



Action Plan HBCG – Hajdú-Bihar Country Government

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Author team: Tünde Szabó

RENATUR

Improving regional policies to better protect the natural
heritage of peri-urban open spaces

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Part I – General information

<i>Project:</i>	RENATUR - Improving regional policies to better protect natural heritage of peri-urban open spaces
<i>Partner organisation:</i>	HBCG – Hajdú-Bihar County Government
<i>Country:</i>	Hungary
<i>NUTS2 region:</i>	Észak-Alföld
<i>NUTS3 county:</i>	Hajdú-Bihar
<i>Contact person:</i>	Tünde Szabó
<i>Email address:</i>	szabo.tunde@hbmo.hu
<i>Phone number:</i>	+36 20 413 2673

Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
	<input type="checkbox"/>	European Territorial Cooperation programme
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other regional development policy instrument

policy instrument addressed:

The Regional (County) Development Programme of Hajdú-Bihar County for 2014-2020 as originally targeted Policy Instrument integrated the strategic goals of the county at both sectoral and territorial levels. The objectives of the programme included 8 priorities; within this project we addressed Priority 1: Sustainable environment focusing on Measure 1.2: Conservation of natural and landscape values of the county. Due to the significant loss of biodiversity and the decrease of natural areas the importance of landscapes clearly strengthens. There is a strong need to create an adequate ecological perspective concerning both policy makers and the wider community. The policy instrument encouraged the development of Nature 2000 and other natural areas applying an integrated landscape management approach with specific focus on biodiversity and the sustainability of ecosystems. It is also an essential objective to ensure an attracting and safe livelihood for citizens considering climate adaptation.

The main aim of the policy instrument was clear but an improved structural background was required with an appropriate approach, enhanced capacity and the potential to integrate enhanced governance of ecosystem services to conserve biodiversity. New methodologies were required to efficiently implement the preservation and maintenance tasks even at municipal level.

Due to the end of 2014-2020 programming period, the policy instrument **went through a full revision and amendment for the period 2021-2027**. The final version of the updated policy was completed in the first half of 2021.

HBCG plans to improve this new **Regional Development Programme of Hajdú-Bihar County 2021-2027**

policy instrument through **improved governance** (as type 2 suggested by Interreg Europe).

This issue gained a significant recognition during the recent years, due to the significant loss of biodiversity and the decrease of natural areas regardless of the many “green policies” actions taken. There is a strong need to create an adequate ecological perspective that reconcile the interests of policy makers, wider community and future interests. Such complex policy instruments would be seen as encouraging the further development of the Nature 2000 and other natural areas as an integrated landscape management approach, with an essential

objective of ensuring an attractive and safe livelihood for citizens in regards to the climate change and adaptation.

Through RENATUR project, there is a new opportunity to improve measures defined, taking into consideration the main challenges to face in Hajdú-Bihar County:

- Improved forms of urban sprawl control
- More efficient actions in decision-making on landscape changes
- Wider green infrastructure development and use in planning
- Focus on restoration of the degraded ecosystems, reducing further fragmentation thorough development of an ecologic networks
- More efficient solutions to face the challenges of climate change (mitigation and adaptation)
- Local developments should consider more special conditions, different landscape character types and harmonize the local development with the land use approach.

As one of the main results of the RENATUR cooperation, the issues of conserving and valuing natural capital and applying green infrastructure based solutions as key themes for regional development have been identified and integrated in the Regional Development Programme of Hajdú-Bihar County 2021-2027 (Policy instrument addressed).

Within Priority 1 – Sustainable environment, a separate measure is dedicated to this theme as “Measure 1.7 – Sustainable use of natural capital, green infrastructure developments”.

The importance of green infrastructures is also included in Priority 2 “Climate adaptation and climate protection in the county”.

Implementing the project in Hajdú-Bihar County will have a potential impact on different sectors; the proper design and interpretation of respective potential brought by the ecosystem services to social and economic assets enable to achieve and generate added value in the form of strengthened and enhanced institutional and territorial capacity. There is a strong need for the integrated and harmonized development of respective peri-urban areas with potential through the preservation of natural heritage.

Built on and thanks to the 3-year fruitful cooperation of the RENATUR partnership so far, Hajdú-Bihar County Government succeeded in integrating biodiversity conservation, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions into its policy formulation process and finally including relevant measures.

