

Wednesday 21 December 2021, 10:00-11:00 Rome time (CET)



### Mainstreaming Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity in Peri-Urban Forest Park Creation: Experience From Eastern Europe

**Speaker:** Adrian Răulea - Programme Director, Cluj Metropolitan Development Association

#### **Description:**

Cluj Metropolitan Development Association and the City of Cluj-Napoca have recently finalized the project Management and Utilization of Urban Forests as Natural Heritage in Danube Cities (URBforDAN), funded by the European Union within the Danube Transnational Program. The specific objective of the project was to foster sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources of the urban forests. URBforDAN was implemented in seven project partner cities: *Ljubljana (SLO)*, *Vienna (AT)*, *Budapest (HUN)*, *Zagreb (CRO)*, *Cluj-Napoca (ROM)*, *Belgrade (SRB)*, and *Ivano-Frankivsk (UA)*.

The social role of peri-urban forests is diversifying, and this implies that peri-urban forests are redesigned to meet and shape social demands. A key challenge is the integration of the social demands for green spaces with the maintenance of key ecosystem structures and processes as well as the biodiversity of the green spaces. One key particularity of the project was that it was co-designed by the administration with one of the most active NGOs in this field, and the academic sector joined the project in its second stage, with the aim of mainstreaming ecosystem services and biodiversity within a well-established design concept.

After comprehensively assessing the biodiversity and ecosystem services of the targeted forest, we found that the ecosystem supply was strongly related to the tree stand structure and the forestry management from the past decades. The public expressed concerns related to the parts of the established development design, which included built structures, artificial lights, toilets, and paved roads, perceiving that these actions will negatively influence the natural environment.

We present the modifications undertaken in the project design after the public consultation and deliberation within the implementation team. An anonymous internal evaluation of the implementation team shows appreciation for the human and professional interactions and the resulting innovation and learning opportunities. To improve interdisciplinary collaborations, there is a need for a good institutional support and financial reward, transparency, and good communication within the team.

[URBforDAN](#) in Romania was implemented in a 40-h mixed deciduous forest in the peri-urban area of Cluj-Napoca. The forest section is part of a larger forest, and it is situated on the border of a Natura 2000 site (being outside of the protected area).

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