) - Introduction to Work Package T3 – Policy, Capacity building, Networking by **Diana Cosmoiu** (WWF-RO) - Introduction to Work Package Communications by **Eszter Sebestyén** & **Thor Morante** (CEEweb)		

2. Day one – Setting the scene

Moderation throughout Day 1: Andreas Beckman (CEO, WWF-CEE)

2.1 Opening and welcome

Opening by **Anreas Beckmann** (CEO, WWF-Central and Eastern Europe)
The SaveGREEN Kick-Off Event was opened by Andreas Beckmann with a warm welcome to all project partners and guests. Before proceeding to a presentation of the meeting agenda, participants were invited to mark their locations on a map, thus visualising the rich diversity of countries and regions from across Europe that were represented at the Event.

Welcome by **Ana Kobašlić** (EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), Priority Area 6 Coordinator)
The opening by Mr. Beckmann was followed by a welcome given by Ana Kobašlić, in which she provided an overview of the new EU Biodiversity Strategy as well as the activities of the Priority Area 6 of the EUSDR, and their relevance for the SaveGREEN project.

Ms. Kobašlić highlighted the fact that the EU's macro-regional strategies have multiplied over the past years, now four in number. In an attempt to strengthen the connections among them, the EU last year launched a series of macro-regional workshops with 'Connectivity' having been designated as one of the main topics for collaboration.

EUSDR PA 6 works with numerous organisations and stakeholders to serve as a linkage between the stakeholder and policy level. The newest addition to the agenda in this respect is the EU Biodiversity Strategy, which will require significant coordinated efforts to achieve the ambitious goals defined therein.

With one of the activities in the Strategy's action plan being dedicated to connectivity, this new policy instrument represents significant opportunities for SaveGREEN partners and interested stakeholders and opens important new funding sources for work to achieve increased ecological connectivity.

2.2 Keynote Speeches

Keynote speech 'Transport infrastructure and ecology' by **Hans Bekker** (Infrastructure and Ecology Network Europe (IENE))

Mr. Bekker opened his speech by highlighting the relatively young discipline of 'transport ecology' brings together two distinct fields of applied science, both highly complex and each vital to humankind's life on Earth. It centralises knowledge of a multitude of processes and fosters the cooperation between civil engineers and ecologists, as well as representatives of numerous other disciplines. The individual groups rely on one another's expertise, and a cooperative effort is crucial for the creation of infrastructure solutions catering to the needs of both humans and the environment.

After touching upon the numerous negative impacts of transport infrastructure on the environment, Mr. Bekker underlined the main avenues for addressing these issues:

- **Avoidance as a basic rule** – deciding not to construct a road has the least impact
- Where we require new transport solutions, **mitigation through de-fragmentation** ought to be the central aim
- Unavoidable **harm must be compensated**
- **Long-term maintenance** of the above measures must be ensured

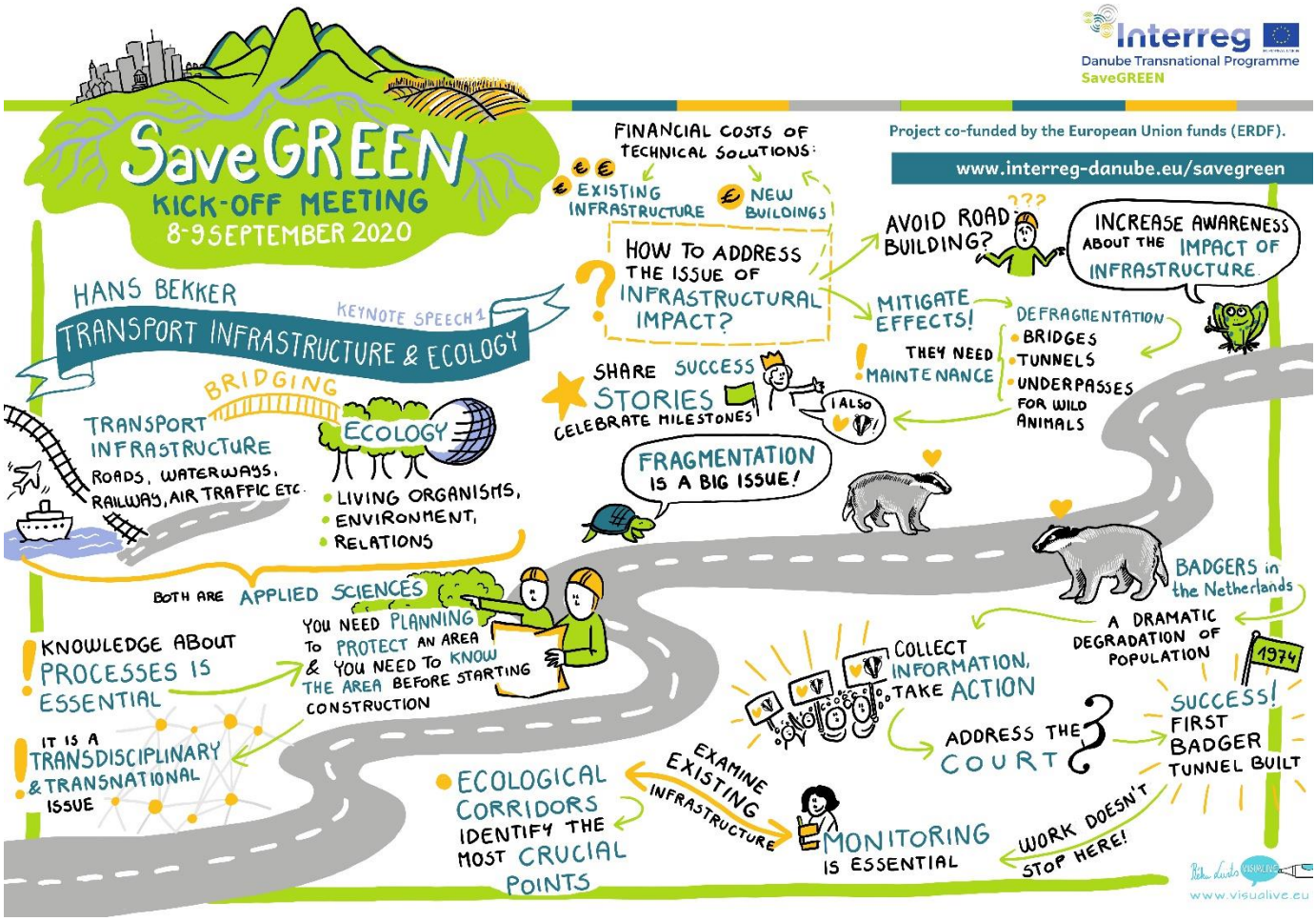
This approach was made more tangible by an introduction to the de-fragmentation actions implemented in the Netherlands, beginning in 1974, in order to preserve the country's badger populations, which had experienced a sharp decline between 1900-1980, falling from 5000 individuals to 1200. Strong awareness campaigns were followed by the construction of numerous tunnels under new roads, joined, from 1989 onwards, by underpasses under existing road infrastructure. In 2020, the Netherlands counts some 4000 small fauna tunnels, as well as ecoducts, big fauna tunnels and added civil works. The badger population has recovered to 7000 individuals.