This action plan intends to create and provide handful solutions to efficiently support the implementation of the above measures, filling the gap between policy and practice in Hajdú-Bihar County.

Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

General background

The content of the Action Plan was developed based on the preparation of technical material, starting with an assessment of the land cover, land use and land use change, and ecosystem services in peri-urban areas through a study of selected municipalities.

By looking at land use change in the county at a regional scale and comparing the land use categories of the maps, the differences between the areas of each category and the two time periods under study (1980-2018) were identified. The main land uses in the county did not change between the two dates and the centroids did not shift. The main land use at both dates is arable (about half of the county's area), with a smaller area of grassland and pasture and a smaller area of deciduous woodland.

The main issue of land use change and ecosystem services that are the subject of this study is the change in green cover and built-up area. At the county level, the change in built-up areas is small for the settlements, while the amount of deciduous forests has increased and the area of coniferous forests has decreased. Pastures also perform a welfare function, and their share has increased markedly, with a decrease in ploughland. The biological role of ploughland is not usually positive, but it should also be borne in mind that it can also function partly as a habitat and partly as a refuge for species of conservation value in the field margins of arable land (of course, this role is quite subordinate, depending mainly on the size of the fields and the intensity of cultivation). At the same time, they can also be green spaces outside cultivated areas, which can be used for hiking or cycling trips away from tarmac roads, avoiding traffic.

The work has summarised the priority sites of importance for ecosystem services in the peri-urban areas; several local features were identified that could be important for nature conservation at county level, but also for society. These include:

- tree-lined areas and parks: these are the main habitats for wildlife in urban areas; the desirability from a conservation point of view is that they should not be composed of alien species, but habitat requirements must also be taken into account (drought tolerance, tolerance of polluted air); they are also impractical; tree-lined areas make the urban environment pleasant, parks are places for human recreation;
- gardens: both front gardens and kitchen gardens are important elements of the green network because some species find their habitat (birds even nesting sites) either through planted flowers or in the hedges of the fence; fruit trees, ornamental trees, hedges, arbours provide shelter, breeding and feeding sites;
- cemeteries: of particular importance in urban environments because of the abundance of green space and flowering plants, and because they are quiet and ideal breeding sites for birds due to the low level of disturbance;
- enclosed gardens: similar in value to urban gardens, they can have a positive impact particularly in areas where the surrounding land is intensively farmed;
- hummocks: even in intensively cultivated agricultural areas, they provide shelter for valuable and protected species, preserving naturalness as a real island in small areas;
- field margins or set-aside areas due to poor soil conditions: areas between or within cultivated fields which, with less disturbance, function as natural habitat(s), like intensively cultivated fields; in areas where there is no other refugium for plants and animals, they provide shelter;
- water bodies, areas under water influence:

- ponds: whether natural (e.g. cut-off lakes, wind holes) or man-made (e.g. brickyard pits), but even if intermittent (e.g. inland water patches, salt ponds), they are the most important elements of the landscape; usually coastal reedbeds and sedge beds, together with open water, support a rich flora;
- streams and veins: in the settlements studied, they often even dry up in the dry season, but even if their presence is limited in time, many species have adapted to this;
- canals: their purpose is twofold, (i) inland drainage and (ii) irrigation; (i) while inland drainage is important for agriculture, it is more important for wildlife to keep these waters in place, to keep inland wetlands out of cultivation - fortunately, the aim of precision water management is precisely to identify these and to produce impact studies that show whether the continued expense is worth the investment for every square metre of agricultural use; (ii) Irrigation is important for agriculture and often these canals provide water in the landscape; overall, the importance of irrigation canals in particular for ecosystem services can be of conservation importance;
- abandoned riverbeds: they may be wetlands in spring but their water supply is generally always better than that of the surrounding areas, their linear nature means that at least the more prominent grassland and woodland would require attention, and their drainage would also mean loss of ecological function.

The aim of the further expert material supporting the action plan was to assess the landscape character of the peri-urban areas of a few selected municipalities, to provide a professional basis for the management and development proposals of the value-preserving landscape protection, i.e. in the case of a few selected towns of Hajdú-Bihar County, the landscape character of the peri-urban areas was assessed, the status of the character-giving environment was qualified, and the possibilities of its preservation and development were evaluated.

