**Workshop ‘Spatial planning and Natura 2000’**

**Organized in the framework of the project: “Potential role of spatial planning for protection and management of Natura 2000” (SPLAN-Natura 2000)**

**Commissioned by DG Environment**

**17 January 2017, Brussels,**

**Venue: VIP room Beaulieu 5**

**Aim:**

The workshop aimed at presenting and discussing the preliminary results of the study on the role of spatial planning for the management of Natura 2000.

**Venue and participants:**

The workshop was hosted by DG Environment and DG Regional Policy and has been organised by the SPLAN-Natura 2000 project consortium consisting of Wageningen Environmental Research (WENR-Alterra), Geographica, Estonian University of Life Sciences and Terraecogest.

The workshop was opened by Mr. Przemek Oginski from DG Environment. Mr. Oginski welcomed the participants and introduced the workshop programme and the background of the SPLAN-Natura 2000 project.

During the first part of the morning session two introductory presentations were given. In the first presentation Mr. Nicola Notaro (Head of Unit Nature Protection, DG Environment) introduced the key policy and legal concepts of EU nature protection system in relation to spatial planning. The next presentation was given by Mrs. Gergana Miladinova (Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG Regional and Urban Policy) who presented the EU funding mechanisms in the field of environment and biodiversity, with particular focus on opportunities for spatial planning.

The second half of the morning session was dedicated to presenting the results of SPLAN-Natura 2000 project. The representatives from the lead partner (WEnR-Alterra) Mrs. Irene Bouwma and Mrs. Vanya Simeonova explained the key challenges of spatial planning and Natura 2000 addressed by the study and introduced the key findings.

The morning programme was finalized by four presentations about best practice in relation to spatial planning and Natura 2000 across Europe related to four sectors i.e. (agriculture, infrastructure, urban development and energy).

The afternoon session began with an overview presented by Mr. Edgar van der Grift (WENR-Alterra) concerning the lessons learned from best practices. The best practice analysis of SPLAN-Natura 2000 aimed at illustrating innovative approaches developed by Member States in dealing with spatial developments and Natura 2000 and how different Member States apply these.

During the panel session the audience was invited to reflect with remarks or questions on the presentations about the best practices. A summary of the points raised is presented in Annex 1.

The afternoon programme continued with an interactive session. During this session the audience was asked to provide feedback on the challenges and the next steps needed to implement the findings of the project. The discussion was organized in four groups, each dedicated to a specific development sector (transport, energy, agriculture and urbanization). A summary of the points raised is presented in Annex 2.

The final presentation of the workshop was given by Mr. Stelian Dimitrov (Geographica). He outlined the state of play in relation to modern technologies used in spatial planning and how these technologies can be used for planning and management of the Natura 2000 network.

The remarks and the questions raised by the audience during the discussions have been noted by the research team (see Annex 1 & 2) and will be taken into consideration for the final report of the study. It was agreed that shortly after the workshop the project team will provide the participants with the relevant information from the workshop, including the PowerPoint presentations.

The workshop was closed by Mr. Oginski who thanked all participants for attending the meeting and contributing to the discussions. He concluded that the workshop had highlighted the importance of a more streamlined collaboration between spatial planning and different sectors in order to achieve a more effective implementation of the Natura 2000 policy.

**Annex 1 Summary of the panel discussion**

During the panel discussion the participants had the opportunity to raise questions with the speakers and discuss the lessons learned from the best practices. The panel members included: Hélène Loiseau, Hazel Graigie, Irina Maldeeva and Edgar v/d Grift.

The discussion started with a question whether, in relation to the projects considered, compromises were made in respect to the nature conservation goals during the planning process. It was observed that in most cases no explicit information is available on the specific compromises made between developments and nature conservation. This is often part of a complex planning process for which, in each case, a more specific exploration is required. Decisions on compromises should be better recorded in order to assess the effects for conservation.

Further it was discussed that the best cases clearly indicate that early informal consultation with stakeholders has been an important factor of their success. It was noted by the panel members that environmentalists are often more open to compromises than actors from other sectors. However, environmentalists need to make clear where the limits of the environmental compromises are, in order to achieve effective biodiversity conservation.

In addition the importance of good reliable information (‘hard facts’) was mentioned as a success factor. Spatial planning is often a negation process between different stakeholders with different interests (power plays). The environmental administration has a crucial role in ensuring that the environmental interests are given priority against often dominant economic developments. They can be more effective in doing so when they have sufficient knowledge-based evidence; particularly in cases were the planning departments are not interested in the environment. Although currently spatial planning is often oriented towards economy-driven developments it should also ensure that environmental issues and Natura 2000 are given an equal priority next to sectoral interests.