Mr. Bekker closed his speech by highlighting main learning points gained from his work with IENE:

- The challenges surrounding transport ecology must be underlined again and again to retain and **increase the level of awareness** of the issue. Lessons, courses and general information about transport ecology are an on-

going necessity for new generations of civil engineers, ecologists and decision makers at all levels.

- **Maintenance, often a weak point, is crucial** for the long-term success of measures.
- **Actions agreed upon on paper must be implemented** in kind on the ground – this is not a given.
- **Milestones must be celebrated**! By making successes visible, the support and motivation of the public and young generations can be gained.



Annex 03.: Presentation by Hans Bekker

Keynote speech 'How does Europe plan for safeguarding ecological connectivity – the new Strategy for Biodiversity' by **Iva Obretenova** (EU Directorate General Environment)

In May of this year, the EU finalised the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, thereby signalling its conviction that the preservation and protection of nature is more important than ever. For far too long, economic growth has been the main predator, an issue that must be addressed to create a more sustainable society – the Biodiversity Strategy, as part of the EU Green Deal, will play a key role in this regard.

The **EU Biodiversity Strategy** consists of four elements: protect nature, enable transformative change, restore nature, and EU for an ambitious global agenda. Building on existing EU environmental instruments, chief among them the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and Natura 2000, the Biodiversity Strategy sets ambitious targets in recognition of the fact that efforts to date have been insufficient in halting alarming levels of biodiversity loss. These include:

- **legal protection of a minimum of 30% of the EU's land and sea areas** that integrate ecological corridors, part of a 'Trans-European Nature Network'
- At least **one third of the EU's protected areas must be under strict protection** including remaining primary and old-growth forests
- **All protected areas effectively managed** and appropriate monitoring ensured

Criteria and guidance on implementation will be issued by the EU Commission to support Member States. These are currently under elaboration, with consultations on-going and are to be adopted in 2021. Member States will have until 2023 to demonstrate progress in designating new protected areas and integrated connectivity. The avoidance of further fragmentation rather than mitigating impacts could be an underlying component of these criteria.

Under the **EU Restoration Plan**, the Commission commits to, among other targets:

- **No deterioration in conservation trends and status** of all protected habitats and species by 2030
- At least **30% of species and habitats have reached a favourable status or show a positive trend** by 2030
- **Significant areas of degraded and carbon-rich ecosystems are restored**
- At least **10% of agricultural area is under high-diversity landscape features**

Links to further useful documents can be found on the last slide of Ms. Obretenova's presentation.

Annex 04.: Presentation by Iva Obretenova

Questions & Answers:

From Petko Tsvetkov, Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation:

> How the Commission will convince the governments to implement its commitments to preserve nature and in particular compete with the Bulgarian road construction business interests in construction of Struma highway through Kresna gorge? And furthermore to achieve the new Biodiversity Strategy objectives?

Response by Iva Obretenova:

> Discussions between the EU Commission and Member States are on-going and significant efforts are being made to gain strong support through the expected Council conclusions on the Strategy. Regarding the specific case of the Struma Highway, the EU Commission is dealing with the case through its own procedures and strives to support a positive solution.

Response by Hans Bekker:

> Fragmented ecosystems and habitats can be encountered everywhere. Even in highly developed areas, it is important to note that nature and animals can nonetheless still be found. In cities too, green corridors exist. It is extremely important to see how these can be connected and to identify the most vulnerable points along transport infrastructure. Once identified, every underpass can be adapted to various species.

From Ján Černecký, State Nature Conservancy, Slovak Republic:

> Is the 30 percent limit and 10 percent for strictly protectcted areas for Trans European Nature Networ valid for each Member state, so everyone should have at least 30/10 percent, or it is target for EU level only? And what will be the main rules for increasing the percentage?

Response by Iva Obretenova:

> The 30% is an EU-level target. The aim, however, is to break this down by biogeographical region. More work is currently being put into this and further details will still arise.

From unknown participant:

> Is there any "legal" or other obligation of TEN-T integrating the TEN-G for the EU states?

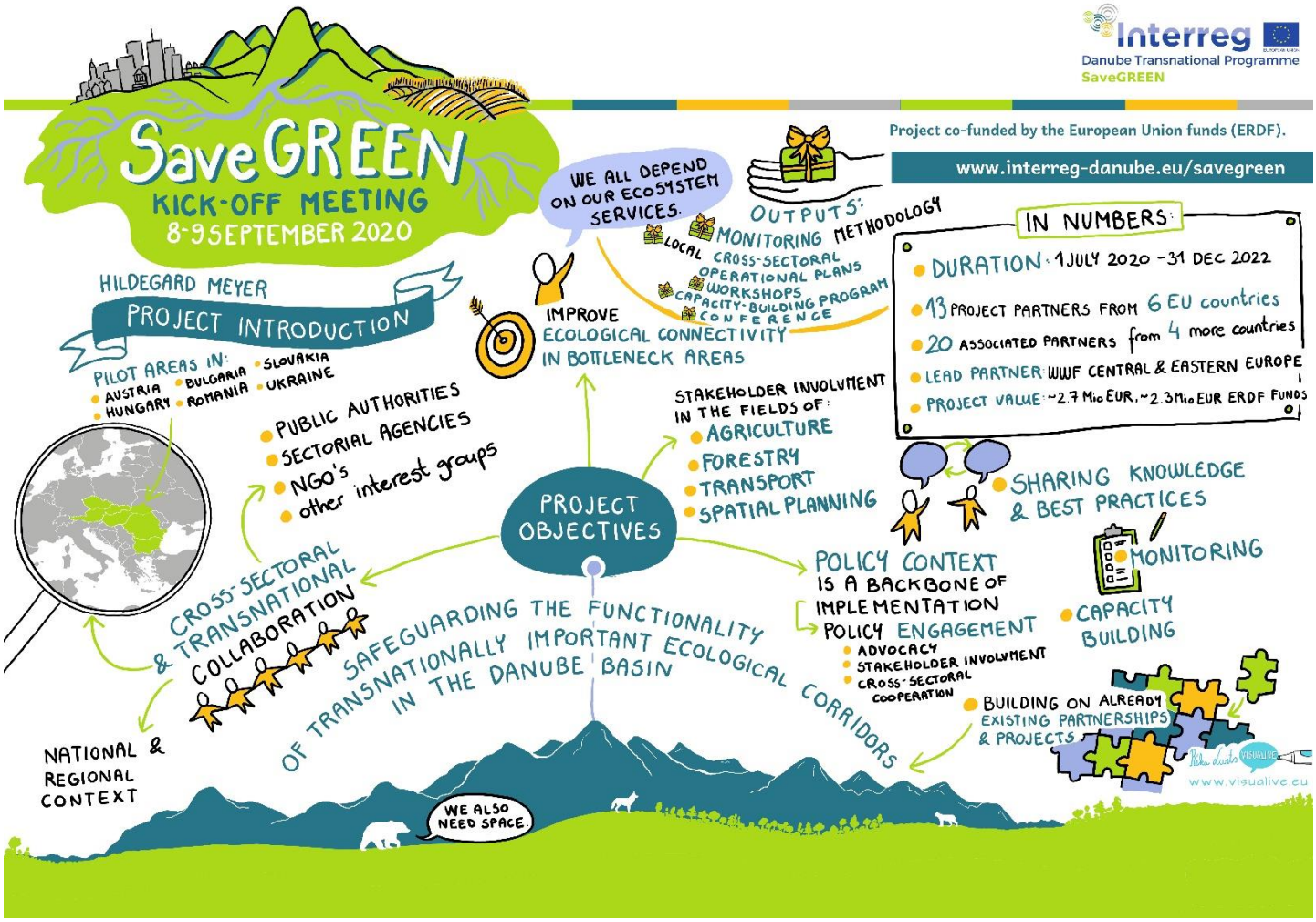
Response by Iva Obretenova:

> The Biodiversity Strategy is exactly that, a strategy, so nothing therein is binding. There are currently discussions on how it will be taken on board by Member States and so far there is no immediate link to the network addressed in the question.

