



## **A Baltic Green Belt Action Plan**

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### **Abstract**

A concise catalogue of future activities to further the development of the Baltic Green Belt shows the key areas where actions are necessary. The measures focus on political activities, regional and site development and on network building.

### **1 Complementation and integration of the Green Belt network**

With the help of the Baltic Green Belt INTERREG project it has been possible to start or enhance Green Belt activities in all nations along the Baltic Green Belt. However, substantial stretches are still not covered by regional activities or representatives. This accounts for the whole Kaliningrad region of Russia or parts of the Polish coast. Efforts will have to be taken to install an active Green Belt also in these areas.

1. A homebase for the Green Belt in Kaliningrad will have to be set up by acquiring at least one dedicated organisation or institution as a regional partner and actively incorporate it/them into the existing network activities. Substantial support will have to be granted for the start of work on Kaliningrad coast, also including the coastal lagoons.
2. On the eastern part of the Polish coast, a regional partner active in this part of the country should be located and integrated into network activities. Assistance to initiate Green Belt activities in this part of the country should be furnished by both the currently active parties in Poland and the international Green Belt network (e.g. the Regional Coordinator).
3. Currently, the European Green Belt consists of three geographical sections: The Fennoscandian, the Central European and the South Eastern European Green Belt. Experience from the Baltic Green Belt project shows that it would probably be a good idea to install an additional Baltic region. This would reflect common cooperative ties within the Baltic Sea Region and substantially ease cooperation and communication within this area. The extent of the Baltic section should be identical with the stretch of the European Green Belt running along the Baltic Sea coastline and thus incorporate parts of the Green Belt in Russia and Germany and the total Green Belt of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.
4. As EU funding options are only partly useable in Russia, special care will have to be taken to secure a sufficient funding base for partners in this country. Advice from the Regional Coordinators and efforts to initiate international cooperation projects which include the Russian activists are badly needed.
5. Extending the Baltic Green Belt and its partnership is a huge effort which cannot be achieved by one partner alone. Joint and concerted work, shared responsibilities and a multitude of active partners representing various interests and organisational forms are therefore a central asset for success. From the partners, this requires openness to differing or even non-standard approaches and a willingness to actively contribute both work and ideas.

## **2 Implementation of the Green Belt into policies and society**

The Green Belt's values and assets can only be considered in planning processes and land use when they are known to stakeholders and the public. Getting Green Belt information to the people and into the people's minds is therefore an indispensable prerequisite for successful protection. Likewise, the implementation into political programmes, policies and financing instruments ensures a constant progress in implementation.

1. The existing Baltic Green Belt information material constantly has to be spread to the public and stakeholders. Updates and additions should be realized whenever possible. Public events should regularly complement written information. Offering live experiences of the spectacular assets in the Green Belt is an excellent promotion measure.
2. The attention that the Baltic Green Belt web pages in national languages receive shows that they are a valuable communication instrument. Efforts will therefore have to be undertaken to keep them both current and interesting.
3. The awareness of the cultural-historical value of many military remains from the age of the iron curtain should be enhanced. Much of this heritage has already been destroyed, often without any notice or awareness that it might be a notable historical monument. Guided tours, publications and personal communication with stakeholders and planning staff are adequate instruments to arouse a change.
4. The Green Belt should seek implementation into the national and international natural and cultural conservation programmes. In this context, communication with authorities for nature conservation and cultural heritage should be enhanced.
5. For relevant financing instruments in the Baltic Region an explicit inclusion of the Green Belt should be targeted.

## **3 Secure sustainable construction and development activities**

Construction works are still going on at large in many areas of the Baltic Green Belt. While they are not per se a problem, care will have to be taken to concentrate them in areas where they will not conflict with Green Belt heritage and values and to realize them in a sustainable way that honours the special conservation needs of the area. Especially, a further fragmentation of the open landscape has to be prevented. Pressure is particularly high in metropolitan areas, notably around Riga agglomeration, and on the Kaliningrad peninsulas.