Some participants noted that the Habitats Directive provides good safeguarding mechanism by setting a hierarchy of interest –developments can only take place in cases of overriding public interest (Art. 6.2, 6.3). This is also evident from a number of court cases in which the ruling of the court has prohibited the execution of spatial plans and projects in favour of Natura 2000 protection. For instance in Bulgaria there was a court ruling on wind energy developments.

Although formal procedures for stakeholder consultation for plans and projects are established in all Member States often these consultations have a very formal character. This formality does not always seem to be effective in ensuring good involvement and participation of different stakeholders. Furthermore it was questioned whether court rulings were the best approach for solving conflicts, given the negative repercussions for many of the parties involved. In this respect, it was agreed by the audience that a more comprehensive approach is needed, not only for assessing individual projects, but also for integrating environment into other sectors by means of spatial planning.

Sufficient experience has not yet been generated in relation to the implementation of Article 6 for spatial plans. However, it was made clear that Natura 2000 issues should be taken into consideration from the beginning of the development of spatial plans. Moreover, via the process of spatial planning more timely and cost-effective solutions can be found that address different types of developments. For instance in Poland urban sprawl is currently affecting the environment while it also increases the costs for development of infrastructure. These costs could have been reduced by a more coordinated planning process which ensures a balanced development of different urban zones and nature.

The best practices were considered to have been very illustrative of the benefits of a more coordinated spatial planning and Natura 2000 conservation. The approaches that were used cannot be copied from one country to another given the different context in which planning takes place. However they provide inspiring examples to planners and environmentalists for coming up with tailor-made solutions that are most suitable for their local situations.

At the end of the discussion the panel members were invited to make a concluding statement. Based on the discussion they highlighted the following key issues:

* The importance of good research and reliable information to support the spatial planning process;
* The need for funding earmarked for nature/ environment;
* The need to increase education and awareness of stakeholders by engaging on a one to one basis;
* To ensure that the potential impacts of spatial plans and developments on nature are considered as early as possible in the process of plan preparation. Respecting the boundaries of nature can avoid damage and lower the costs for restoration and mitigation measures.

**Annex 2 Summary of the interactive session**

During the interactive session participants discussed the following two questions:

* What are the key opportunities within the selected development sector for implementation of the SPLAN Natura 2000 findings?
* Which important actions need to be taken in order to realize these opportunities in the spatial planning practices of the Member States?

The tables bellow summarise the results of this interactive session.

***Group Transport and Infrastructure***

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| *Opportunities* | *Next steps* |
| Transport network policy should be integrated into to be part of spatial planning | Clear picture about which roads need upgrading or downsizing considering N2000 areas, analyses of bottleneck locations in MSs (fragmentation of N-2000 across roads) |
| Common database for integrated transport planning | Joint action of public administration |
| Develop know-how/tool kits for transport mitigation measures | Cross-border collaboration on transport planning |
| Economic calculations for long-term and integrated outputs | Cost-benefits analyses |
| Energy efficiency policy goals reduce the need for conventional transport means | Prioritise the needs for transport means in transport plans |
| Proper evaluation of policy and mitigation measures across transport networks | Monitoring should be mandatory, to be able to learn from it and plan future measures |

***Group Energy sector***

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| *Opportunities* | *Next steps* |
| Develop and upscale existing technologies | Quick/easy implementation of technologies, that are not harmful for biodiversity |
| Research needed in relation to the energy sector and the impact on biodiversity | Increase data gathering for developing your strategy. Data gathered needs to be specific to the questions so it enables policy development |
| Consider both the potential for renewable energy, the capacity required also in terms of areas of supple and demand | Look at trade offs |
| Data gathering is needed for maximising energy production while minimizing impact on biodiversity |  |
| Reduce energy needs where possible |  |
| Potential for producing energy in urban areas – close to the user. |  |

***Group Agriculture and Rural development***

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| *Opportunities* | *Next steps* |
| Funding opportunities are abundant: needed for extensive farming, organic food, local products | Strategic planning for environmental planning at EU and regional level |
| Land abandonment is an urgent issue | More education is needed |
| Climate change adaptation | Identification of action areas for funding |
|  | Land use planning: not focus on traditional farming, but new agriculture |
|  | Strategic planning for environmental friendly agriculture; shift in policy making |

***Group Urban development sector***

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| *Opportunities* | *Next steps* |
| Use the opportunity to work on strategic level to avoid conflicts | Tools for resolving conflicts needed |
| Enhance legal certainty | Open-data sources needed, collect and share data (citizen science). |
| Enhance public consultation at an early stage, use GIS tools to support the discussion | Funding: member states should encourage action, but EC should also make funding available (and the public should be made aware of the available funds) |
| Putting N2000 areas and urban areas on the same map, use GIS to professionalise your work, communicate benefits | Monitoring is needed. |
| Urban areas can deliver ecosystem services through Green Infrastructure |  |