Further questions were collected in the Zoom chat to be addressed bilaterally.

2.3 Introduction to the SaveGREEN project

Hildegard Meyer, WWF-CEE



Following the two keynote speeches and the ensuing discussion, Hildegard Meyer of WWF-CEE, lead project partner for SaveGREEN, proceeded to introduce the project. In one sentence,

> SaveGREEN will achieve **improved** structural and functional **ecological connectivity in bottleneck areas** by adapting land use and management in the surroundings involving **stakeholders from different fields of experience** in Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine.

As was also addressed by the keynote speakers, ecological connectivity is of vital importance for the preservation of biodiversity in Europe and around the world. It

allows for the movement of animals in their search for mates, food and shelter, increases the resilience and stability of ecosystems, crucial buffers in our struggle against climate change an natural disasters, and is basic requirement for healthy levels of biodiversity in our heavily developed countries, which in turn provides the ecosystem services we all depend on.

Project details:	
Duration:	1 July 2020 – 31 December 2022 (2,5 years)
Partners:	13 Project partners from 6 European countries: Austria: Environment Agency Austria, WWF-CEE Bulgaria: Black Sea NGO Network, Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation Czech Republic: Friends of the Earth, Transport Research Centre Hungary: CEEweb for Biodiversity, Szent Istvan University Romania: Association Zarand, EPC Consulting, WWF Romania Slovakia: Slovak University in Bratislava – SPECTRA, WWF Slovakia 20 Associated project partners from 4 more countries: Austria: Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Mobility, Innovation and Technology Bulgaria: Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, SW State Enterprise SE - Blagoevgrad Czech Republic: Ministry of the Environment , Nature Conservancy France: Infrastructure and Ecology Network Europe (IENE) Germany: Bavarian Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection Greece: Egnatia Odos S.A. Hungary: National Infrastructure Development Ltd., Ministry of Agriculture, Duna-Ipoly National Park Directorate Romania: Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests, Ministry of Public Works, Development and Administration, Ministry f Transport, Infrastructure and Communications Slovakia: Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Transport and Construction, National Motorway Company, State Nature Conservancy Ukraine: M. P. Shulgin State Road Research Institute, State Enterprise – DerzhdorNDI SE, Zarkarpattia Oblast Administration
Lead partner:	WWF Central and Eastern Europe
Project value:	~ 2.7 Mio. EUR, ~ 2.3 Mio. EUR ERDF Funds

The SaveGREEN project's main aim is to achieve cross-sectoral cooperation and transnational and local cooperation & to build capacity for improving, restoring and preserving the functionality of key ecological corridors in the Danube Basin with a focus on bottleneck areas and surrounding areas. This can be broken down into three specific objectives:

1. **Increase the knowledge and experience** among relevant authorities and key stakeholders
2. **Improve cross-sectoral practices** relevant to green infrastructure for integrated mitigation measures, implementation and monitoring
3. **Strengthen the international and national governance framework**

In order to satisfy these objectives, the project will produce the following outputs:

- A **standardized methodology** for monitoring structural and functional connectivity including an **application toolbox** for fieldwork & analysis
- Local **cross-sectoral operational plans** for each pilot area including preparatory actions for its implementation
- International **on-site workshops** to develop solutions & exchange experiences held in the pilot areas
- A **capacity building programme** for authorities & training events for public authorities and key players on cost/benefit analysis, SEA, EIA, etc.
- A **joint political declaration** on maintaining and restoring Green Infrastructure with a focus on spatial planning
- A **set of recommendations** towards the integration of mitigation measures into the national and EU level policy processes (GI funding measure)
- Finally, an **international conference** is to be organised in coordination with the IENE 2022 Conference

The project will work in seven pilot areas distributed across the Carpathians. Two in Austria, the Kobernausser forest and in Pöttsching in the Alpine-Carpathian Corridor, one in the Struma valley in Bulgaria, a fourth in the Beskydy mountains between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, one in Ipoly between Slovakia and Hungary, another in the Mures valley in Romania, and a seventh and final one in the Zakarpatska region of Ukraine. In all of these pilot areas as well as all other areas of work in SaveGREEN, project partners will engage public authorities at the local, regional and national level, work with sectoral agencies and infrastructure and (public) service providers, reach out to interest groups including NGOs, and raise awareness among the general public.

