



# NATREG

## Managing Natural Assets and Protected Areas as Sustainable Regional Development Opportunities

Protected areas not only represent an important instrument of biodiversity conservation, but also contain a great potential for social and economic development. However, these potentials are not yet recognized enough - even more - nature conservation is not well enough connected with the development of protected areas.

The NATREG Project is addressing the mentioned challenge – its main aim is to acknowledge and promote the potentials of natural assets and protected areas as drivers for sustainable regional development, and to increase the perception of preserved nature as a valuable asset.

The Project is connecting six protected areas in the Adria-Alpe-Pannonia territory.



# Deliblato Sands

Special nature reserve (SNR) Deliblato Sands, Serbia, is one of the last and the largest oasis of sand, steppe, forest and wetland vegetation in the Pannonian Plain. SNR Deliblato Sands is located in south-eastern part of Vojvodina province, along the regional road between Belgrade and Timișoara (Romania), between Danube River and Carpathian slopes. This spacious area, with a total area of 34,829.32 ha, with numerous ellipsoidal sandy masses surrounded by fertile agricultural land, is one of the greatest centres of biodiversity in Europe and the region of extraordinary, universal value for nature protection. The Labudovo okno locality is a Ramsar site and it is a habitat of wetland birds as well as the largest migratory area in this part of Europe. Due to its richness of flora (900 plant species, some of them relicts and rarities) and many bird species (especially the imperial eagle and the steppe falcon), this area is marked as an Important Bird Area.

## Issues and challenges related to the management of the protected area

Because of misunderstanding and insufficient communication between responsible institutions there is a lack of proper management plan for the protected area. The area is also lacking joint promotion and tourism strategy as there is no consensus between PE Vojvodinašume and the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia about main tourist focal points. Participative involvement of local inhabitants and local communities in the management of the protected area is weak as well as participation in finding opportunities for the development and growth of tourism-generated income. Negative demographic trend is registered within the nature reserve borders.

## NATREG objectives in the pilot area

- To start intensive communication and cooperation between institutions and sectors and to reach agreement about common management principles and measures.
- To start involving local communities into the management process and to promote SNR Deliblato sands in a wider area as a unique place of local and global importance.
- To present good practices of cooperation and participation to the relevant authorities and to invite them to participate in developing new ideas for further investments projects, especially to stop the negative demographic trend.

## Envisaged results

- Strengthened cooperation, better knowledge transfer and share of experience between relevant institutions and authorities, as well as created favourable conditions for promotional and educational activities related to nature conservation and the protected area.
- Raised awareness on the importance of natural resources and biodiversity, raised capacities for their sustainable use, increased stakeholder involvement.

## Local partners

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# Pohorje

Pohorje, a mountain complex covering 840 km<sup>2</sup>, lies in the northeastern part of Slovenia, south of the Drava River. Norway spruce and beech on acid soils prevail in vast Pohorje forests, while along the creeks in gorges, mixed broadleaf forests can be found. Due to impermeable ground, characteristic peat bogs with small lakes and bog woodland were formed. Mountain forests represent habitats for numerous rare and endangered bird species like woodpeckers, capricelies, etc. Steep valley streams with deciduous forests along streams, are also important as a habitat of endangered species of butterflies and amphibians.

Main economic activities in Pohorje are forest exploitation, rural economy and tourism. In 2001, an agreement for the development of the Pohorje Regional Park was signed. In 2004 Pohorje was declared a Natura 2000 site (SPA and SCI).

## Issues and challenges related to the management of the protected area

Pohorje is today overloaded with negative influences that are threatening the values of the area due to uncoordinated management. A huge part of conflicts arises from administrative fragmentation of the site due to different initiatives by spatial planning, regional development and nature conservation sectors. The area is territorially divided between 16 municipalities, three regional development agencies, four major tourism enterprises and two nature conservation regional units, which leads to shifting responsibilities from one sector to another. Therefore the harmonization of aspirations will be one of the main objectives in the NATREG Project.

