Interreg
Danube Transnational Programme
TRANSGREEN

Report on Actions Focusing on Conflict Minimisation

Output 4.2

TRANSGREEN Project DTP1-187-3.1

Compiled by Christophe Janz, Tereza Thompson & Hildegard Meyer based on interviews representatives of the four pilot areas:

NCA, Czech Republic, CEEweb Hungary, State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, Milvus Group, Association Zarand

June 2019

Project co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

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Introduction

The central aim of the Interreg TRANSGREEN project was contribute to safer and environmentally friendly road and rail networks in the mountainous regions of the Danube Basin with a special focus on the Carpathian Mountains. It sought to achieve this by improving planning frameworks and developing concrete environmentally-friendly and safe road and rail transport solutions that take elements of Green Infrastructure, in particular ecological corridors into account.

The TRANSGREEN project was implemented with the help of an interdisciplinary partnership comprised of planners, economists, engineers, and ecologists who integrated and applied their specific knowledge across the region and cooperated on developing guidelines on integrated transport infrastructure planning, construction, management and monitoring, taking into account aspects of road safety and biodiversity conservation. The project partners collaborated on the production of ready-to-use methodologies for stakeholder participation processes, a training package on Environmental Impact Assessments with a focus on ecological corridors, and Catalogues of measures to minimise conflicts between linear transport infrastructure and wildlife corridors for each of the four pilot sites. These were located in Beskydy-Kysuce on the border between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Miskolc-Košice-Uzhgorod, which is shared by Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine, and Tîrgu Mureş - Iaşi and Arad (Radna)- Deva, both of which are situated in Romania. All pilot areas are located along the European Network of Transport (TEN-T).

The following report provides an overview of the pilot actions focusing on conflict minimisation, which were implemented in the four pilot areas of the TRANSGREEN project. The actions comprise testing of tools and methodologies developed under Work Package 3 “Scientific support” and starting implementation of measures outlined under Output 4.1 Catalogues of Measures for each pilot area including activities in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

Beskydy- Kysuce Crossborder Pilot Area (Czech Republic - Slovakia)

In Beskydy and Kysuce, the pilot action consisted of the installation of ‘Beware of wildlife’ road warning signs together with a speed limit along sections of the road at which large carnivores and other animals were known to frequently cross. Fauna mortality induced by road collisions has a significant negative impact on animal populations. Indeed, there have been several recorded cases of lynx, as well as one of wolf that have been involved in traffic collisions. The installation of road signs informing drivers about possible wildlife movement along crucial road sections thus presented a promising mitigation action.

Figure 1: Section of the road with one of the installed road signs. © Vaclav Hlavac

The project team approached the administrative authorities of the Moravskoslezský district and Zlínský district, both whose administrative territories overlap with the Beskydy project area, and requested the installation of 'beware of wildlife' road signs with a speed limit of 50km/h along selected sections of the road. In subsequent negotiations with the police, who argued that 50km/h was too little to guarantee a fluid traffic flow, the speed limit was raised to 70km/h. Finally, only the Moravskoslezský district proceeded to install the signs along two key sections of the road:

1. Pindula Pass (GPS: 49.5051869N, 18.1907556E), which connects the Veřovické hills (west) and the Radhošť massiv (east). This location was identified as an important migration corridor, an observation confirmed through the tracking of a female lynx using a GPS telemetry collar in 2012.

2. A densely forested section of the road (GPS: 49.5043997N, 18.4159861E), which was confirmed as a crossing point for both lynx and bears. A lynx has in the past died here in a vehicle collision.

While cooperation with the Moravskoslezský district administration was highly satisfactory, the Zlínský district authorities were not in favour of installing road signs after receiving a police statement that claimed these would negatively influence traffic flow and put drivers and other road users at risk in the event that some individuals fail to respect the speed limit. Increased communication efforts could have allowed to achieve more in this regard, yet this was not possible due to insufficient personal capacities.

Possible next steps under the ConnectGreen project include contacting Mr. Ostružka from the Road Administration in Ostrava with the request to set up repellent light installations along selected road sections in order to keep animals away from these high-risk spots. Moreover, Zlínský district authorities could once more approached and made aware that the traffic sign installations were successful in the neighbouring district without a significant slowing down of traffic in the area.