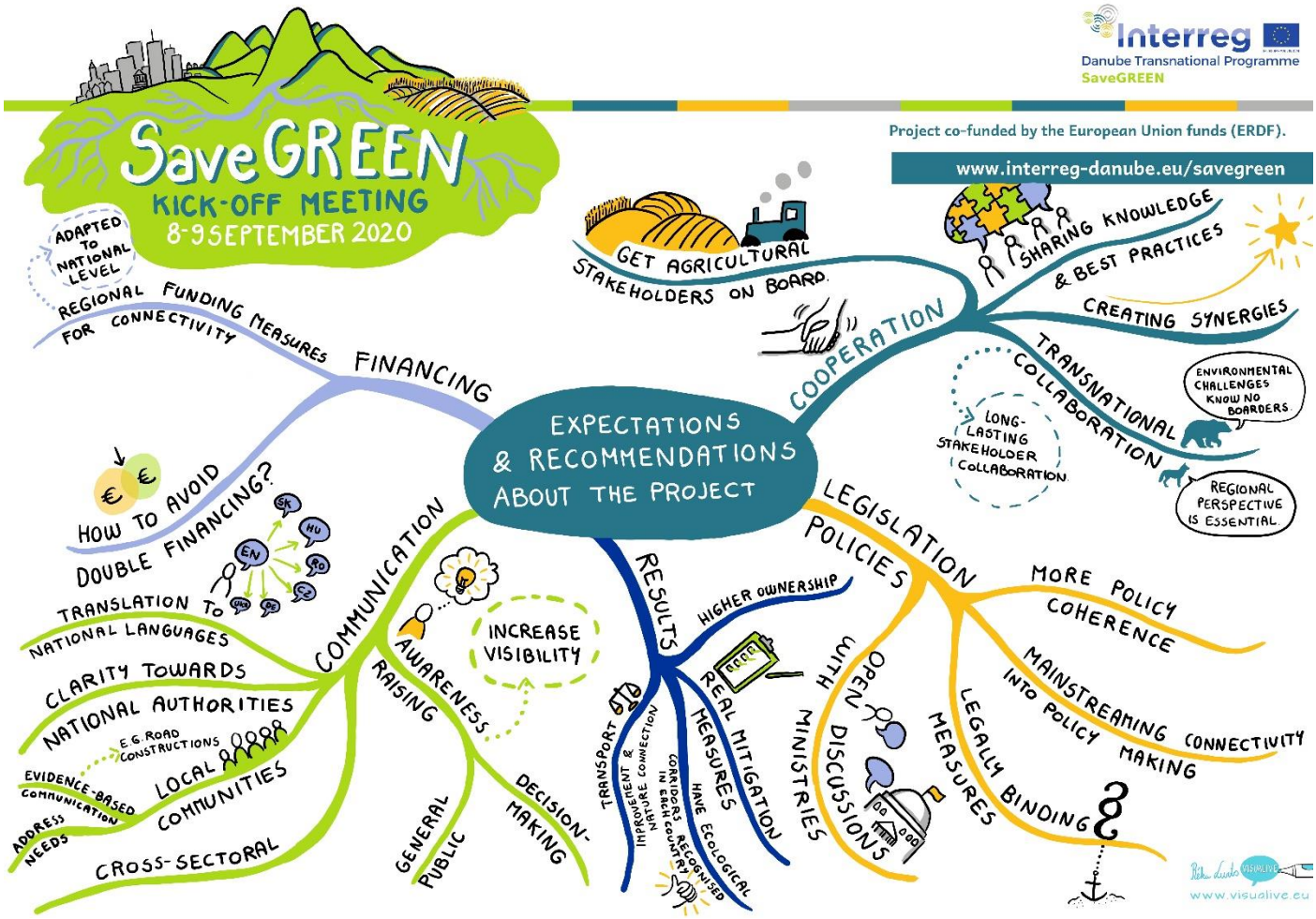
To achieve the objectives described above, the project will build on numerous existing partnerships at the local, national and transnational level, as well as the results from other relevant DTP projects, chief among the TransGREEN, HARMON and ConnectGREEN. Moreover, it will seek to capitalise on synergies with other projects in the region, including Open Borders for Wildlife in the Carpathians, BISON, ReVerSE, Centralparks, Dare2Connect, LIFE Safe-Crossing, LIFE EuroLargeCarnivores and BearConnect.

Annex 05.: Presentation by Hildegard Meyer

2.4 Brainstorming on recommendations & expectations

After a coffee break, participants were divided into five working groups, which reconvened in ZOOM breakout rooms to brainstorm recommendations and expectations for the SaveGREEN project.

Following a 20-minute discussion, participants came back together to present main takeaways from their discussions. This process was captured by illustrator Réka Livits in the image below:



Participants shared the following expectations regarding SaveGREEN:

- There is an urgent need in the Carpathians to achieve a balance between transportation improvement and nature protection. The project is an important step in the right direction.

- The project offers the chance to explore how different countries and organisations approach the topic of ecological connectivity and to learn from one another.
- Numerous opportunities will arise to initiate and deepen connections between actors working on connectivity issues in the region.
- SaveGREEN may be able to shed some light on the situation of railways and connectivity in the Carpathian area, a hitherto still largely under-researched topic.
- The project will allow all those involved to continue building on what has been accomplished so far in past projects, and to put their results to use.

Subsequently, participants provided project partners and all stakeholders involved with some recommendations and questions that warranted consideration:

- Greater awareness surrounding the issue of ecological connectivity is urgently needed, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. How can the public be brought on board?
- Similarly, conflicts can be avoided or attenuated through early engagement with all impacted stakeholders. An open and evidence-based form of communication is vital.
- Numerous initiatives exist throughout central and eastern Europe that work on ecological connectivity. How can double financing be avoided and how can synergies be ensured?
- Regarding the project's aim to mainstream connectivity in policy making, the problem is that approval and active positioning often proceeds very slowly – this resistance must be overcome with the active participation of national government structures in the implementation of the project.
- We must be careful to not only look at the negative dimensions of infrastructure development but also consider the opportunities when including innovative design and environmental considerations.
- It is important to not only look at structural connectivity as has been done so far, but also to focus on functional aspects of Green Infrastructure.
- In all of these projects, there is a need to guarantee follow-up work on the results of this and previous projects after they come to an end. This is particularly valid for cooperative modes of work between stakeholders, which should result in solid long-term working relationships.
- It Is crucial to get the agricultural community on board. They are major stakeholders, especially considering the fact that many bottle-necks in ecological corridors lie in the middle of heavily-used agricultural areas.

- There is a need to make the concept of eco-corridors more legally binding. In Slovakia for instance, the intention among policy makers is there, but a solid legal status has not yet been achieved.
- It would be very useful if translations project materials were made available in respective languages to make the generated knowledge widely accessible.
- Setting up a detailed well-working monitoring system that could inform a standard for the entire region would be highly beneficial.
- Close cooperation should be established between the Carpathian and Balkan mountain areas.

2.5 Wrap up of Day 1.

Summarising the day's discussions, the meeting moderator **Andreas Beckmann** noted that important insights could be gained from the case study of badgers in the Netherlands mentioned in the keynote speech by Hans Bekker: the steep decline in numbers in Dutch badger populations mirrors the situation of biodiversity around the globe today, a fact highlighted in the newly published WWF Living Planet Report.

However, the badger example also harbours a message of hope: this is not yet a lost cause. As was the case with the badgers in the Netherlands, we can bring species back from the brink of extinction. The new EU Biodiversity Strategy and EU Green Deal are ambitious steps in the right direction – we must now ensure that their content on paper is translated into action on the ground.

To succeed, awareness and support among all relevant stakeholders and the general public are key: we need to find the regional equivalent of the Dutch Queen, who chose to promote the construction of badger tunnels across the country in order to ensure the species' survival.

3. Day two – The project

Note: The agenda of Day 2 was altered at the beginning of the meeting. The session on WP Communications, originally planned for 9:45, was moved to the end of the agenda, beginning at 13:15. The other sessions each moved forward by one slot.

3.1 Welcome and introduction to Day 2.

Welcome by **Hildegard Meyer** (WWF-CEE), meeting moderator of day 2

To begin day 2 of the SaveGREEN Kick-Off Event, Hildegard Meyer, together with illustrator Réka Livits, shared the illustrations that had been created based on the discussion the day before.