## NATREG objectives in the pilot area

The basic purpose is to encourage sustainable development in the entire area of Pohorje through recognition of the preserved nature as one of the main drivers for future development plans and investments. Specific objectives of this NATREG pilot area are:

- To broadly recognize the area's potentials.
- To involve the general public and NGOs into the management planning process.
- To develop the integrated management plan for the Natura 2000 sites.
- To develop the follow-up project proposals deriving from recognized area's potentials.
- To initiate the process of the adoption of the Pohorje Regional Park.

## Envisaged results

The main Project result will be the harmonisation of activities of key sectors present in the area according to the integrated management plan in order to eliminate administrative and any other obstacles. The consortium of local stakeholders will be established and an agreement on development initiatives as well as on conservation measures in the Pohorje pilot area will be achieved through a series of workshops. Sustainable development and nature preservation will be implemented through the regional development plans of the Pohorje area, and the awareness of local inhabitants will be significantly arisen.

## Local partners

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# Delta Po River Parks

The area of the Delta Po River Parks of Veneto and Emilia Romagna, Italy, covering 70,500 ha within Veneto and Emilia-Romagna regions, is shaped by the joint action of the branches of rivers that flow into the Adriatic Sea and the sea itself, representing one of the most important wetland zones of the Mediterranean and Europe due to its landscape, outstanding flora and fauna habitats and extraordinary biodiversity.

Important local economy resources are the commercial ports of Ravenna and Porto Viro, agriculture, agro-food and tourism. Furthermore, hunting represents a strong income factor and plays a crucial role in the preservation of NATURA 2000 networks. Defined as a weak territory, the delta is today facing problems like the depopulation, the uncertainty of its economy and the effects of environmental phenomena/disturbances intensified by climate change. In spite of this vulnerability, Delta Po offers promising conditions to develop a series of activities.

## Issues and challenges related to the management of the protected area

Natural and economic factors of the Po delta area make the coexistence of biodiversity management and the need for growth conflicting: requests to extend development areas where new construction will be allowed, the project of a new course to replace the existing Romea route, increasing availability of hunting zones, proposals to reduce the number of fish-eating birds, and the management of the canal and rivers banks are the main topics of discussion. In some cases, different visions and lack of communication at different levels of administration play an important role. The main problem is how to involve the stakeholders to find solutions and harmonize various opinions.

## NATREG objectives in the pilot area

The final objective of the Veneto Region and the ARPA Emilia-Romagna, NATREG Project partners, is to scale down the guidance contained in the trans-national strategy within the local policy framework in order to develop a common Management Plan of the Delta Po River Park shared by two regional administrations of Veneto and Emilia-Romagna: an ambitious objective, that is configured within a proactive policy to create an Inter-Regional Delta Po River Park. This goal is related also to the needs of simplifying the complicated planning framework of Po delta area, with the presence of different planning instruments proposed by the different local authorities.

## Envisaged results

The envisaged result commonly pursued by Veneto and Emilia-Romagna is figuring out – through the expected interregional management plan – a reconciliation measure to harmonize the need of preserving the ecological and natural balance of protected area and guarantee the conditions to ensure economic growth and development of the zones adjacent to the Parks where specific restrictions caused by the proximity of sensitive areas are often perceived by residents as an obstacle to development rather than a growth opportunity.

## Local partners

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# Regional Park Mura-Drava

The Regional Park Mura-Drava was temporarily protected in 2008. It stretches from the border with the Republic of Slovenia through 5 counties to the borders on the Danube. The NATREG pilot area includes only a part of the temporarily protected regional park Mura-Drava in the Koprivnica-Križevci County. The Drava river has a natural riverbed with many meanders and backwaters and a variety of animal and plant life. The pilot area includes 12 villages (some of the scattered settlements - "konaki") and 3,000 inhabitants.

Cities of Koprivnica and Djurdjevac are located 10 km from the Drava river. Podravina is an agricultural area with developed food-processing industry (Podravka) and has the largest deposits of natural gas in Croatia (2/3 of national production) as well as a large geothermal potential due to numerous sites with geothermal water. This area is also a homeland of naive painting.

