

Cross-border ecological connectivity in the triangle area between Slovenia, Austria and Italy

Results of PlanToConnect Case Study



Background

- Project PlanToConnect
- E.C.O. Institute of Ecology as one out of 11 partners
- Case Study in trilateral border area
- Project Aim: identify the key cross-border areas for planning of ecological connectivity and to facilitate the upgrade of spatial planning systems and territorial policies to preserve or re-establish them

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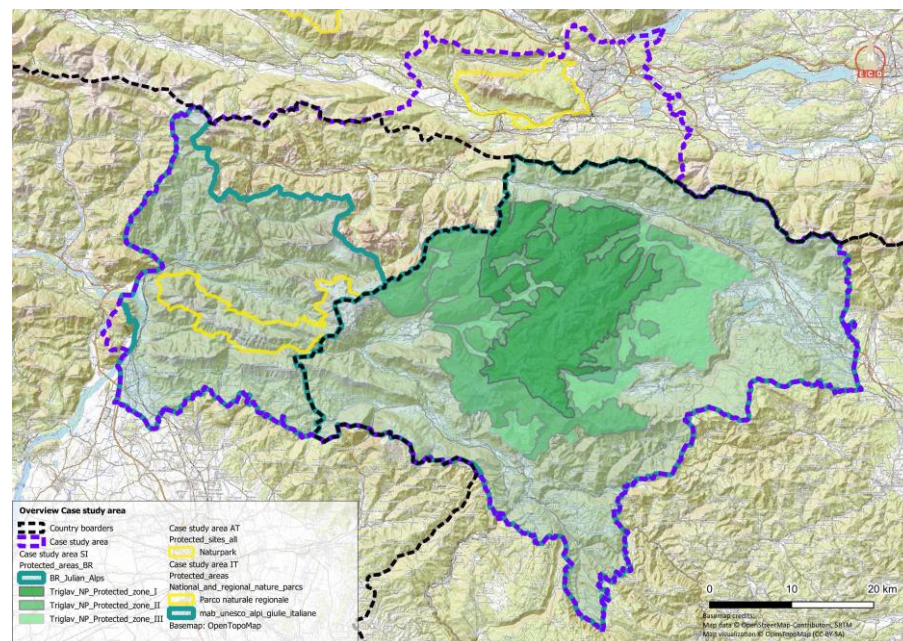
PlanToConnect

<https://www.alpine-space.eu/project/plantoconnect/>

Case Study: Trilateral transboundary pilot site (Austria-Italy-Slovenia)