The character of the peri-urban outskirts of the selected towns of Hajdú-Bihar County examined has changed a lot in the last three decades, on average, because in fact only two towns have experienced a very large-scale land use reorganisation. The 5-8% of the land area affected by the change is below the national level of 10-11%, although these two figures are not perfectly comparable, because the national figure is not only an indication of the extent of change in the peri-urban areas but also of the change in the whole of the country.

Land use changes have mostly affected small-plot arable land and enclosures are mostly of the type in decline.

A typical trend is for new development to occupy grassland, but the conversion of some small parcels of arable land to grassland offsets this in many places, and ultimately there is no significant reduction in the proportion of grassland. In the case of other settlements, the proportion of large plots of arable land is particularly stable in the good-quality blacklands of the Hajdúság region, thus defining the landscape structure and visual character of the outskirts of the towns in these areas.

The other most common type of landscape character is the mosaic of wet meadow grassland.

The general conclusion is that the key element of landscape attachment in this area is the grassland landscape, a mosaic type with wet meadows.

The natural way to exploit grassland would be to increase livestock production, but there are few encouraging examples of this in the vicinity of the towns surveyed. Another important depositary of self-identity is the world of enclosures, which is more of an endangered land use type that shapes a disappearing landscape character.

In summary, a series of maps have been produced highlighting those parts of the peri-urban areas where valuable landscape character types are found, the conservation, enhancement and sometimes rehabilitation of which would be an important consideration in planning for the outskirts.

Reflecting on the needs to support the policy instrument and based on the findings of the expert materials and the discussions of the regional expert group, the focus themes have been identified, where it is necessary to formulate solutions to support the developments in several aspects and to give them a new, more sustainable character.

Overall introduction of action

The action has been defined to give appropriate tools for the county to support the transition of developments towards a more nature-based approach considering and integrating green and blue infrastructures and putting more emphasis on the valorisation of ecosystem services. Action is expected to influence the attitude of local decision makers and behaviour of local communities through the common understanding of their role in nature protection and community well-being.

The development of the action plan is built on the utilization of good practices identified in the RENATUR project, the good practices and policy briefs studied within the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, the results of the virtual peer review organized by Hajdú-Bihar County Government and the peer review report compiled by the Polish partner ARMSA as well as the lessons learnt through the participation in the PROSPERA project as external stakeholder strengthening the cross-fertilization of projects.

The action has been developed in strong co-operation with the members of the regional stakeholder group.

The implementation of action is expected to result in a more responsible behaviour of local communities and leaderships strengthened by supportive policies in Hajdú-Bihar County and an increasing number of municipalities adopting nature-based solutions to preserve the natural heritage of their peri-urban open spaces.

ACTION 1 – Formulation of a Policy Guide integrating new Brownfield Cadastre and E-Toolbox

Action 1 is dedicated to create and establish a totally new Policy Guide that will be directly integrated in the Policy Instrument. This freshly developed new guidance will affect the Policy Instrument providing practical information, professional framework and applicable tools and solutions for the preparation and implementation of the measures of the relevant PI priorities in order to achieve its objectives.

The Policy Guide will include completely new indicators as well to significantly enhance the currently existing indicators in order to support the formulation of better decisions not only in short but in a long term.

The Policy Guide is planned to be officially approved by the General Assembly of Hajdú-Bihar County until 30 April 2023 as an integrated part of the PI so it can provide guidance and tool at

the same time for each actors working together in the implementation of the measures of the PI in 2021-2027. This process will result in a clearly improved governance of the PI strongly contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of PUOS in Hajdú-Bihar County.

The Policy Guide includes two main sections:

Section 1 – Development of a county level Brownfield Cadastre

Section 2 – Development of an E-Toolbox

Section 1 – Development of a county level Brownfield Cadastre

Section 1 is planned to create and establish a cadastre of brownfield sites in the county. Attracting more and more investments and formulating new developments, the county government made it clear in its updated Regional Development Strategy of Hajdú-Bihar County that these activities should favour brownfield sites instead of making greenfield investments. In order to strongly support this goal, it is especially important to provide a freely accessible database of such areas with proper and updated information as well as contact data. This new information pool on brownfields can also contribute to the formulation of redevelopment scenarios of brownfield sites to reconsider its potential impact of the well-being of citizens and help the regional and local decision makers to make a green infrastructure based solution.

