

## **BalkaNatureNet (BNN) – a Vibrant Expert Network for Thriving Nature in the Balkan Region and Adjacent Countries**

BNN is a transnational professional expert network in the fields of nature conservation and education for sustainable development (ESD) for experts in the Balkan region and adjacent countries. It will start as a contact platform and platform for exchanging knowledge and experiences and develop further activities.

BNN is based on the alumni of three training, but welcomes other experts working in the target region, following the slogan “Borders do not matter. Nature does.”.



### **Why a Professional Expert Network?**

Southeast Europe as the wider target area inhabits a high biodiversity, a high diversity of undisturbed ecosystems and cultural landscapes. But social and economic impacts on these natural assets are increasing. The political and social structure in the respective countries (Balkan region and adjacent countries) varies from country to country. Nature conservation and education are still in the development phase and in many places there is a lack of specialists and experts.

Subsequently conservationists are facing problems in finding partners. Maybe an expert in Bulgaria has the solution or expertise for a specific challenge that occurred in Montenegro.

There is no specialist for dragonflies in your country? Maybe there is one in another country in the region and you could find this expert via a professional network – BNN.

You are looking for best-practice-examples and the latest news in nature conservation and/or environmental education in the Balkan region? BNN will provide this information.

### **Our Journey to BNN**

The idea for such a network came from young nature conservationists who participated in the last NatuRegio training programme. The professional exchange of experiences and knowledge with experts from different countries was an important part of the training programmes.

The idea was born and the Alfred Toepfer Academy for Nature Conservation (NNA) started the project “BalkaNatureNet” in 2016. The project is funded by the German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU), the Alfred Toepfer Foundation F.V.S. and the Heidehof Foundation.

The feasibility for initiating a transnational expert network based on about 80 alumni of the NatuRegio training programmes was assessed in 2016. A detailed survey was conducted and the results were further reviewed during a small expert workshop in September 2016. More than 20 experts from 9 different countries attended the workshop and discussed objectives and concepts for the

future network. Both the survey and the workshop showed a need and enthusiasm for BNN and an action plan for the start-up period was developed.

Since then different task groups worked voluntarily on the establishment of BNN together with the project team of the NNA.

### **BNN Kick-off at the “BalkaNatureNet – Forum” in Tirana**

Over 60 enthusiastic experts of 13 countries participated in the first network meeting in April 2017 in Tirana, Albania. Among the participants were the Deputy Minister of the Environment of Albania, funders of the project BalkaNatureNet, GIZ, alumni of the NatuRegio-programmes and further representatives of local and regional nature conservational organisations.

The main goal was to establish a management team and to register the first members. BNN is completely based on voluntary commitment of the members, so it is important to share the work load among many members. 50 participants filled out a member registration and over 30 decided to take over a job for BNN, either working in one thematic field or being responsible for the coordination of different work areas.

Another key aspect of the Forum was to exchange experiences between the international participants: Presentation of projects, dialogue with other experts and a field trip to a national park in Albania.

### **The journey of BNN continues**

During the first year of BNN work flow, content, and communication structures will be assessed and adapted. The management team of BNN started this process during the Forum and will prioritize all activities to lead BNN into the future.

BNN’s website ([www.balkanature.net](http://www.balkanature.net)), including its internal member section, is the “headquarter” for the transnational expert network. It serves as a platform for internal and external communication of BNN, attract new members, advertise the network and ensure many communication channels for members to discuss, exchange and network.



Participants of the kick-off meeting “BalkaNatureNet – Forum” in April. Tirana, Albania