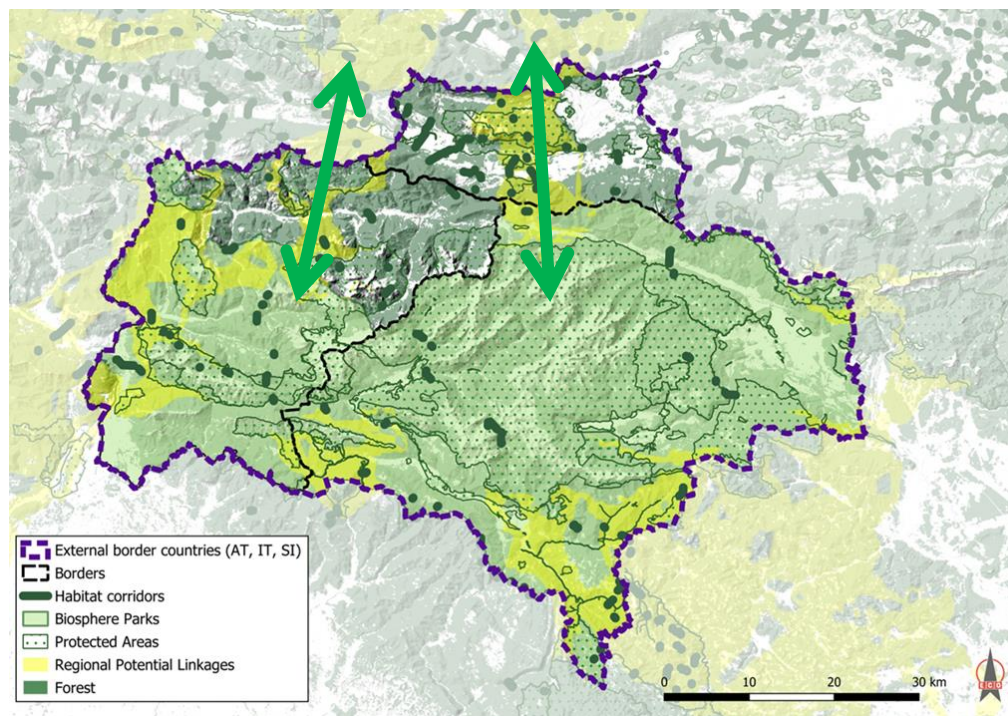
Tasks

- Assessment of ecological connectivity between Biosphere Reserve Julian Alps and Nature Park Dobratsch based on Macro-regional model
- Compile data on corridors and GBI elements
- Assessment of threats and barriers
- Assess options for integration into spatial planning tools
- Participative way – Form regional connectivity working group
- Elaborate proposal



Results data compilation

- Model shows two important south-nord alpine wide corridors: one within pilot area (A,SI), second more west (A, I)
- 3 Parks and other protected areas as backbone but also PA gaps
- National corridor systems exist
- Existing good structural connectivity across border areas given by large forested areas
- Limitations: Crossing of valley floors – bottlenecks
- Aim: keeping of the good natural connection





Results Barrier Analysis and border situation

- **Barriers:** Mainly in the north
- **Pressures:**
 - Transport infrastructure
 - Energy sector (River power plants, Power Grid)
 - Community development (little space) in narrow valle
 - Legally established Pas not existing in corridor area
 - Forestry practises in Austria
- **Threats:** no actual but future – renewable energy development
 - Tourism (skiing areas) is not considered, but present a triangle
- **Aim: Addressing threats at 3 border corner and agree on joint “no go” areas for RE development in sectoral plans and spatial planning documents**
- **Corridor implementation at strategic international level is required to secure the existing situation**



Results Analysis of spatial planning instruments

Spatial Planning

- There are **three different complex systems** at all levels with different competences and multi-stakeholder setting
- **Nature conservations topics in spatial planning are hardly considered**, just if legal established PAs (restriction zones) exist
- Ecological corridors bring additional limitations for spatial planners
- Forest law is quite strong, Ecological corridors **are not considered in open area**
- **There is no international cooperation** apart from the parks

Sector/Level	Spatial Planning	Ecological corridors/ Nature Conservation	Forestry/Hunting	Agriculture
National level		Lebensraum.at (Expert platform)	Forest Law (2023)*	OPUI/NAT
Province/Regional level	Provincial Spatial Planning Law	Protected area system	Hunting Law	
	Open Space Concept (2006) (GBI Concept (2023) in Progress)	Nature Conservation Law §8, §9, §6 Wildlife corridors	Forest Function Plan (County) Wildlife ecological plan (County)	
Local level (Municipality)	OEK (Municipality development concept)	Biotop/Habitat inventory (partly established)		
	FLAWI - (municipality plan)			Agri-ecological schemes (individual contracts)

recommendation
mandatory

Sectors addressing connectivity in Austria



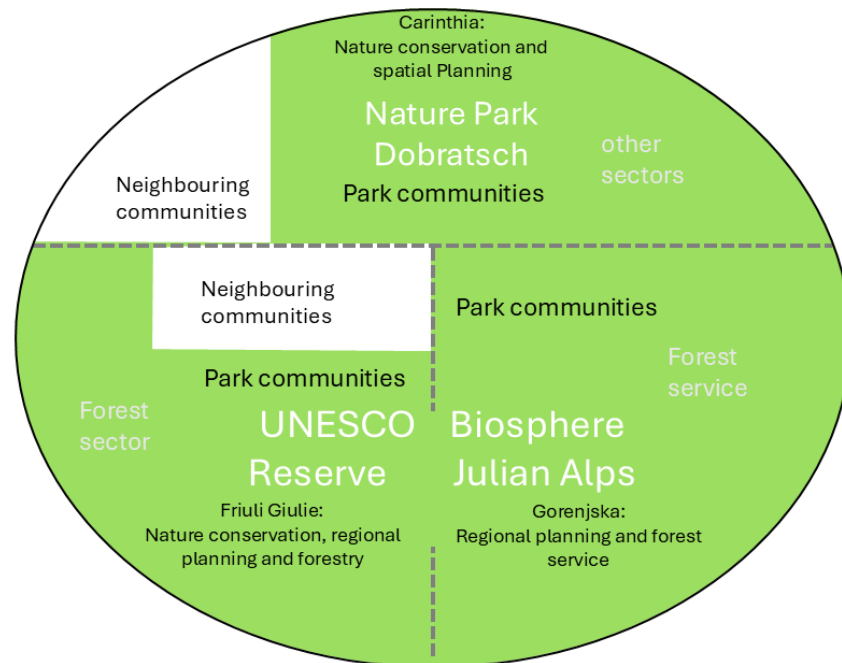
Options for cooperation at international level