Annex 06.: Illustrations by Réka Livits

Welcome by **Gusztav Csomor** in the name of the Danube Transnational Programme

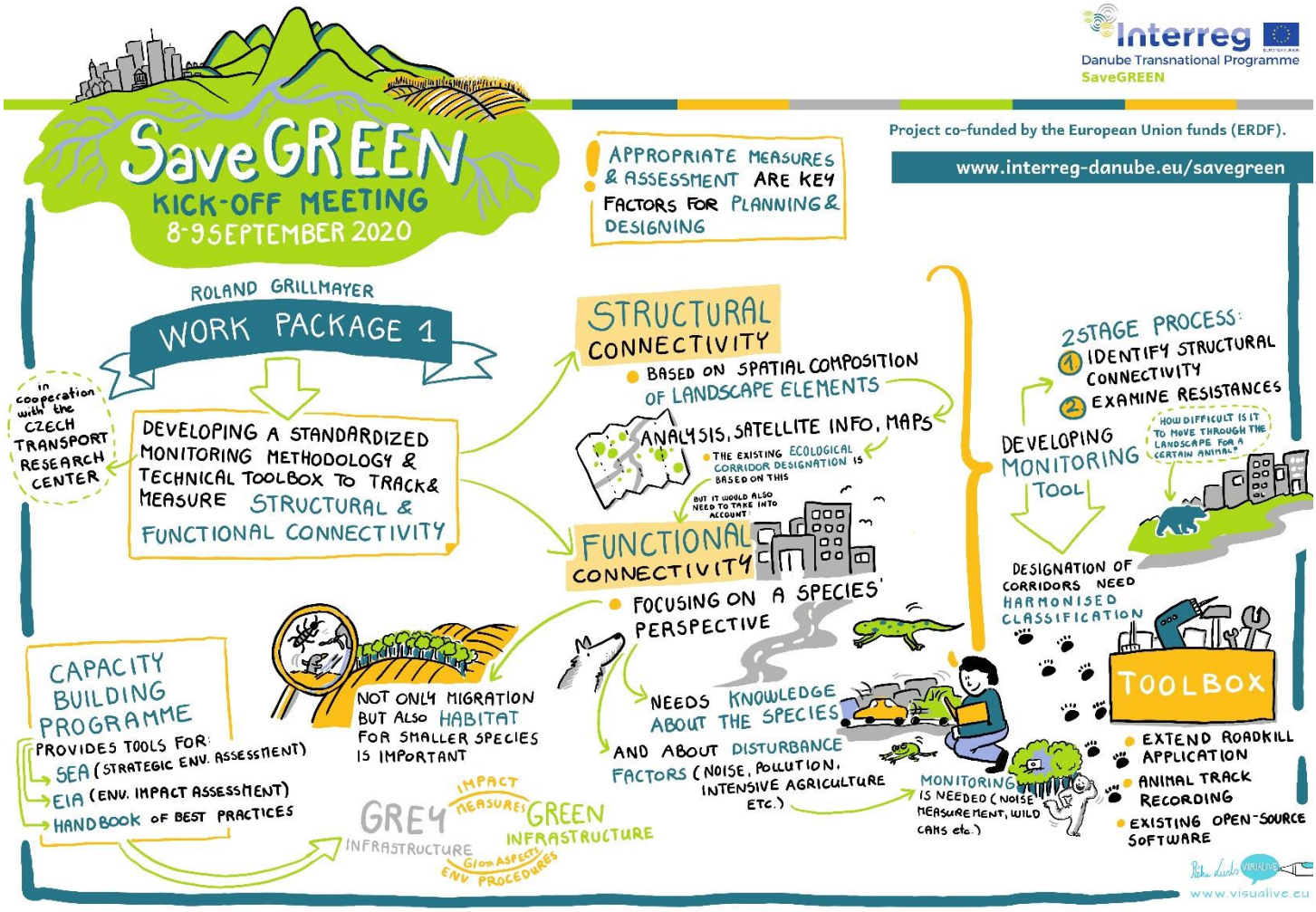
Mr. Csomor began his welcome by congratulating all participants of the event for recognising the urgent need to improve ecological connectivity in the region, a view also shared by the Danube Transnational Programme (DTP), which for this reason decided to provide the funding for the SaveGREEN project.

Regarding the project's implementation, Mr. Csomor noted that we were all treading unknown and challenging waters in light of the current Covid-19 pandemic. Visions and ideas will have to be adapted to the context. In this regard, it is now already clear that an extension beyond the project's 2.5-year run-time will not be possible – a fact which all project partners should keep in mind when formulating their plans over the next months and years.

The DTP expects that all planned actions are delivered on time and in good quality and is confident that the partners, many of whom have previously worked together, will be able to launch into action right away. When implementing the project, it is important that partners also cast their gaze beyond SaveGREEN alone to explore opportunities for synergies and partnerships with other DTP projects. Particularly in a policy context, the degree to which regional bodies and national stakeholders are engaged is crucial for success. SaveGREEN's approach in this regard has been very promising so far, and should be continued.

3.2 Work Package T1 - Methodology and Tools

Hosted by **Roland Grillmayer** from the Environment Agency Austria and **Marius Nistorescu**, EPC Consulting Ltd. Romania



Mr. Grillmayer opened the session dedicated to Work Package T1 by outlining the chief objectives for him and his team. These are:

1. **Develop tools for the work in pilot areas** conducted by Work Package T2 and the **capacity building programme** for public authorities and key players lead by Work Package T3;
2. **Create a standardised methodology for the monitoring** of structural and functional connectivity;
3. Based on the developed methodology**, identify critical ecological bottleneck areas** and surroundings for wildlife and monitor these sites

before and during the construction and operation of linear or other types of infrastructure to generate lessons learned;

4. The **Czech Transport Research Centre** will develop a **technical application** for the standardized monitoring methodology including a mobile app for professionals;
5. **SPECTRA** will work on **harmonising data gathered from the field** and make them available through the existing CCIBIS.org platform;
6. **EPC Consulting Ltd.** will lead the development of a **comprehensive capacity-building programme** consisting of training materials and on-the-job training dedicated to public authorities and other relevant stakeholders.

The SaveGREEN project, and Work Package T1 in particular, attaches considerable importance to the addressing of both *structural* and *functional* connectivity. This is based on the observation that most existing ecological corridor designations have been made based solely on structural connectivity considerations. Building on this, the collection of on-site monitoring data can then be used to evaluate whether these crossing points also satisfy functional connectivity aspects, ascertaining whether wildlife not only *can* use the Green Infrastructure, but whether and which ones actually *do*.

SaveGREEN's monitoring concept that is to be developed within Work Package T1 will therefore follow a two-stage approach:

Stage 1. covers the designation of ecological corridors and the classification of the permeability of segments within these corridors based on **structural connectivity**.

Stage 2. focusses on the field-based collection of all required parameters for the evaluation of **functional connectivity**.

In recognition of the many and varying definitions of structural and functional connectivity, the participants of the session were invited to take part in a quiz, whose aim it was to tease out specificities in the interpretation of the two notions, and to agree on a common understanding for the further work in Work Package.

The results from the questionnaire exercise can be viewed in greater detail in Annex 7.

Annex 07.: Session on WP T1 Conclusions Questionnaire

For the remainder of the session, Mr. Nistorescu of EPC Consulting Ltd. laid out their approach to elaboration of a capacity building programme that is to be

subsequently used within Work Package T3 to address public authorities and other key stakeholders.

