



## Action Plan Basque Country

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Author team: Ibone Ametzaga, Leire Agirreazkuenaga, A. Rocio Motran  
Ferrandiz

### RENATUR

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

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01/08/2019- 31/07/2023



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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>	Basque Country (Spain)
<i>NUTS2 region:</i>	SE22 Basque Country
<i>Contact person:</i>	Ibone Ametzaga
<i>Email address:</i>	<a href="mailto:ibone.ametzaga@ehu.eus">ibone.ametzaga@ehu.eus</a>
<i>Phone number:</i>	+34 94 601 2571

## 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:

This Action will address the policy instrument European Regional Development Fund Operational Program for the Basque Country 2021-2027 (ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027), instead of the European Regional Development Fund Operational Program for the Basque Country 2014-2020 (ERDF-OP-BC-2014-2020), as initially planned.

The ERDF-OP-BC-2014-2020 aimed to boost sustainable economic growth in the region by creating quality jobs - especially in activities with high added value sectors, and improving the competitiveness of the regional economy through 'smart' and innovative growth initiatives. The Program focused on six main priorities, being the main priority related to the environment: *Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency*, (having just 4,47% of the budget) by preserving biodiversity and supporting industrial transition towards a resource efficient economy. This priority was developed under the Specific Objective (SO) 6.4.1 *Promote the management, protection and maintenance of natural areas and their diversity, in particular protected areas, including measures to alleviate the problems of erosion, salinization, desertification, deforestation, etc.* However, the vision was mainly for protected areas and there was a need for the idea to be applied in all the territory, and to be specially directed to the forestry land as most of the territory is potentially for forestry (68% of it). Thus, the policy instrument needed to go under a structural improvement for the period 2021-2027.

The loss of biodiversity and the climate change urged for a holistic management of the landscape to improve its sustainability and resilience, thus, being able to adapt to the new environmental changes and benefit the well-being of the citizens.

In the actual draft of the ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027, the aim is to concentrate all ERDF funds on the Political Objectives (PO) 1 and 2, so it is proposed to allocate 100% of the funds to these two POs, bearing in mind the minimum of 30% to PO2. The SO 6.4.1 has been rewritten on the SO 2.7 "The promotion of the protection and conservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure (based on Ecosystems Services), including in urban areas, and reducing all sources of pollution. Following the lessons learned from the RENATUR project (Peer review, Good practices and bilateral conversations with partners)."

The RENATUR project was an opportunity to identify best practices to be proposed for the improvement of new Policy Instrument, in order to have a better management of the Basque Country landscape, specially the forestry sector. During the interregional workshops, in particular the main environmental problems caused by the forestry sector were addressed. Thanks to the

exchange of knowledge implemented during the peer-review process more information about specific practices were discussed with experts from the European partner regions. Thus, this Action Plan shows the results so far achieved in the structural change already addressed in the draft of the ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027 through the Phase I and the expected achievement during Phase II.

### Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

Starting from the identification of the regional challenges described in the state of the art, important aspects related to the forestry management in the Basque Country have been highlighted and addressed. Besides the regular meetings with the group of regional stakeholders, thanks to the selection of good practices and the implementation of the interregional thematic workshop, whose main results were included in the peer review report, relevant information have been collected about practices for a more sustainable management of the forestry sector. In particular, during the meetings with the group of regional stakeholders, the discussion has been primarily focused on the main concerns about the landscape development as presented by the different agents that took part in the meetings. Main points of the discussion were related to forestry management, especially in Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa.