Miskolc-Košice-Uzhgorod Trilateral Pilot Area (Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine)

In Hungary, stakeholder consultations were carried out in order to gauge the position of relevant stakeholders and local society regarding the development of transportation infrastructure in the area. As ecosystem service evaluations are on the agenda for many actors in the transport planning sector, the team felt that the survey would not only raise awareness and interest for the project itself, but also create the opportunity to involve these actors in cross-sectoral discussions.

The work was carried out by two external consultants: Veronika Kiss and Zólyomi Ágnes. At the beginning, the involvement of stakeholders proved difficult due to negative previous experiences, after which many felt that their opinions weren't given proper consideration. However, following several outreach attempts and some more in-depth interviews, numerous people were more than willing to share their point of view. Due to a lack of capacity, an incomplete database and no previous surveys that could provide baseline figures, a full economic evaluation of ecosystem services wasn't possible.

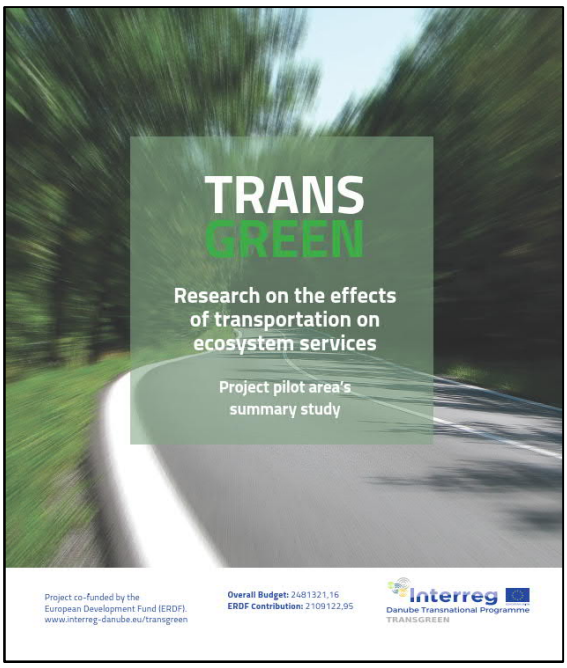

Figure 2: Brochure with results of the survey on the effects of transportation on ecosystem services (www.interreg-danube.eu/transgreen).

In the Slovak section of the pilot area, the project team organised a series of meetings both at the beginning and end of the project in order to inform stakeholders about the project, its findings and outputs. The main motivation behind these outreach actions was to give local stakeholders the feeling that they could take part in, influence, and support nature conservation processes in their area, rather than these simply being laws imposed from above.

The meetings were organised by staff of the State Nature Conservancy (SNR SR). The invited stakeholders included local landowners (farmers), landusers (hunters and foresters), decision makers (public authorities, municipal officials, and representatives of the self-governing regions), and institutions (road administration, spatial planners, and the National Motorway Company). While there is a need for more time and effort to communicate the importance of ecological connectivity in the area, these first meetings served to create a good basis for further discussions. They allowed the different stakeholder groups to exchange views and get to know each other. Many voiced positive feedback, with some hunters offering possibilities for future cooperation and the sharing of phototrap data, and a representative of the self-governing region promising to contact the team in order to include their findings in a spatial plan update.

With more capacities, organising individual meetings specifically tailored to the different groups (e.g. hunters or foresters) may have yielded even better results. Nonetheless, the outreach efforts have doubtless borne fruit, and will continue to be carried out in the future.

Figure 3: Many stakeholder meetings took place during the implementation of TRANSGEEN activities, here in Varín, Slovakia. © State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic

The project team in Ukraine carried out several Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) training workshops for local stakeholders and authorities. The aim of these trainings was to stimulate local stakeholders to get more actively involved in activities related to EIAs, including the current assessment of the situation in the Zakarpattya region. The stakeholders that took part included regional authorities dealing with road construction and environmental protection, scientific and educational institutions, NGOs active in environmental protection and regional development, and representatives of protected area administrations.