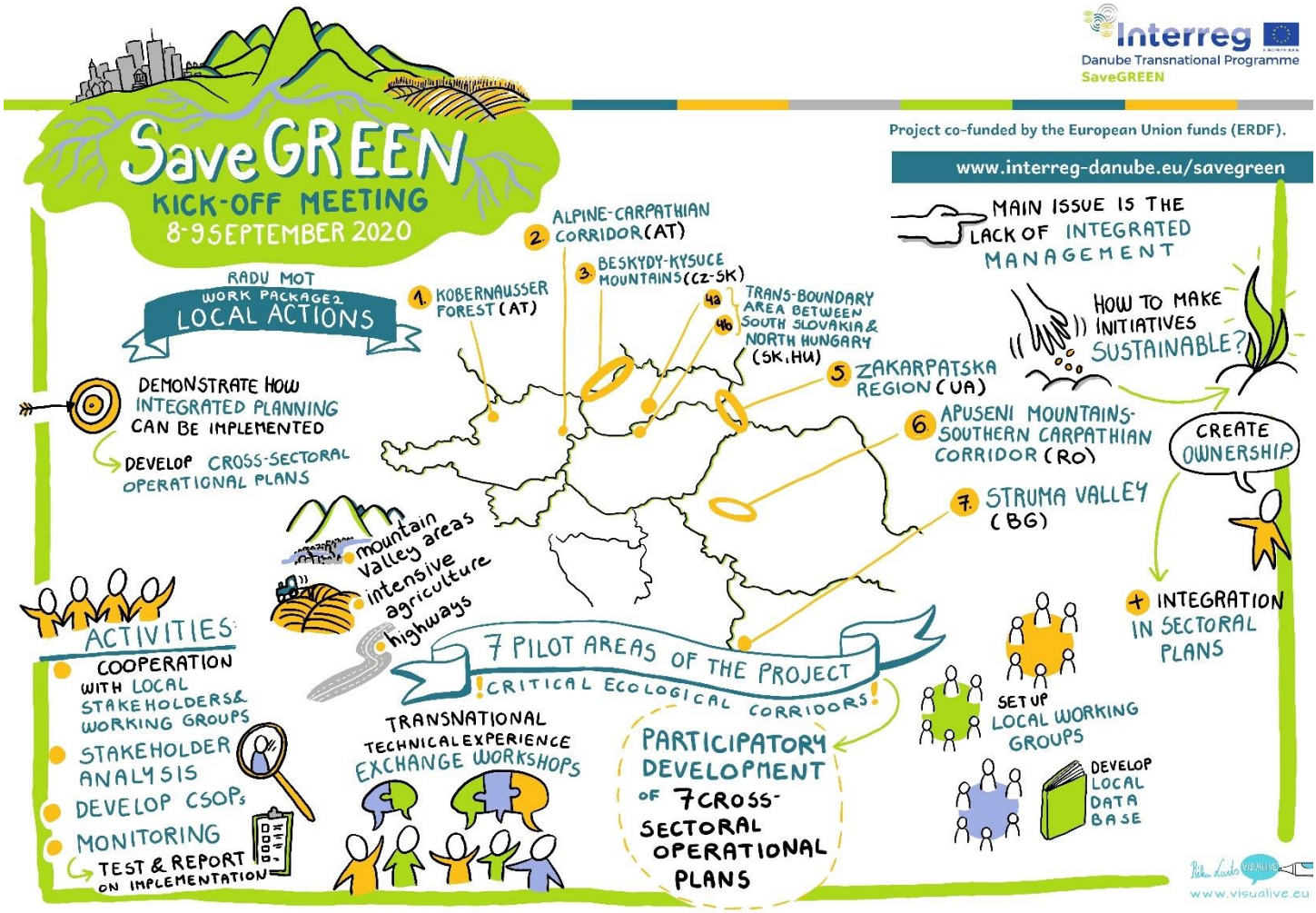
The principal aim of the programme is to provide key stakeholders with a better understanding of human impacts on ecological connectivity and improved knowledge on the identification and implementation of measures to prevent and reduce impacts. The developed materials are to include a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) toolkit, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) toolkit, including the best use of cost-benefit analyses, and a handbook on best practices.

A detailed diagram illustrating the planned approach for the compilation of the capacity building programme is available in Mr. Nistorescu's presentation (Annex 8.)

Annex 08.: Presentation WP T1 Methodology and Tools_Grillmayer and Nistorescu

3.3 Work Package T2 – Pilot Area Actions

Radu Mot, Zarand Association, Romania



The main goal of Work Package T2 is to demonstrate how integrated planning can be implemented on the ground. In seven pilot areas, Work Package T2 therefore strives to secure ecological connectivity by developing and implementing concrete and specifically tailored mitigation measures by addressing a multitude of sectors (transport, agriculture, forestry, water management, hunting, spatial planning etc.).

To achieve this the Work Package team aims to develop a Cross-Sectoral Operational Plan (CSOP) in a participatory manner in each of the seven pilot areas. Within SaveGREEN's runtime, these CSOPs will already be partially implemented.

The seven pilot areas have been carefully identified during the preparation of the SaveGREEN proposal. They are:

1. **Kobernausser Forest, Austria**
   Part of the last remaining ecological corridor connecting the Alps (Austria) with South Bohemia (Czech Republic). The pilot area is located on the Austrian side of the border.
2. **The Alpine-Carpathian Corridor, Austria**
   Part of an important corridor, linking the Alps with the Carpathians. The pilot area is located on the Austrian side of the border.
3. **Beskydy-Kysuce Mountains, Czech Republic/Slovakia**
   A trans-boundary area at the edge of the West Carpathians, important for large carnivore species and connecting the inner Carpathians and the periphery.

4a. The Trans-boundary area between South Slovakia and North Hungary, Slovakia
Important corridors connecting central Slovakia with the Southern part of the country and with Hungary.

4b. The Trans-boundary area between South Slovakia and North Hungary, Slovakia
An important connectivity area within the bio-corridor for large carnivores and ungulates between the Carpathians and the Börzsöny Mountains, bordered by Danube River on the South and Ipoly/Ipel River to the West and North.

5. **Zakarpatstka region, Ukraine**
   A critical transboundary connectivity area for the whole Carpathian range, it is one of the most important bio-corridor for large carnivore migration between Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary, through Ukraine. It is located on the southwestern slopes of the Ukrainian Carpathians and is adjacent to Transcarpathian lowland, included in the Tisza River catchment.
6. **Apuseni Mountains – Southern Carpathian Corridor, Romania**
   A critical connectivity area within one of the most important bio-corridors for large carnivores at the whole Carpathian range. It connects the distinct Western Romanian Carpathians (Apuseni Mts.) with the main arch of the Carpathians through the Mures River valley and adjacent hillside areas.
7. **Struma Valley, Bulgaria**
   An important area for ecological connectivity between the mountain massifs throughout Southwestern Bulgaria, including 3 main ecological corridors

and several local corridors. The area is also important at regional level as it increases migration opportunities in key bio-corridors between Bulgaria and Serbia, as well as between Bulgaria and Northern Macedonia.

Following a general overview of the Work Packages' main objectives, Mr. Mot dove into a more comprehensive look at planned outputs and deliverables and noted the numerous overlaps and complementarities with the work of the other SaveGREEN work packages. This was succeeded by a closer look at the Cross Sectoral Operational Plans, the centre-piece of the WP T2's work:

The CSOPs are SaveGREEN's immediate response to the observed strong lack of integrated management regarding matters of ecological connectivity in the region. Upon completion, the plans are to represent a common logical framework that facilitates the logical path from identified pressures and threats to concrete deliverable actions. In order to ensure that the CSOPs are carried by the largest possible number of relevant stakeholders, they are to be developed in a participatory manner, involving all stakeholders from relevant sectors by way of local working groups, established in each of the pilot areas. Stakeholder ownership is to be ensured through their involvement in the creation of the plans and by developing concrete roadmaps for actions defined by sectoral and intersectoral collaboration throughout the project, thus imbuing the results of this work with a longevity reaching beyond SaveGREEN 2.5-year runtime.