In the Basque Country all the territory excluding cities are considered Peri Urban Open Spaces (PUOS), and 68% of the territory is forest mountain land (71% in Bizkaia, 72% in Gipuzkoa and 62% in Araba). The potential forest is deciduous mixed oak forest but, at the end of XIX<sup>th</sup> century most of the forested land was deforested in Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa due to historical events. Moreover, most of the land in these territories was also privatized and an exotic species (*Pinus radiata* D. don) was planted in most of the forest land and land owners earned a lot of money (it was called the green gold). However, the management of this species creates many environmental problems such as soil erosion, biodiversity loss, reduction on water control, soil fertility, and carbon sequestration leading to a continuous land degradation. Moreover, with the low price of the coniferous timber, nowadays, the conifer is being replaced by eucalyptus tree species, that has a more intensive management and increases the environmental problems. Thus, a change in the landscape management is needed in order to improve the Biodiversity and the Ecosystem Services of the area through a good design of Green Infrastructure, favoring a better management of the environment.

Several ideas and considerations were shared during the meetings about how to make the forestry management more sustainable by maintaining and promoting biodiversity while preserving also soil fertility and ecosystem services. Thus, the need for a native vegetation based forestry was thought as the solution. Moreover, the two case studies used during the interregional meeting in July 2021 were selected during these regional meetings. The stakeholders were willing to learn from other situations in Europe, and the information learned from the Interregional meeting in Bilbao was passed to them in the Regional meeting in October 2021.

We found very valuable learnings from the peer review process in the Interregional meeting in which we obtained valuable comments and recommendations from our partner from Germany. Below are described some ideas that have served as inspiration to face our meetings and recommendations to the public sector, collected in our action plan:

- Holistic approaches to biodiversity (species, landscape, etc.) and the need for the native ecosystems to be promoted. Sectorial approaches, on the other hand, only address one aspect and are only vaguely suitable for looking at complex ecosystems.
- Evidence-based strategies should also consider inter-community differences in both challenges and individual problem situations.

- With lower profitability of timber production, a change in forest management must be made possible. Furthermore, there must be a social consensus that values (financially) the ecosystem services of the forest (possibly compensation payments). However, there should be a multifunctionality approach.
- In education, especially the ecosystem services of native mixed forests as well as the consequences of monocultures and the cultivation of exotic species should be shown and taught. - A stronger link between civil science and scientific approaches can support the participation processes.
- Investors and project developers need to be more involved in these processes to create a win-win situation for all.

Moreover, we learnt from different Good Practices (Green Belt Saxony-Anhalt-Germany, Land purchase policy by the Kampinos National Park-Poland and bilateral meeting with Slovenian Partner) about the importance of green-belts on supra-regional scale protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, and the importance of cooperation among public actors, foundations or NGOs and institutions to anchor it. However, a good legislation and the public ownership of this land (public purchase of the land) facilitates its good management, but private land could also be considered if multifunctionality is provided. In this last case, payment of ecosystem services could also be considered.

### General background

The Action described in the Action Plan derived from a continuous process of collaboration among the institutions and stakeholders involved in the writing of the new Regional Operation Program for the Basque Country. The draft of the ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027 has been recently released (11-04-2022) and in public consultation until 17<sup>th</sup> June 2022. The process has been complex, not helped by the Covid, but the document addresses the main ideas developed during the RENATUR project and it is expected to fulfill the inspiration of the Interreg Project. However, there is a gap for improvement and for monitoring the real progress of the ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027 that we intend to achieve by the end of Phase II.

**ACTION:** Inclusion of new measures in the Specific Objective 2.7 of the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) towards the support of native forests and multifunctional management of native forests for conserving, protecting and promoting ecosystem services and restoring land.

### Objective

The Action included in the Action Plan is in line with the main objective of the RENATUR Project, that is to improve the political instruments for the protection of natural heritage in Peri-Urban Open Spaces (PUOS) to protect Biodiversity, the ecosystems and the services they provide, reducing fragmentation in the Basque Country.

### Activities

**Activity 0:** Lobbying for the inclusion of new concepts and strategic view in the Policy Instrument (PI).

This activity is continuous throughout the Project, transferring the knowledge and new approaches compiled within the framework of RENATUR to all the players involved in the design of the new ROP, specially:

- Basque Government
- Provincial Council of Bizkaia
- Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa
- Provincial Council of Araba

The contributions of our partners in RENATUR regarding the two case studies presented for our region were especially relevant, since the knowledge gathered and the recommendations of the peers motivated the meetings and increased our emphasis on the need to promote a change in the PI approach to PUOS, as mentioned above.