Relevance to the project

Section 1 was strongly inspired by the interregional charette workshops and peer review events organized in RENATUR project. Discussing the needs of the partnership, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Digital Affairs of Saxony-Anhalt presented their regional demand concerning brownfield sites. Following the event, this information was shared within the regional stakeholder team of Hajdú-Bihar County Government and the topic was found to be also an interesting key topic to be addressed even in Hajdú-Bihar County to support the objectives included in the policy instrument addressed. In order to find potential practices to rely on, several resources have been studied even outside the RENATUR partnership but within the Interreg Europe community with special regard to existing national practices as well as the Policy Learning Platform.

This section of the action has been generated considering the relevant national practice originating from the Municipality of Budapest but mainly on the basis of 2 former Interreg Europe projects identified in the Good Practice database of the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform. The first input was found within the COCOON project while the other one was identified in the PERFECT project:

- Database ALKAT (Brandenburg, Germany), COCOON Project
- 'Green infrastructure and spatial planning: recent experiences and innovative approaches', PERFECT project event, November 2017



Database ALKAT (Brandenburg, Germany), COCOON Project:

ALKAT is a database management system for brownfields. It can be used for the documentation of landfills. ALKAT is a database management system for brownfields. Old waste disposals are also brownfields in the sense of the German Soil Protection Law, therefore ALKAT is suitable to index closed landfills.

The tool applied for the database management system is „ALKATonline“, **which contains a central database**. Users get access via internet browser. For analysis geographic information systems are applied (ArcGIS, WebOffice).

Since 1991 there is a **continuous registration** of landfills and brownfield. New information about landfills and brownfields are added regularly. While in 1997 the waste management program of Brandenburg registered a number of 5,193 waste disposal sites, the actually number (12/2016) is 7,264. Of these landfills 2,634 are considered as remediated.

The State Office for Environment Brandenburg is responsible for **maintenance and further development** of the database management system as well as for evaluation. The local authorities (district administrations) further record data of old landfills and add them into the database.

ALKAT contains information about

- identification and position
- general information
- topographic data and land use
- legal relationship and causer
- site description, especially geological conditions
- disposed waste (kind of waste, amount)

- existing expertise, detected pollutions

The information about the landfill can be **illustrated on maps**. For queries on information of the landfill and other topics ARCGIS is applied.

The GP with its clear structure and applicable content serves as a basis to be followed when formulating the database in Hajdú-Bihar County.

‘Green infrastructure and spatial planning: recent experiences and innovative approaches’, PERFECT project event, November 2017

The event ‘Green infrastructure (GI) and spatial planning: recent experiences and innovative approaches’ took place on 13 November 2017. The experts of the event underlined the importance of investigating:

The relationship between spatial configuration of the green space (area, length and width) and ecosystem service supply;

The relationship between GI and benefitting areas, through morphology and scale.

This approach can **help urban planners to maximise the benefits of GI**. For example, a study carried out for the Municipality of Trento compared **different redevelopment scenarios of brownfield sites** in order to estimate the benefits to citizens and **help the decision makers to make a GI-oriented choice**.

This content is evaluated as a future potential for the brownfield cadastre to be used for.

Section 2 – Development of an E-Toolbox

As it was defined in the baseline document prepared for the peer review in Debrecen (April 2021), in the last one and a half or two decades, the process of regional renewal in Hajdú-Bihar County has been accompanied by the renewal of previously existing settlement areas, the recycling of underutilized or unused areas, and the relatively diffuse, easily accessible greenfield developments for economic development. Although the phenomenon of urban expansion was marked in almost all settlements in the county, the analysis of land use data shows that it remained within a relatively solid framework.

However, there are existing initiatives and funding opportunities to define, select and implement green infrastructure related projects and investments, it is hard to find applicable solutions for smaller municipalities to fulfil the multiple needs of municipality, economic/business actors and local communities at the same time. That’s why it was decided to find solutions on how to develop a municipal green infrastructure concept and how to use such green infrastructure (GI) approach to protect the natural assets and heritage of peri-urban open spaces.