The 2-days training event, which included a field trip to critical points in the pilot area, was conducted by two highly professional national EIA trainers: Dmytro Skylnikov and Anatoliy Pavelko. The field trips were organised by Andriy-Taras Bashta.

The training participants gained substantial knowledge related to understanding the role, structure and functionality of green infrastructure and the means by which the development of transport infrastructure can ensure the maintenance of ecosystem services and ecological connectivity. Furthermore, they gained the capacity to implement adequate mitigation measures ensuring the sustainability of green infrastructure and its functionality, and received valuable input on best practices in data collection, the identification of appropriate mitigation measures, and on learning to differentiate high and low quality environmental reports. The results of these trainings are already visible: in April 2019, the developer of the Mukachevo-Beregove road submitted some documents to the Department of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Zakarpattya region for project approval. The latter then recommended several practical solutions aimed at improving road permeability in the form of wildlife crossings and culverts for the migration of amphibians, reptiles and small and medium-sized mammals.

In the future, these efforts can be continued in order to further develop the capacity of actors at the regional and local levels to conduct and assess the quality of environmental reports, identify appropriate mitigation measures in cooperation with the road service administration, and conduct field research to identify migratory routes and species.

Arad-Deva Pilot Area (Romania)

In the Arad-Deva pilot area, the project team introduced a roadkill registration mobile application and a complimentary web database. This represents a first in Romania, and its use will hopefully not only be restricted to the pilot area, but may be extended to the entire country. Regular drivers will be able to use the app to report wildlife traffic accidents, and experts and other people interested in road-ecology of traffic-safety issues can then consult the data aggregated through tool. This will result in the creation of the first database in Romania dedicated solely to wildlife and transport infrastructure safety, and therefore has the potential to inform road, rail and traffic

authorities about accident-prone locations, as well as the environmental policy makers regarding sectors that are in particular need of mitigation measures.

As wildlife traffic-related mortality or incidents are currently not perceived as important topics in Romania, the establishing of a national-level database holds the potential to not only help interested stakeholders to understand the phenomenon, but also to make the general public more aware of the issue.

The idea for the tool came from an existing version of such an app in the Czech Republic, which was created by the Transport Research Centre (CDV). The Zarand Association, Association "Milvus Group" and WWF Romania subsequently proposed a set of adaptations that would allow the tool to be rolled out in Romania. After adaptation, the new tool proved to be more complex than the original Czech version, which meant that numerous technical issues had to be solved, tested, checked and revised. As such, the entire process took somewhat longer than was originally anticipated. Nonetheless, the possibility to work with the highly experienced staff of the CDV who became part of a very heterogeneous team of GIS and technical developers, fieldwork operatives and ecological experts proved a highly productive, efficient and rewarding experience.

The roadkill registration tool is now ready to be tested by selected third parties that were approached in the context of the TRANSGREEN project and, after fine-tuning, will be available for and promoted among the wider public. The online database will have more limited access permissions.

In the future, the database will be supported through the GreenWeb (a regional group of IENE for Southeast Europe), and efforts are already being made with other TRANSGREEN partners to explore possibilities for further development of the app. and database and other ways to make use of the data analysis results to inform decision-making regarding transport and conservation issues.