RENATUR contribution to the current draft of the PI has already been confirmed by the Department of Economic Development, Sustainability and Environment” of the Basque Government.

Thus, from now on we will continue meeting different institutions that will be deciding the changes to the draft of the ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027 and transmitting our knowledge and contribution to continue influencing the new Policy Instrument until its final approval.

Here below the list of meetings with the institutions involved in the writing of the new ERDF, during the period of RENATUR:

- Direction of Natural Heritage and Climate Change (Department of Economic Development, Sustainability and Environment” of the Basque Government) and Department of Sustainability (Provincial Council of Bizkaia):  
28 February 2019, 8 July 2019, 18 November 2019, 24 February 2020, 2 March 2020, 18 December 2020, 3 November 2021, 10 February 2022
- Provincial Council of Bizkaia: 24 February, 2 March 2020, 24 November 2021
- Participation in the 4 regional meetings of the HORIZON 2020 SINCERE Project (Spurring Innovations for forest Ecosystem Services in Europe, 2018-2022). One of the partners is Department of Forestry (Provincial County of Bizkaia):  
6 March 2020, 17 March 2021
- Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, through the participation in the Think-Tank workshops of the Program Green Recovery Gipuzkoa: 27 January 2022, 17 March 2022, 28 April
- Goikolau Forest Association: 17 November 2021
- Amurrio Town Hall: 17 December 2021
- Bermeo Town Hall: 15 September 2021, 29 September 2021, 12 October 2021
- Berriatua town Hall: 19 October 2021, 16 November 2021
- Forestry Department of the Provincial Council of Bizkaia: 17 November 2021
- Director of Conservation of the Urdaibai UNESCO Biosphere Reserve: 1 April 2022

**Activity 1.** This is the activity that analyses the results of all the work carried out throughout the project: the learning from our partners together with the experience gained by permanent contact with local authorities in meetings included in Activity 0. It is the most ambitious activity and one that seeks visible changes in the new ROP (ERDF-BC-2021-2027 draft document released

on 11 April 2022, and on public consultation from 17 April till 17 June 2022). The steps taken so far and future ones are described below.

- Study and analysis of ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027
- Learn about the writing process of the new instrument: timeframe, stakeholders involved and relevant documents
- Work together with the Department of the Natural Heritage and Climate Change (which is in charge of developing the part of the program related to nature and environment) to better know the state of progress and structure of the new program
- Preparation of recommendations to the draft program, based on our experience and the lessons learned from our partners from the RENATUR project. The results from the interregional workshop as described in the peer-review report, together with the identified good practices related to Green Belt and Green Infrastructure were very useful in the preparation of these recommendations
- Participation in the Consultation on ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027 and associated Strategic Environmental Study, led by Direction of Cohesion Policy and European Funds of the Department of Economy and Finance of the Basque Government

Here below the list of meetings with the institutions involved in the writing of the new ERDF, during the period of RENATUR after the publication of the draft ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027 in April 2022, and underlined the future ones:

- Head of fund management ERDF, Directorate for Cohesion Policy and European Funds Basque Government: 10-11 May 2022
- Head of fund management ERDF, Provincial Council Bizkaia: 12-13 May 2022
- Head of fund management ERDF, Provincial Council Araba: 12-13 May 2022
- Head of fund management ERDF, Provincial Council Gipuzkoa: 12-13 May 2022
- Participation in the Design Environment Action Programme to 2030 for the Basque Country: 15 June 2022
- A new participation is planned before the end of the public process period (June 17<sup>th</sup> 2022)
- RENATUR regional stakeholders: 23 June 2022
- Basque Government and Provincial Council of Bizkaia: November 2023
- Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, through the participation in the Think-Tank workshops of the Program Green Recovery Gipuzkoa: 9 June 2022 and February 2023

**Activity 2** Monitoring of implementation of the approved the ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027 and foresight new opportunities to influence.