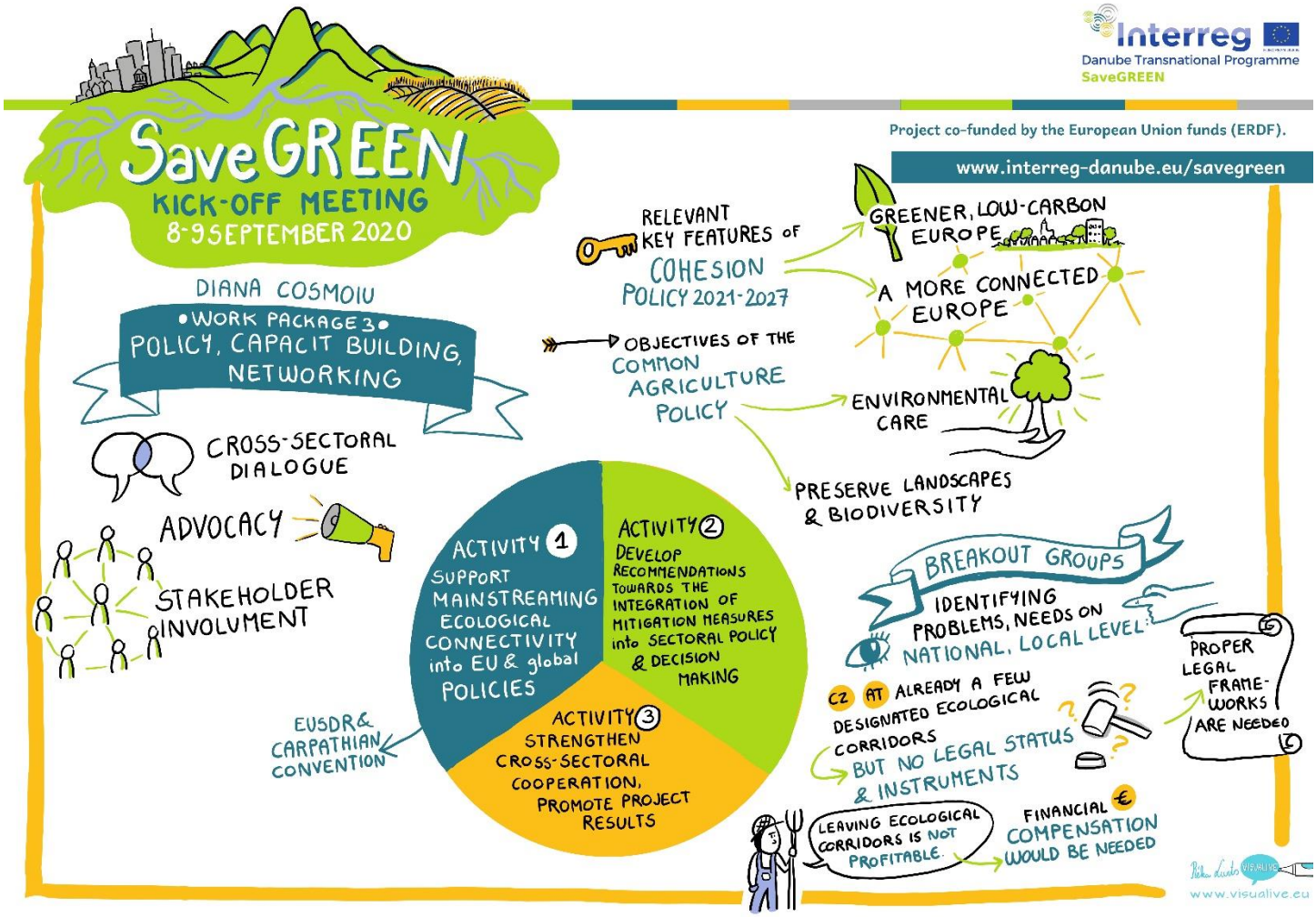
A first draft of the proposed structure for the CSOPs was shared and discussed with session participants. A specific question was raised by an audience member, whether the same methodology used for field monitoring in the other pilot areas would also be applied in Ukraine, taking into account the limited participation of the country in the rest of the project as a non-EU state. Mr. Mot responded that the idea, indeed, is to prepare Ukraine with the toolset needed for when major new plans for infrastructure are put into place. Ukrainian partners will have to identify which approach is best suited to the Ukrainian pilot sites, based on a common understanding among all pilot sites regarding the appropriate methodology.

Annex 09.: Presentation WP T2 Pilot area actions_Radu Mot

Annex 10.: WP T2 – Session on WP T2_Example of Arad-Deva rapid sectoral assessment

3.4 Work Package T3 – Policy, Capacity-building, Networking

Moderation of session by **Diana Cosmoiu**, WWF-Romania



Work Package T3 encompasses the policy-related work within the SaveGREEN project. Lead by WWF-Romania, the project partners involved will:

- pursue **policy-advocacy and stakeholder involvement activities at different levels** (national and regional – EUSDR, Carpathian Convention, EU) which, in combination, will enable the project to achieve its main objective;
- strengthen cooperation towards safeguarding the functionality of ecological corridors by **improving Green Infrastructure through a cross-sectoral dialogue**;

- advocate for the **adoption of adequate measures to ensure the funding of Green Infrastructure** in Operational Programmes and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and for EU standards on the integration of ecological connectivity/Green Infrastructure.

After a more detailed look at the Work Packages' three main activities and the deliverables therein, participants were divided into breakout groups and asked to reflect and discuss the two following guiding questions:

1. What are the planning, management & administration problems/needs you have identified at national and local level in terms of integration of connectivity in spatial planning and land use nearby linear transport infrastructure?
2. What are the potential solutions to the identified problems/needs that could be financed through future EU Funding and other sources (e.g. IFIs - International Financial Institutions)?

Upon re-convening in the plenary session, the three breakout groups were asked to share their findings. These are summarised below:

Breakout group nr. 1.:

- Connectivity is not recognized as an important aspect. There is a need for stronger involvement of stakeholders. NGOs could lead this process. No suggestion in regards to type of investment and sources.
- Regarding the EU Cohesion Funds, these are directed mainly at economic investments, not environmental ones. Ecological corridors should have a clear place in the Cohesion Policy with a dedicated allocation of EU funds.
- The new motorways constructed in the region are not functioning well so monitoring is important. By way of a solution, EU funds can be accessed to support activities such as monitoring (e.g. dedicated funds for monitoring to be integrated into the funds that are related to motorway development).
- Political will for local and regional implementation of ecological connectivity is missing. Local farmers are against corridors and it is difficult to get them on board because of the restrictions. As a solution for farmers, we need specific measures foreseeing proper management of the land which guarantees ecological connectivity and compensates the landowners for their loss of profit.
  Local authorities do not protect corridors - they are supportive of economic development. Measures are needed that can stimulate both, not only the farmers, but local authorities as well.