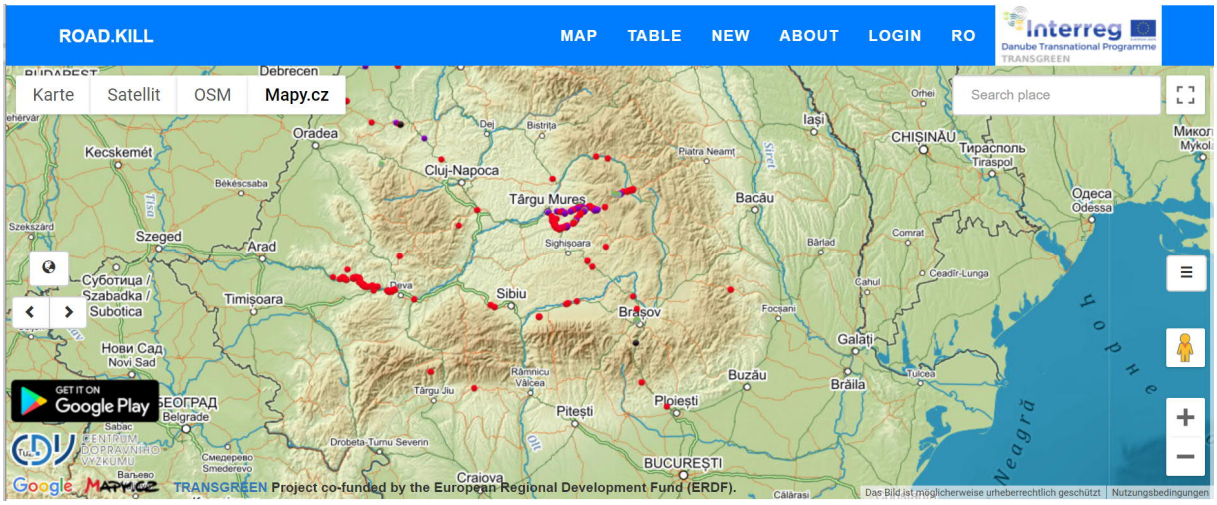

Figure 4: Roadkill registration application created and tested within TRANSGREEN (https://road-kill-registration.green-web.eu/?lang=en).

Tîrgu Mureş – Iaşi Pilot Area (Romania)

The Tîrgu Mureş – Iaşi project area was unique among the TRANSGREEN project implementation sites, as the A8 highway was still in the early planning phase and construction work has not yet begun. This provided the project team with the opportunity to intervene in a timely manner and to attempt to positively influence the planning process, thus minimizing the future highway's potential negative impacts on local communities, and on both wildlife species and natural habitats of national and EU importance.

One of the most important actions in this pilot area was the cooperation with stakeholders, the main goal of which was to emphasise the need to base effective mitigation measures for the future A8 highway on sound scientific (biological) data. The engagement of and consultation with all stakeholders was considered crucial from the onset of the project, given the wide array of local, regional and national actors involved in - and potentially affected by - the planned infrastructure development. These included:

- Organizations, institutions and state administration bodies involved in nature conservation: the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Waters and Forests, the National Environmental Protection Agency, county-level Environmental Protection Agencies, protected area managers, wildlife managers, forestry services, environmental consultancy companies, and environmental NGOs;
- Organizations, institutions and state administration bodies involved in transport infrastructure development and management: the Ministry of Transport, the National Company for Road Infrastructure Administration (CNAIR), infrastructure engineering companies, and infrastructure NGOs;
- Organizations, institutions and state administration bodies involved in spatial planning: county-level authorities (County Councils) and local public authorities (mayor's offices, local councils); and
- Other stakeholders: micro regional associations (NGOs), common ownership structures, local communities, individual landowners, the general public, and mass-media.

Consultations with these groups occurred in a sustained manner and on several levels throughout the project implementation: two local Kick-off Meetings, a local stakeholder meeting with local wildlife managers, a technical meeting, a series of multidisciplinary meetings in Bucharest, and two Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) trainings. On each of these occasions, the local project partner (Association “Milvus Group”) presented its currently available, and continuously developed biological data sets relevant to the planning and construction of the future A8 highway. The willingness to share the data with planners and decision makers was also emphasized on each occasion.

The consultations with the different stakeholder groups were successful. As a result, there is a heightened awareness among all stakeholders about both the need to implement mitigation

easures on the planned A8 highway and about the existence of data that can and should serve as a basis for adequately planning the respective mitigation measures.

The existence of baseline biological data in the early planning phase of the A8 highway sets this highway project apart from similar developments in Romania (both past and present), creating the opportunity to properly address its potential negative effects - given that there is a will to actually do so. To facilitate this process, the local project partner will already make the data available to planners in the upcoming phase of the revision and updating of the Feasibility Study.

Ideally, effective mitigation measures should be incorporated into the highway's technical plans before the actual construction begins - ensuring that these costs are considered and measures are implemented from the very beginning. This could create a positive precedent in Romania, a country that has ambitious plans to extend its transportation infrastructure.

Figure 5: Field trip as part of the EIA Training event in Praid, Romania. © Association "Milvus Group"

Figure 6: Break out groups as part of the EIA Training event in Praid, Romania. © Association "Milvus Group"