Building on the outcomes of the peer review virtually organized in April 2021 and considering available policy solutions and good practices, the county defined a section for Action 1 to provide a guiding toolbox. This process was strongly contributed by the external expertise of invited professionals as well as the remarks of the members of the regional stakeholder group.

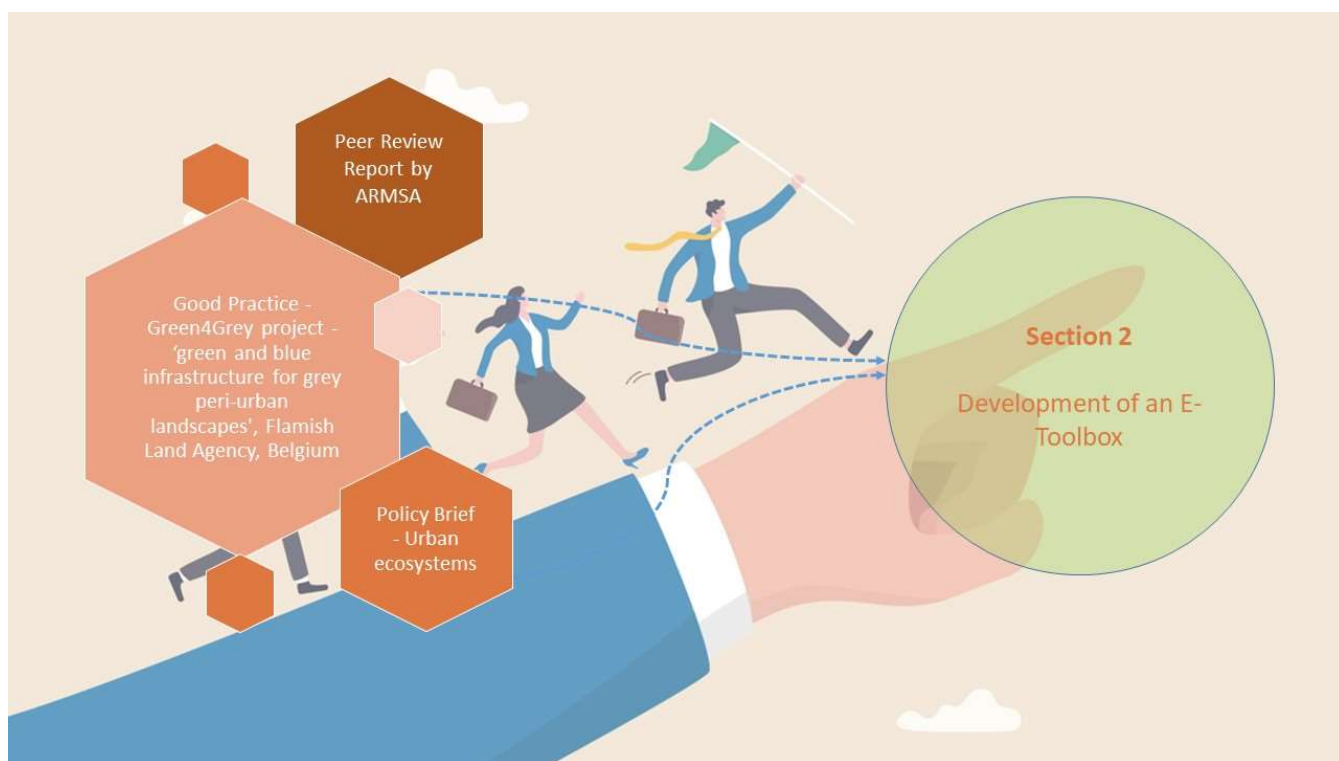
This Section 2 can not only strengthen the understanding of GI approach at municipality planning level but also improves the knowledge base to utilize when talking about spatial and regional/local planning and developments. The E-Toolbox includes a pool of practices, solutions, summaries of pilot projects as well as the network contacts and introduction of local actors, technicians, planners and wider stakeholders to formulate and establish a regional green

infrastructure (GI) oriented community. This network can act as a key supporting element when planning and re-planning the future of peri-urban spaces in Hajdú-Bihar County.

