



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

PROGRESS
Interreg Europe



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

Regional GI Coordination Meeting via Microsoft Teams **12 December 2022 // 10.00am – 12.00pm (Irish time)**

Summary and Issues Emerging

Following on from the successful Pilot Action on Mapping Green Infrastructure (GI) using an Ecosystem Services (ES) approach in Dún Laoighaire-Rathdown, the aim of the workshop was to support the further development of Green Infrastructure policies and coordinate the mapping of strategic Green Infrastructure in the EMRA Region.

In attendance were Planners, Biodiversity Officers, and other experts from across our 12 Local Authorities, representatives from relevant Government Departments, State Agencies, the Office of the Planning Regulator and Academia.

Mr Jim Conway (EMRA) made the opening address and Owen Douglas (EMRA) provided an update on the ongoing work of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly in supporting Green Infrastructure policies. Carles Castell (Barcelona Provincial Council) outlined the development and deployment of a GI and ES optimised approach for territorial analysis at the regional scale in Barcelona, and Joan Pino (CREAF) outlined the piloting of this approach in Dún Laoighaire-Rathdown as part of the Interreg Europe PROGRESS project.

There was a high level of engagement from attendees with a lively exchange throughout the session. The following emerged as key themes and issues as regards the development of a standardised mapping approach.

Resources

Limited financial and human resources availability in individual Local Authorities - particularly rural local authorities - emerged as a key issue from the outset. There was a clear desire among those attending to progress GI mapping both locally and through regional cooperation and sharing best practice. While it was agreed that a regional mapping approach could provide certain efficiencies through the shared development of a standardised approach, there is still a need for enhanced resources within the Local Authorities in terms of identifying, sourcing, and creating the local datasets that would be required. Joan Pino reinforced the importance of data availability and usefulness. It was noted that new Biodiversity Officers are currently being appointed to Local Authorities nationally, which could assist with the resourcing issue to some extent. It was also noted that while mapping GI and putting it in a County Development Plan is one thing, building and maintaining it is quite another due to the lack of resources. Comprehensively mapping, improving, building and managing GI will require substantial resources.

The need for a Green Infrastructure mapping hierarchy

One attendee noted that in terms of planning policy more broadly, we are operating under a hierarchy of national regional and local plans and GI maps need to reflect this. We need maps at national level which filter down to the regional and the local. It was suggested that such a hierarchy would facilitate political buy-in which is difficult to get locally. Guidance and policy which can be clearly traced down from the national and regional levels is much more likely to have an impact at the local level. More direction from the national and regional levels would facilitate positive developments in this area. Carles Castell emphasised the importance of regional mapping as the link between the national and the local. He noted that regional GI mapping also facilitates landscape scale designations of protected areas and the optimisation of sectoral policies and ecosystem services. He also noted that GI and its designation is a commitment by all stakeholders in terms of planning and management for biodiversity and ecosystem services. Real policy impact will require more detail and refinement of mapping approaches at all levels. As noted by Joan Pino, the DLR pilot action and our engagement with national, regional and local actors provides a starting point for that conversation.

The appropriate granularity for regional Green Infrastructure mapping

Some participants were concerned that a standardised regional approach to GI mapping would not be suited to the needs of the Local Authorities who need the detailed information at the site level. In response, Joan Pino noted that this is a common discussion point around GI and suggested that for regional GI mapping, we have to work with a simple but robust set of common indicators that works for all. More fine-grained data can then be added on at the local level, depending on the specific circumstances and aims and objectives of each Local Authority.

Content of Green Infrastructure Maps

As noted by Joan Pino, Ecosystem Services mapping is a big undertaking as it deals with processes. Most of the information available to Local Authorities is related to land use regarding patterns. The link between patterns and processes is not fully solved. As such, any approach to ES mapping will be imperfect by definition. Linked with the point above on granularity, he suggests that we shouldn't dwell too much on resolution and comparability between counties in relation to ES. We simply have to identify and work with a set of indicators that more or less cover the concept of ES. The approach to ES Mapping undertaken in the DLR pilot action concentrated on biodiversity conservation and ecosystem functioning – This is a limited approach, which didn't take into account wider ecosystem services. Joan Pino suggested that the approach to GI mapping in a given Local Authority will be modulated by the aim of the county. The central focus could be for example biodiversity protection, or water provision or regulation of pollution by vegetation, or something else. Furthermore, we must keep in mind that biodiversity value and ecosystem services are not always synergistic – there are sometimes trade-offs. This consideration is important in addressing regional GI deployment.

Other participants noted that we need to include what is useful in our GI maps and this will vary depending on the characteristics of the county (e.g. urban or rural) and the priority at hand (e.g. drinking water provision, coastal defences etc.). Some approaches focus on climate risk for GI, some only consider limited geographic areas. The starting point is to ask what sort of ES you want to focus on and then start building a GI network. It will never be a finished product. Maps will always evolve as new information/data becomes available. As such, they will require amendment over time as new species, data, development pressures emerge and the GI network changes in size, shape, location etc. Static GI maps are therefore only ever a snapshot

in time. Mechanisms for monitoring how changes in GI are occurring over time would be useful, but as noted by Carles Castell, this isn't automatic and requires buy-in and ongoing management.

Potential Synergies

A number of participants identified a range of existing references and resources which could feed in to the development of a standardised approach. These include the [SEA Directive](#) (which covers 11 different sectors and has a legal basis); the [IFI planning guide for urban watercourses](#) and potential for synergies with the ReFrame project on landscape character assessment.

New and emerging resources mentioned include updated Rural Housing Planning Guidelines which are currently being prepared, next-generation Copernicus Satellite Data, the evidence review of resources undertaken for the development of a national land-use plan, planning guidelines in relation to the Water Framework Directive, strategic flood risk assessment and management. It was emphasised that the substantial overlap between the biodiversity and climate agenda must be recognised. The OPR is currently working on a *Digital Planning and Analytics Strategy* which recognises the need for a planning portal that puts all relevant tools and resources in one place. It was also suggested that a new Interreg project could be organised to develop a GI strategy/map for the entire region.

Next Steps

As set out in the Action Plan for the PROGRESS project, the findings of this meeting will be presented to the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly in Q1 2023. In Q2 2023 we will organise a follow-up meeting to continue this conversation, building on the outcomes of Meeting 1 on December 12th 2022. Our intention is to circulate a survey in advance of that meeting where we will seek further input to support the further development of Green Infrastructure policies and coordinate the mapping of strategic Green Infrastructure in the EMRA Region.

The Next Steps include:

- Further discussing the key elements of a standardised regional GI mapping approach.
- Exploring appropriate funding/resourcing mechanisms.
- Identifying who leads/develops and what is a realistic timetable.

