

An aerial photograph showing a cityscape in the background, a large river in the middle ground, and lush green wetlands in the foreground. The river flows from the left towards the right, with several smaller channels branching off. The green spaces are interspersed with trees and open fields.

Greening the European Cohesion Policy

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Why greening the Cohesion Policy?

Cohesion Policy will represent over one third of the Budget of the European Union between 2014-2020. The main goal of Cohesion Policy under this new budget is to contribute to the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, which is to develop smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Investing in nature and ecosystems, our natural capital base, is indispensable to achieving these objectives.

Intelligently investing cohesion funds can help restore the environment, create employment and rejuvenate the local economy at the same time. EU Cohesion Policy (2007-2013) already provides a range of supportive measures to invest in green infrastructure. The examples outlined in this publication have been supported by the Cohesion Policy. Building on this experience, the future Cohesion Policy (2014-2020) should significantly increase the opportunity for regions to strategically spend on ecosystems, green infrastructure and Natura 2000.

Investments in Green infrastructure

Green infrastructure offers nature-based solutions to economic, environmental and societal challenges, by providing valuable and measurable services through the sustainable functioning of ecosystems, while also making a significant contribution to the restoration and preservation of biological diversity.

Ecosystem-based solutions are often cheaper than man-made fixes, for example because their maintenance costs are lower. Also, developing green infrastructure can provide a wide range of additional benefits that grey infrastructure does not, such as biodiversity protection, recreation and tourism. This way it can effectively contribute to the implementation of EU environmental legislation, especially the Water Framework Directive and Natura 2000.

As green infrastructure projects require significant construction works to get them off the ground, they provide jobs and income for local and regional enterprises just as much as the grey infrastructure does.

Expanding green infrastructure in Europe

EU regional policy has shown that it can achieve a lot for people and ecosystems with the limited funding available for green infrastructure projects. However, the uptake of these projects needs to be reinforced. Increased uptake of available funds relies on the development of a sound policy for the coming budgeting period 2014-2020, but also on the correct choices being made at national level.

There are many examples of where organisations have drafted plans, programmes and projects which are waiting for financing from Member States and EU co-financing. These plans are often not considered as a priority and grey infrastructure works receive the majority of funding.

Future Green Infrastructure Projects

One of the plans that could be realised with Cohesion policy support is floodplain restoration along the Lower Danube. In 2000, the governments of Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Moldova pledged to cooperate in order to establish a green corridor along the entire length of the Lower Danube. About 70% of the floodplains there have been lost due to farming and other human activities on the land, causing increased risk of flooding.

WWF estimates that the restoration of 2,236 ha of floodplains along the Lower Danube would cost €50 million, while the flood protection, water purification and tourism benefits would reach an estimated €112 million.

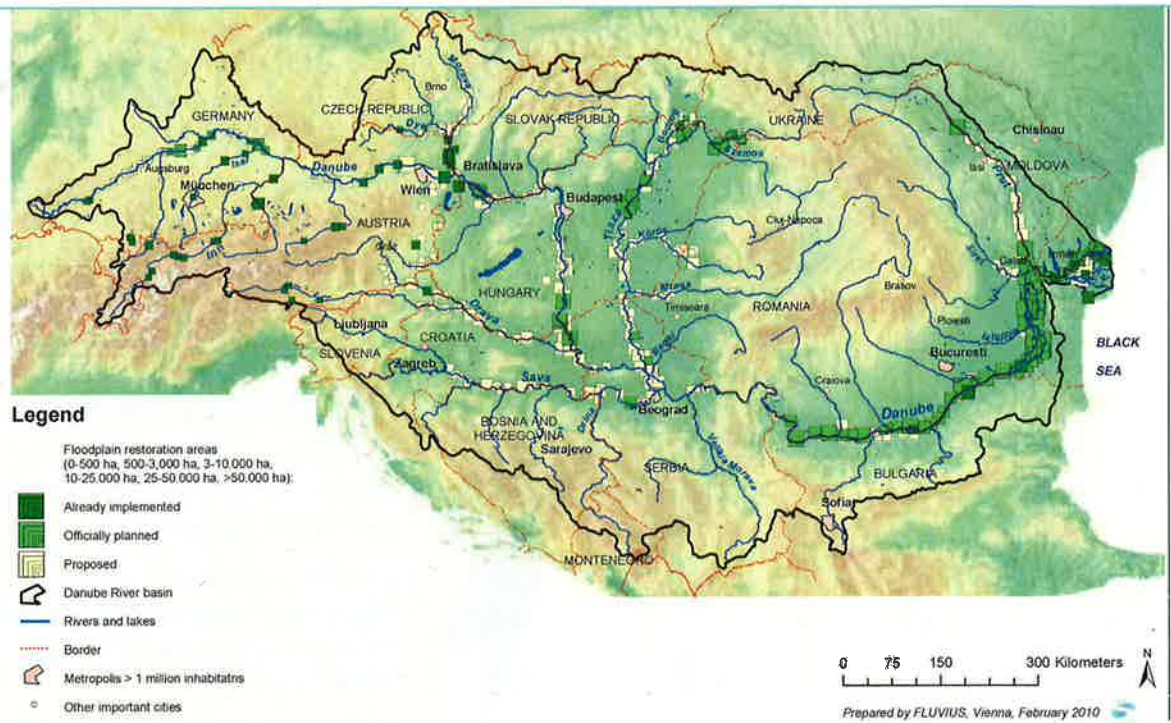
In 2005 a flood killed 34 people, displaced 2000, flooded 690 km² and caused €396 million in damages in Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Moldova. The economic damage from floods in Europe are estimated at 6,4 billion €/year for the period 2006-2010.*

The flood plain restoration opportunities and needs along the Lower Danube have been comprehensively mapped out and work has already been done to restore some of these areas. More funding and effort is needed but long-term projects such as the floodplain restoration along the Lower Danube are often discarded.

All info from: Assessment of the restoration potential along the Danube and main tributaries, WWF, Vienna, July 2010 and Valuing and conserving ecosystem services: a scoping case study in the Danube Basin, Institute for European Environmental Policy and WWF, 2010

*Impact Assessment to the Commission Communication a Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Waters

Floodplain restoration areas - implemented, planned and proposed along the Danube and major tributaries



Graphic: Institute for European Environmental Policy and WWF



Interested? Further examples and information....

See the EEB website

Building Green Infrastructure For Europe: Special report (EEB)
Biodiversity investments a smart contribution to reach EU 2020
objectives (BirdLife, EEB and WWF)
Green Infrastructure: Sustainable Investments for the Benefit of
Both People and Nature (Surf nature)

Publications

Green Infrastructure: Sustainable Investments for the Benefit of
Both People and Nature (Surf nature)
Investment Tips for High Returns: Making the EU Budget Deliver
for People and Nature (BirdLife, NABU)
The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) Study, The
Bank of Natural Capital
Commission Staff Working Paper SEC(2011) 1573 final Financing
Natura 2000 Investing in Natura 2000: Delivering benefits for
nature and people
Investing for the future: more jobs out of a greener EU budget,
Coalition of NGOs



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