## Issues and challenges related to the management of the protected area

Due to the lack of communication between responsible institutions at national and regional levels (development, spatial planning, nature conservation and economy), the management plan for the protected area hasn't been developed yet. Also the scientific data about biodiversity and spatial plan for the Drava river basin are missing.

Past and current development strategies in the protected area foresee building of hydroelectric plant, river navigability from Osijek to Ferdinandovac, utilization of geothermal energy and development of tourism, intensive agriculture as well as 3 natural protected areas in spite of the lack of investments. Besides the problem of depopulation the area is lacking proper communication and consensus between local communities and institutions for sustainable development.

## NATREG objectives in the pilot area

- To start intensive communication and cooperation between institutions and to agree about the common management plan.
- To start involving local communities into the management planning, and to present good practices of cooperation and participation to the relevant authorities.
- To promote the Park, to network with other relevant institutions along the Drava river in Hungary, Austria and Slovenia.
- To develop ideas for further investment projects for the Regional Park.

## Envisaged results

- Draft Management Plan for the most valuable water lands in the pilot area will be prepared.
- A study of sustainable tourism development and biodiversity will be carried out.
- Regional and local policy will be improved regarding natural protection in the regional park.
- Cross-sector network will be established. Web site for the promotion of natural assets in the Koprivnica-Križevci County, and the brochure about the Regional park will be prepared.
- New project proposals will be prepared.

## Local partners

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# Styria

Styria is the second largest province of Austria with a land area of approximately 16,400 square kilometres and a very diverse landscape – from the Alpine region in the northwest (Dachstein 2,995m) to the hilly region in the southeast. The “green heart” of Austria (61% of land cover is forest) is famous for its winter sports attractiveness as well as for the thermal region and the “Weinland” (wine land) at the southern border with Slovenia. Styria is covered with a high number of protected areas, e.g. national park “Gesäuse”, the so called “Europaschutzgebiete” (Natura 2000) and areas with protected nature or landscape, with lots of different valuable natural assets.

The population (1,207,000 inhabitants) concentrates in the wider region of the capital Graz and in the Alpine region in main valleys of the rivers Mur, Mürz and Enns.

## Issues and challenges related to the management of the protected area

In central areas of Styria, e.g. around Graz, the economic region Leoben-Bruck-Kapfenberg, Aichfeld-Murboden or Weiz-Gleisdorf, housing, economy and infrastructure are growing and dividing habitats. Furthermore, main corridors for mammals (at the European scale) are crossing Styria from the southwest to the northeast. Most development activities are located outside protected areas, so from a spatial planner’s point of view the focus has to be put on ensuring connectivity between habitats by building up a “green network”.

## NATREG objectives in the pilot area

Therefore, within the NATREG Project it is planned:

- To define the relevant “green areas” (habitats) in protected and non-protected areas throughout the whole country and the relevant neighbourhood (Slovenia, Carinthia, Salzburg, Upper- and Lower Austria and Burgenland).
- To identify the “green network” (main ecological corridors between habitats) in the regional scale of 1:50,000.
- To analyze the main barriers for connectivity caused by settlement and infrastructure.
- To ensure sustainable functionality of green areas by coordinating various functions such as ecology, protection against natural risks, recreation and tourism.
- To develop measures in the field of spatial planning at the regional scale.

## Envisaged results

The results of NATREG shall be the basis for the adoption of regional spatial plans i.e. regulations of the provincial government of Styria. These plans are concerning ecology, landscape, natural resources, settlement, industry etc. and have to be followed by spatial planning authorities at the local level. The main goal is to avoid new building sites in the so-called “hot spots” for connectivity-function (“bottle-necks”).

The second goal is to build capacity in the field of habitats’ connectivity for planners and authorities of traffic infrastructure, water management and spatial planning at the local and regional level.

## Local partner

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# Vellacher Kotschna

The protected area is geographically located in the territory of the Carinthian municipality Bad Eisenkappel. It is situated in an Alpine valley representing the most southern part of Austria.