1. The illegitimate issue of building permits, sometimes only legalizing unlawful previous construction works and in some cases encouraged by bribery, is a pressing problem especially in some Green Belt parts of the eastern Baltic. It has to be made clear to politicians and inhabitants of these areas that this practice is highly detrimental for the development potential of the region, e.g. destroying touristic attractiveness. A full success will additionally need a strong political will on all levels and an effective control of the use of externally granted development funds.
2. A protected coastal strip to keep the seaside landscape free from buildings and urban sprawl should be installed and enforced in the whole Baltic Green Belt. In Germany, the reduction of the width of the protected coastal strip in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern state has raised dangers of further deterioration on an already highly built up and fragmented coastline; a revert of this measure is badly needed.

## **4 Apply site protection**

Although quite a lot of protected areas have been set up in the Baltic Green Belt since the fall of the iron curtain (and even before), many valuable sites still lack adequate protection. For the Green Belt's success, the conservation of its values is essential, and experience shows that this has not been

achieved to the necessary extent so far. Losses of cultural and natural values take place every day, and counteractive measures are urgent.

1. An urgency to grant valuable sites a protection status is apparent in all Baltic Green Belt countries. This applies not only to so far unprotected areas, but just as well to many sites that have been designated as part of the Natura 2000 or Emerald networks but still need a legal protection on the national scale for effective preservation. An especially important area for catching up with an adequate protection is the Kaliningrad coast.
2. Protection alone will not preserve the natural or cultural heritage of the Green Belt. Suited management schemes must go in line with the legal protection, and in many cases it requires some effort to not only have the protection regulations, but to also enforce them. The Green Belt network can assist in successful site protection by e.g. joining administrative, scientific and NGO partners who can each take up different tasks in site management.
3. Site protection can usually go well in line with land uses and often also with land use changes. However, all uses must be sustainable and it must be guaranteed that they will not interfere with the specific natural and/or cultural values of the respective site. In many cases, Green Belt heritage offers good options for sustainable usage schemes that will contribute to regional economy and income.
4. The sale of unsettled former military areas to private investors for a development incompatible with Green Belt aims and ideas, like practiced on the Polish coast, has to be stopped. A possible sale to developers must only be decided upon after a case analysis has been undertaken, taking into account both the kind of development anticipated and the site's natural and cultural assets. The concept of the "National Natural Heritage" which designates valuable former military areas in Germany for a natural development should be copied in other Green Belt countries and – if necessary – adapted accordingly.
5. The underwater habitats of the Baltic Green Belt are unique in the whole European Green Belt and are of special ecological and environmental value. They must therefore receive special attention in conservation efforts.

## **5 Ensure communication among the partners in the Green Belt network**

A network will only work in the long run with constant communication between the active parties. This includes everyday contacts by phone and email, but also periodical meetings. Contact persons and organisations/institutions should be appointed to streamline exchange. The Baltic Green Belt project has built a very good basis for this. Future work will have to focus on maintaining and preferably extending these communication channels and on an inclusion of all interested parties.

1. A newsletter, either by email, in print or both, should serve as the major instrument to keep all partners informed.
2. Contact persons should be available for specific tasks and coordination activities, serving both as a source and hub for information.
3. A regularly updated website where all active parties have access, both in reading and writing, is a central instrument for constant communication. The European Green Belt's Facebook pages can complement that, but cannot be a complete substitute.
4. Pan-Baltic Green Belt meetings should be held at least bi-yearly to sustain personal contacts of activists. They should be complemented by thematic workshops that can enable further communication and joint in-depth work on pressing topics.
5. Joint project development is a basis for the essential financing for the initiative, but also for continuous exchange between partners, both during project development and implementation.

6. Communication with other parts of the European Green Belt is essential to ensure a coordinated development of policies, ideas and projects on the European scale and to enable a transfer of knowledge and useful experiences.

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