Relevance to the project

The Section 2 of Action 1 has been generated on the basis of the inspiration found in the policy briefs called “Urban Ecosystems” published on the Policy Learning Platform of Interreg Europe, a good practice introduced by the Belgian RENATUR partner Flemish Land Agency and the outcomes and recommendations included in the peer review report prepared by the partnership for Hajdú-Bihar County:

- Good Practice of Green4Grey project - ‘green and blue infrastructure for grey peri-urban landscapes’, Flemish Land Agency, Belgium
- Peer Review Assessment Report prepared by ARMSA
- Policy Brief - Urban ecosystems



Good Practice of Green4Grey project - ‘green and blue infrastructure for grey peri-urban landscapes’, Flemish Land Agency, Belgium

Flanders can be seen as a perfect laboratory for the development of an *innovative approach* to implementing the EU ‘Green Infrastructure Strategy’ in peri-urban regions. Within the Green4Grey LIFE project they developed and showcased the Flemish approach to improve and develop green and blue infrastructure in peri-urban areas. But certainly, there are other European peri-urban regions with their own policy instruments and practical experience to promote and develop peri-urban open spaces. In their “*Inspiration guide to peri-urban green infrastructure*” they present experiences and approaches from 8 different EU peri-urban regions regarding peri-urban green and blue infrastructure.

The practice also included **thematic workshop series** that are considered as solutions to be applied in this action.

Peer Review Assessment Report prepared by ARMSA

The assessment report summarized the results of the peer review process considering both the practices and solutions introduced and the recommendations by partners and their stakeholders. For this action Hajdú-Bihar County identified two important recommendations to be used:

- **Understand the challenges the decision-makers have to face** - Most of the time, the policy-makers are more interested in serving the interests of private sector and current economic issues than in implementing Nature Based Solutions goals in their political agenda. To efficiently lead the dialogue and implement NBS you have to find the balance between progress and nature. This can be done only through a systematic and strategized long term process. Practice shows that stakeholders like to engage in dialogue about change and the future, but do not necessarily want to take decisive actions. The actual change may require a joint, long-term cooperation and dialogue.

Engage your stakeholders - Know your audience, but try to simplify the messages you send to your stakeholders. The most proven form are the series of workshops, their methodology can be adapted depending on the needs (the knowledge base on this subject is tremendous). Create a database of your stakeholders and decide at which stage you want to include them in the dialogue. The process should be constant, yet it will be very difficult to keep most of the participants in the process, which often takes years. Leave the technical details and complicated processes to small workshops with experts and your team, for the rest of stakeholders try to simplify the message. All people are more likely to cooperate if you talk in a simple and general way. If you gain their trust and interest, they will ask for details and advice themselves.

Policy Brief - Urban ecosystems - The importance of green infrastructure and nature-based solutions for the development of sustainable cities

nature of the action

- A1.1 Formulating the structure and content of the Policy Guide
- A1.2 Organisation of a brainstorming workshop involving all parties concerned to complete the draft version of the Policy Guide
- A1.3 Collection of data and information on brownfield sites in Hajdú-Bihar County, setting up the Brownfield Cadastre
- A1.4 Development of the content of the E-Toolbox
- A1.5 Compilation of the Policy Guide integrating both sections
- A1.6 Approval of the Policy Guide by the General Assembly

The document highlights that the combination of architecture, art, culture, heritage, environmental gains and social improvements is a key factor for a new urban landscape.

Sustainable planning in peri-urban areas requires strong stakeholder engagement in order to move from the ‘not in my backyard’ attitude to a more productive cooperation. An integrated approach is needed to achieve development objectives with focus on environmental protection, the provision of ecosystem services, the creation of green infrastructure alongside local economic development, and the maintenance of quality of life.

Stakeholders involved

- regional and local government actors
 - Municipalities in Hajdú-Bihar County
 - General Assembly of Hajdú-Bihar County Government
- chambers representing and supporting SMES, entrepreneurs and companies
 - Hajdú-Bihar County Directorate of the Hungarian Chamber of Agriculture
 - Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Hajdú-Bihar County
- entrepreneurs and enterprises of agri-food sector – main users of peri-urban sites
 - SMEs in agri-food sector
 - farmers’ associations
 - knowledge base to improve the nature-based solutions
 - NGOs (active in nature conservation, sustainable development)
- representatives of existing initiations, good practice owners
 - University of Debrecen
 - urban planners/spatial planning experts
- nature conservation experts and bodies providing experience
 - Hortobágy National Park
 - Nature conservation authorities