The implementation of the Activities 0 and 1 of the Action described above will favor an improvement of the landscape management through the maintenance and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the PUOS. However, there is a need to monitor that the programs related to the Specific Objective are carried out and a change in the landscape is

achieved during Phase 2. Thus, there will be a follow up of the financing of the Operation Program:

- Track future steps of the document: Publication of new drafts and new open periods to participate or Final approval by European Commission
- Study and analyze of financing lines within the new ROP
- Keep introducing RENATUR view in every meeting held with relevant regional players and offer to participate as expert in actions such as renaturalization of forest land and in Bilbao green belt.

Future meetings:

- Basque Government and Provincial Council of Bizkaia: January 2023
- Meeting with the team writing the Basque Green Infrastructure strategy: March 23
- Basque Government and Provincial Council of Bizkaia: June 2023

### Stakeholders involved

Regional and local government actors: provide the programs for the ERDF to be implemented.

- Basque Government
- Provincial Councils of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Araba
- Representatives from Municipalities

Local stakeholders: land owners and managers

- Representatives of the forest sector (Asociación de Forestalistas de Bizkaia - Bizkaiko Basogintza Elkarte),
- Cooperatives of Forest management
- BASOINSA (Environmental Engineers)
- Izadi 21 S.L.
- PROSPEKTIKER
- The agricultural sector (EKOLU: The Association of Bizkaia on Ecological framing),

Local NGOs: help to promote the aims that want to be implemented in the landscape

- Different NGOs: UNESCO Etxea, Biharko basoa (Forest or tomorrow), Pindo Azul, Lurgaia Fundazioa, Ekologistak martxan

Research institutions: provide the scientific knowledge on which to be based the new landscap approach.

- University representatives of different departments (Plant Biology and Ecology, Geography, Economy among others)
- Research Centres (NEIKER Basque Institute for the Rural Development, etc)
- Basque Centre for Climate Change (BC3)
- Industrial representatives (ACLIMA, Lantegi Batuak)
- Representatives of the tourism sector (Urdaibai Turismo aktiboa eta abentura and hotel representatives)



## Timeframe

<b>Activity 0</b>	From September 2019 to June 2022
<b>Activity 1</b>	From April 2022 until the ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027 is finally approved (expected September, the latest December 2022)
<b>Activity 2</b>	From ERDF-OP-BC-2021-2027 final approval to April 2023

## Costs

Total costs: Staff working on the revision: 5000 euros

Travel cost to expected meetings:

1. We expect to have at least five more meetings with the Basque Government and the Provincial Council of Bizkaia in Bilbao: total costs of three meetings: **545 euros**  
**Travel costs:** 30 kms x 0.3 cent/km= 9 euros, x 5 meetings = 45 euros  
**Working time:** 2 hours/ meeting x 50 euros/hour= 100 euros, x 5 meetings = 500 euros
2. We expect at least two one meeting with the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa in Donostia-San Sebastian total costs: **320 euros**  
**Travel costs:** 120 kms x 0.3 cent/km= 36 euros, plus the Motorway 24 euros, x 2 meetings= 120 euros  
**Working time:** 2 hours/ meeting x 50 euros/hour= 100 euros, x 2 meetings 200 euros

## Funding sources

The funding will come from the Project we have with the Basque Government and the Provincial Council of Bizkaia in relation to Ecosystem Services and human well-being.

## Indicators to evaluate the action plan's impact

	Quantitative Indicators	Expected value
<b>Action 1</b>	• Increment native forest surface from 2019-2023	• 0.5 % increment from 2019
	• Increment of native forest owned by public institutions 2019-2023	• 0.5 % increment from 2019

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Stamp of the organisation (if available):** \_\_\_\_\_

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