With a total area of 586 hectares it is one of the largest protected areas within the NATURA 2000 network in Carinthia. The Vellacher Kotschna was declared a protected area by the Carinthian government in 1959. In 2002 it was designated a PSCI (Protected Area of Special Interest) NATURA 2000 area. The main protection target is the conservation of the unique biotic assemblage in the area.

## Issues and challenges related to the management of the protected area

To this day, no comprehensive management plan has been drawn up for the Vellacher Kotschna. Decreasing agricultural utilization causes the spreading of shrub and forest vegetation. The region of southern Carinthia, especially the rural areas close to the border with Slovenia, shows strong emigration and increased ageing of the population. The consequences are a decreasing economic power and the diminution of local infrastructure.

Increasing interest in outdoor activities such as hiking and mountain biking, however, reveal new opportunities for future development if considerate and sustainable management is carried out.

## NATREG objectives in the pilot area

Main objective of the project site is to conceive management of nature conservation activities in coordination with development measures in the protected area through:

- The development of guidelines for economic evaluation of the natural assets and development potentials – Natural Resources Accounting.
- The analysis of existing problems and discrepancies between the objectives of nature conservation and other sectors (development, spatial planning, ...) as an input for further development and implementation of a joint strategy.
- Gathering and evaluation of best practice examples as an input for the development of joint strategies – establishing knowledge platform.
- The development of regional, interregional and cross-border development strategies based

on connections between protected areas and the integration of nature conservation and economic issues.

## Envisaged results

- Assessment of the current state of the protected area (habitat, protected plants and wildlife animals).
- Drawing up a management plan for the protected area.
- Capacity building: organization of trainings to provide skills for a participatory and integrated approach to the planning process and the implementation of joint strategies.
- Establishment of cross-sector networks, preparation of regional, interregional or cross-border development strategies and networks for protected areas according to various needs of the pilot area.

## Local partners

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# NATREG - Managing Natural Assets and Protected Areas as Sustainable Regional Development Opportunities

## Project aims

Project's main objective is to establish a trans-national and multi-sectoral cooperation network and to develop the Joint Strategy for Integrated Management of Protected Areas. Within the project, numerous trainings and knowledge transfers will be carried out. Furthermore, using the participatory approach all relevant stakeholders of regional development, spatial planning, nature protection, civil society and other sectors will be involved in working together on Integrated Management Plans for protected areas and on Strategies for Development of Ecological Corridors. After the conclusion of the Project, which is due at the end of July 2011, several follow-up projects are expected to be initiated.

## Project partners

- Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation, *Lead partner*
- Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning
- Office of the Carinthian Government, Dept. 20 – Spatial Planning and Development, Dept. for Nature Conservation
- Office of the State Government of Styria, Dept. 16 – State Planning and Regional Development
- Veneto Region Spatial Planning and Parks Dept.
- Regional Agency for Environmental Protection – ARPA Emilia Romagna
- Klagenfurt University, Department of Economics
- The Regional Environmental Centre, Country Office Ljubljana
- Public Institute for Spatial Planning of Koprivnica – Križevci County
- Public Institute for the Management of Protected Natural Values in the Area of the Koprivnica – Križevci County
- Public Enterprise Vojvodinašume Petrovaradin
- Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia

## NATREG Pilot Areas

The Project is connecting six protected areas in the Adria-Alpe-Pannonia territory.

- Deliblato Sands Special nature reserve, Serbia
- Pohorje, Slovenia
- Delta Po River Parks of Veneto and Emilia Romagna, Italy
- Regional Park Mura-Drava, Croatia
- Styria Region, Austria
- Vellacher Kotschna, Austria

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Project partners at the kick-off meeting in Koprivnica, Croatia



REGIONALNI CENTER ZA OKOLJE  
Slovenija



KÄRNTEN



ZAVOD ZA PROSTORNO UREĐENJE  
KOPRIVNIČKO-KRIŽEVAČKE ŽUPANIJE

AGNATURE

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The SEE Programme aims to develop transnational partnerships on matters of strategic importance, in order to improve the territorial, economic and social integration process and to contribute to cohesion, stability and competitiveness of the region. For this purpose, the programme seeks to realize high quality, result-oriented projects of strategic character, relevant for the programme area.

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