Establishing formal collaboration

- 1) Establishing Biosphere Park Component in Austria (Feasibility study for Nature Park Dobratsch needed)
- 2) “Corridor contract” of 3 Parks and border communities of the three countries (Arnoldstein, Tarvisio, Kranjska Gora) as a minimum) – (at least agreement of willingness to consider the corridor)
- 3) Establishing European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC)
Feasibility study with focus on connectivity

Governance in the pilot area

- Three parks: Thematic cooperation but no planning authority –they could take up a coordinating role in the process
- RCWG: Cross-sectoral an international cooperation and agreement (different regulations in nature conservation, spatial planning, and forestry need to be overcome) – interdisciplinary group – information level
- Municipalities play a key role due to their planning authority in local development („local development concepts“ / „land use plans or municipality plans“) especially in Austria
- → **Enhanced collaboration is needed**





Option 1 – Corridor Agreement

Declaration of willingness

- Agreement on an ecological priority zone/green belt in the corridor areas
- Draft agreement document- should be signed by states, parks, and border municipalities as well as representatives of regional development.

Challenge

- legal text to be signed by many parties and stakeholders
- Must be prepared carefully and in diplomatic way – based on common goals
- Risk to fail politically

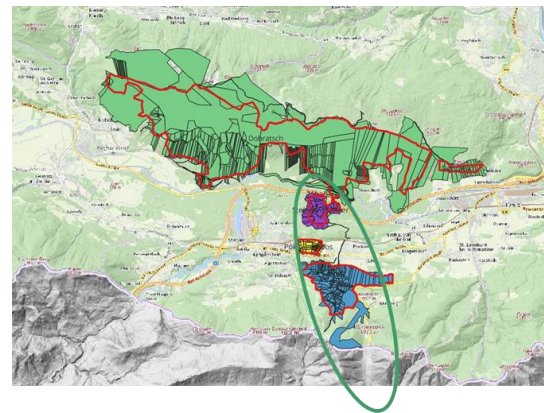
Option 2 - UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

Advantage

- Biosphere regions can act as drivers for regional development concepts in many areas (tourism, mobility, etc.).
- Integration into the UNESCO World Network (WNBR) provides global visibility, opportunities for exchange, and prestige.
- Communication focus possible on regional development topics, not only nature conservation
- Natural values serve as a basis – but it is more: an international recognition for a region.

Challenges

- Potential core zone would exist in NP Dobratsch, but landownership seen as challenge
- Positive multi-stakeholder process in the next years needed





Action plan for pilot area

Level	Idea
International level A, I, Si	<p>Establish a structured form of cooperation on nature-related topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain RCWG (Regional connectivity working group) as a minimum • Cross-border cooperation for the preservation of green corridors • Designation of “no-go areas” for infrastructure development in corridor areas within the spatial planning of the three countries • Process towards Biosphere reserve in Austria (Feasibility study and zoning plan options as next steps)
Regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic none intensive use zones (forest, grassland, wetlands) in the corridor area should be defined and established in spatial planning (Regional development plans) • Lobbying for Corridor Agreement - Three parks, administrative bodies and sectors • Establishment of strategic protected areas or at least corridor categories in sectoral planning
Local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take ecological corridors into account in spatial planning • Mitigate barriers locally



Important for Implementation

- Perfect mix of top down and bottom up is required
- Alpine Strategy as back up
- International concepts must be understood locally
- Positive communication of natural values as chance for development – **incentives!**
- Parks as strong stakeholders and coordinators
- Risk to fail if restrictions or dangers are recognized by local stakeholders or if they contradict local interests





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Thanks for your attention



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