- Lacking political will and corruption lead to measures not being implemented/maintained. Careful planning and an incorporation of the costs of new projects (highways) and additional programs are needed to counter these issues.
- The planning system currently does not promote research-based plans, and the funding system does not help going beyond the minimal requirements.

Breakout group nr. 2.:

- On Sectoral policy integration: some corridors are already identified, but masterplans remain a challenge: spatial planning cannot protect the identified corridors, because some masterplans already foresee the use of individual sections of this land. This is a problem related to land use and property rights and therefore a legal challenge. Changes could cause landowners to go to court if obligations were imposed on them.
- Specifically on Slovakia and Austria: a legal status for the protection of migration corridors is missing. Only the masterplans can have such a status, and getting critical stakeholders on board is very difficult. Creating such a status will be an important step.
- In Romania, migration corridors have not yet been officially designed. Possible funding solutions could come from the EU level, but governmental and landowner support remains crucial.
- It would be highly beneficial to secure financial incentives through national strategic plans and/or the CAP for farmers who offer parts of their land for ecological corridors. Along with such financial incentives, one should highlight the prestige of being part of these corridors.
- Moreover, CAP funding pots for traditional forms of agriculture that, as in the past, support ecological connectivity should be expanded.
- Strategic consideration: First get the agricultural community on board, as major landowners. Then, with their support, move the spatial planning authorities' actions. This is a long and arduous process and at this stage, funding solutions to support this are lacking.

Breakout group nr. 3.:

- The EIA/SEA process is applied too late in the transport Infrastructure development process, so the solution provided in EIA/SEA comes too late. It is essential to identify the key issues from an early stage in the SEA/EIA processes, when many options are still open, to ensure that they are effectively assessed throughout the process.

- Another problem is the lack of methodology for the designation of ecological corridors. The project must advocate a common methodology and work more/better with local stakeholders.
- The infrastructure solutions are hard to adjust because the connectivity aspects are dynamic. A possible solution could be to finance from the work necessary to adjust initial structural solutions out of Operational Plan funding.
- Mirroring the findings of breakout group 1., participants here also noted that there is a problem with the official identification and land designation of ecological corridors in Romania. Lacking appropriate legislation, efforts are currently limited to voluntary actions, if the administration accepts them. It is therefore crucial to have a) a common methodology at the national level and b) to subsequently pressure the authorities to take the designated ecological corridors into account and protect them.
- The initial openness of authorities to these issues is also a problem. To address this, advocacy is needed at the local level and with all key stakeholders so that the importance of connectivity is understood. If this is achieved at a local level, the country-level plans can then be adjusted to include ecological corridors.
- Bulgaria and Greece face similar problems. The terms of 'Green Infrastructure' and 'connectivity' are not familiar to the government administration/authorities, so clear definitions are needed. As the sectoral divisions are very deep and represent the main obstacle to legally binding measures, Green Infrastructure considerations must be made conditional in every funding programme. Transborder and national level coordination and support from the EU can be used to achieve this.

  Open data resources, increasingly available, in particular due to the INSPIRE Directive, should continue to be fed with data as they represent a strong foundation for the designation of the corridors.
- Adding to the points made by breakout group 2. regarding the CAP, breakout group 3. noted that the subsidies for intensive agriculture are too high when compared to more environmentally friendly forms of agricultural production.
- Lastly, breakout group 3. noted that a better balance between our infrastructure needs and the needs of the environment could be struck by making an economic evaluation of ecosystem services.

Summarising the reporting by the three breakout groups, Ms. Cosmoiu noted that the official designation of ecological corridors is seen as a crucial first step. Only if ecological corridors are efficiently embedded in the legal framework can EU funds be accessed to support identification, monitoring, etc.

Annex 11.: Presentation WP T3 Policy_Diana Cosmoiu

3.5 Work Package Communications

Session moderated by **Eszter Sebestyén** and **Thor Morante**, CEEweb

The final session of the day was dedicated to WP Communications which covers all of SaveGREEN's internal and external communication activities. It began with a deep dive into the activities and deliverables of the work package in order to inform all project partners of the resources at their disposal as well as their duties towards the WP Communications. More than arguably any of the other work packages

under SaveGREEN, the WP Communications has numerous overlaps and interlinkages with the other work streams of the project.

The activities under the work package can be broadly grouped into four work streams:

- **Scientific field work**: communication of field work results to stakeholders and the broader public via flyers, factsheets and other materials;
- **Coordination and support** for all activities with a communications dimension within the project through the provision of tools and instructions;
- **Public appearance**: organisation of public events, press field trips, info-days, and conferences and the writing of press articles to increase the visibility and accessibility of the project's work;
- **Web appearance**: creation and management of website content, social media and newsletters to ensure the project's online presence and engagement.

After introducing the deliverables and responsibilities of project partners under the four work streams outlined above, Ms. Sebestyén proceeded to share a calendar of the key milestones for the work package over the lifetime of SaveGREEN, beginning in period 1 with today's Kick-Off Event, and ending in period 5 with the Final Conference.

All participants of the session were subsequently made familiar with the visual identity guidelines – fonts, colours and logo specifications, that are required when producing project-related materials and then made aware of the templates and materials already available to date and where these could be found in the project's online file storage.

Finally, CEEweb shared the next steps for Communications Work Package:

1. Inform Communications Lead Partner (CEEweb) about your communications officers
2. Send missing organisation logos by 11. September
3. Provide feedback on the Communications Strategy by 3. October
4. Translation and printing of roll ups and posters
5. Communications meetings to be held on the 1st Tuesday of every month

Three questions were raised by participants at the end of the session:

How does one connect to the SaveGREEN Communications calendar?

- We must agree which service to use - Google, Outlook or third party. This will be decided together. Google may make sense as everyone has also had to create a Google profile to access the project materials on the shared Google Drive. It will be shared with all the project managers and comms officers to edit and anyone can apply for access to the calendar to see the upcoming events.

Is there a project summary for communication purposes?

- Yes. A draft is already on the drive, which will be finalised in the coming days.

Do we have photos (new, not previously used in preceding projects)?

- This is an important point and a request to all partners to please share any photos that can be used in the course of the project. A folder will be created in the WP Communications folder on the shared drive in which photos can be collected.

Annex 12.: Presentation WP Communications_Eszter Sebestyén and Thor Morante

3.6 Conclusions and Next Steps

Hildegard Meyer, WWF-CEE

Day 2. of the Kick-Off meeting was concluded by Hildegard Meyer who, with the aid of the illustrations by Réka Livits, summarised the discussions that had taken place over the course of the two days. In the names of all project partners, she thanked all participants for having joined the meeting and for sharing their valuable insights, which will be of significant use in the further implementation of the SaveGREEN project.

The central aim of SaveGREEN is to improve ecological connectivity in the Carpathian region through an active collaboration among the numerous stakeholders that affect and are affected by the issue – this Kick-Off Meeting provided a solid basis from which the necessary next steps can be taken towards achieving this goal.

Annex 06.: Illustrations by Réka Livits

Annex 01.: SaveGREEN Kick-Off Event Agenda

Annex 13.: Opinion poll – feedback on meeting format and organisation