Timeframe

- May 2022 – April 2023

Costs

- Staff working on the Policy Guide development: 7.800 EUR
- Organisation cost of workshop: 650 EUR EUR
- External expertise to visualize the cadastre if applicable: 2.300 EUR

Funding sources

- Regional public funding through own institutional funding
- Potential new region-related and theme-related calls of national Operational Programmes using governmental sources

Monitoring and expected impacts of the action

Implementing the activities of Action 1 can strongly support the transition towards a more sustainable and nature-friendly development of peri-urban areas in Hajdú-Bihar County. Addressing municipality leaders first, it is expected to enhance their awareness on the location and value of brownfield sites as well as the development potentials.

Action 1 also strongly supports to find answers on several challenges of Hajdú-Bihar County:

- efficient answers on landscape changes
- green infrastructure planning and development

- restoring degraded ecosystems, development of ecologic network, reducing fragmentations
- efficient solutions combatting the challenges of climate change (mitigation and adaptation)
- considering special conditions, different landscape character types
- harmonizing development, land use approach and tools to achieve more integrated spatial planning system.

Hajdú-Bihar County Government (HBCG) will monitor the implementation of the action to see the progress.

The following indicators are planned to be applied to measure the success of each activity within the action:

Activity	Indicator	Expected value
A1.1	Number of draft structure of Policy Guide	1
A1.2	Number of participants taking part in the workshop	15
A1.3	Number of Brownfield Cadastre developed	1
A1.4	Number of E-Toolbox developed	1
A1.5	Number of Policy Guide compiled	1
A1.6	Number of officially approved Policy Guide	1

ABOUT THE PROJECT

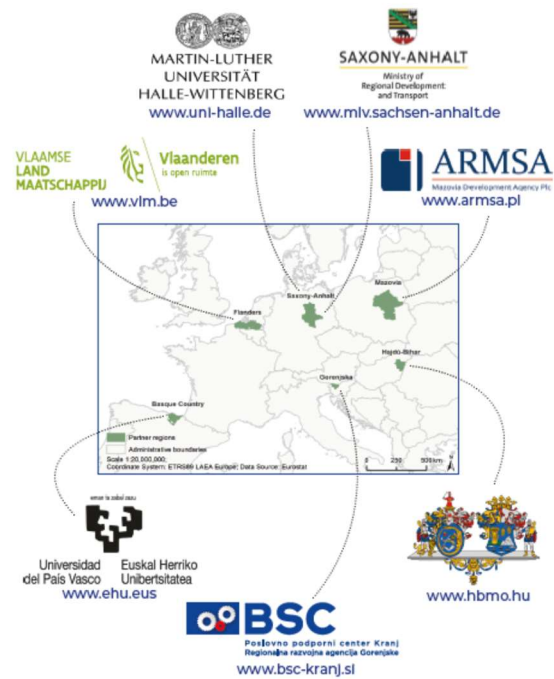
Peri-urban landscapes are located at peripheral locations of cities, often beyond their administrative boundaries. Build-up areas, such as new housing estates, leisure and industrial areas, communal infrastructure as well as valuable peri-urban open spaces, such as green spaces, brownfields or agricultural fields, can also be found here.

Due to increasing urbanisation and investments beyond the city boundaries, these peri-urban open spaces are decreasing. With the decrease, the natural heritage of these open spaces and thus biodiversity, climate and air quality regulation as well as recreation services are lost.

The aim of RENATUR project is to draw attention to the importance of peri-urban open spaces and their natural heritage in order to preserve it. For this purpose, model regions were selected, which have a great interest in the promotion and protection of the natural heritage of the peri-urban open spaces in planning practice.

PARTNERS

- ❖ Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (Germany)
- ❖ Ministry of Infrastructure and Digital Affairs (Germany)
- ❖ Flemish Land Agency (Belgium)
- ❖ BSC, Business support centre, Ltd., Kranj (Slovenia)
- ❖ Hajdú-Bihar County Government (Hungary)
- ❖ University of the Basque Country (Spain)
- ❖ Mazovia Development Agency Plc (Poland)



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For further information about the RENATUR project please visit:

<http://www.interregeurope.eu/renatur>

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