

Environment and natural resources

The region is formed by a broad variety of different landscapes:

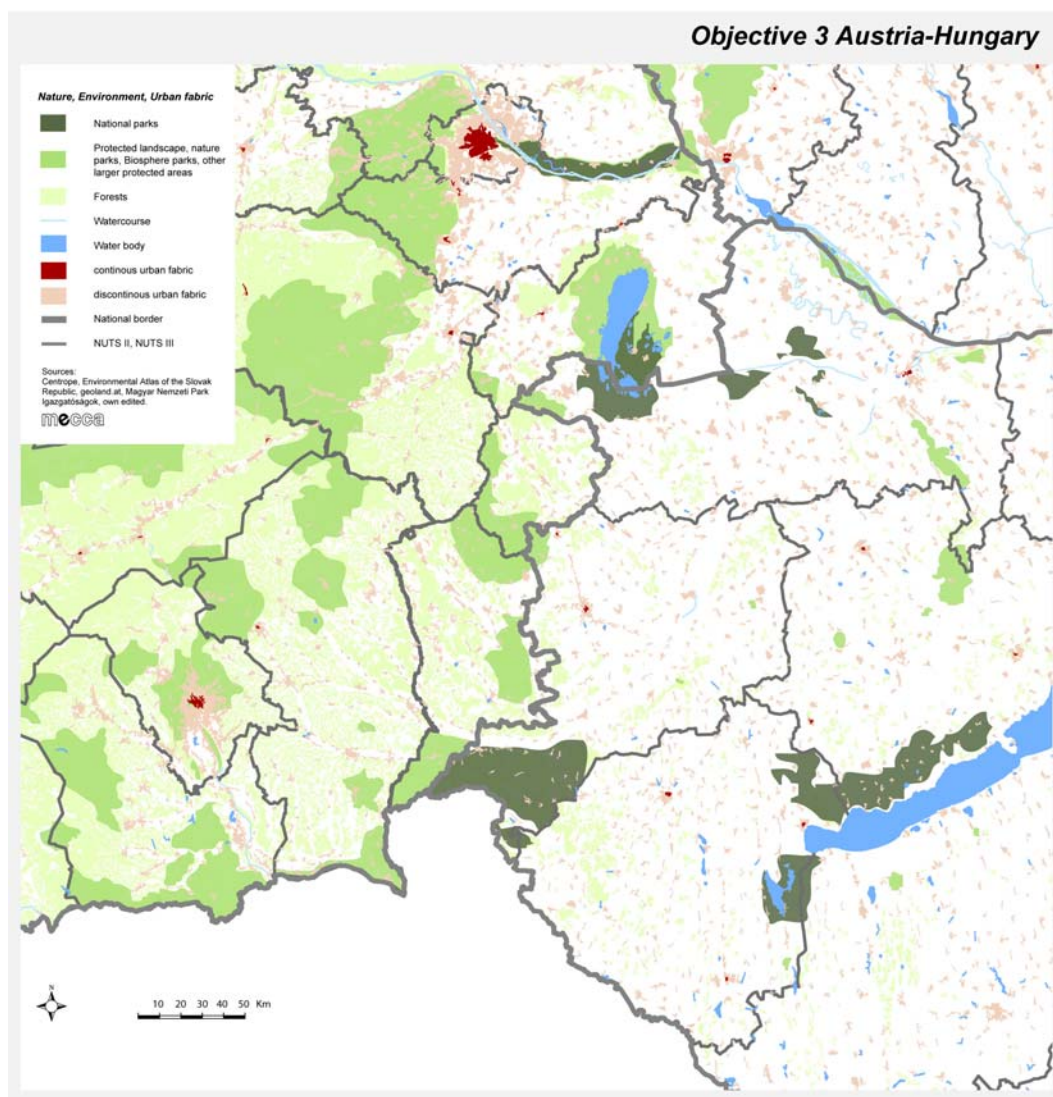
- the Wiener Becken and its edges, i.e. in the West the hilly and mountainous zones of the Wienerwald and in the East the semi-alpine zones of the Alps – including the eastern foothills of the Central Alps, i.e. the Leitha mountains (484m), and the Rosalien and Ödenburger mountains (606m) in the Nordburgenland as well as the Landseer and Günser mountains in the Mittelburgenland;
- the Kisalföld with the Kőszeg, Sopron and Sag Mountains and the hilly lands of the Zala and Vas regions;
- the lowlands of the Nordburgenland (the flat of Parndorf, Seewinkel) and the basin of Oberpullendorf which opens to the Hungarian Small Plain (Kisalföld);
- the hilly lands in Oststeiermark and the Südburgenland as part of the basin of Graz;
- Alpokalja - the 'fingers' of the Alps reaching Hungary.

Cultural heritage

The great variety of ecosystems and the rich natural heritage is responsible for a number of nature parks and national parks (NP) such as the NP and world heritage site Neusiedler See/Fertő, sensitive areas, Natura 2000 and protected areas. Together with the richness of cultural heritage and the geologic conditions for spas they offer favourable conditions for environmental forms of sustainable tourism.

Most of the nature and landscape conservation areas are located at a distance from the main settlement and development areas. A key measure in the field of nature conservation was the establishment of the Neusiedler See-Seewinkel cross-border national park in 1993, which encompasses the South-Eastern shore of Neusiedler See/Fertő, more than half of the lake itself and the adjacent reeds and meadows. Europe's only steppe national park covers an area of about 20.000 hectares, 8.000 are situated in Burgenland. In an effort to protect and develop cross-border natural space resources, two nature reserves – Geschriebenstein-Írottkő and Raab-Őrseg-Goričko – were established.

Map 7: Nature, environment, urban fabric



Eco-mobility

Among several cross-border concepts and joint development actions focusing on the environmental reserves, the initiative on “Sustainable transport development in sensitive areas” shall help to shape the economic development of the area preserving the quality of living conditions for future generations.

This idea is in line with the biosphere growth region concept elaborated in the Joint Development Strategy for the Vienna-Bratislava-Győr Region (JORDES+) and describes the potential synergies among skilled labour forces, R&D and natural resources. Steiermark identifies itself as the ‘Green

Heart of Austria' as well as the vision of West Transdanubia is to be a 'Green Region' including Vas and Zala. These facts make it easy to extend the biosphere growth region concept across the entire border region.

Renewable energy

There is a growing awareness within the border region regarding environment. Utilisation of renewable and alternative energy sources (e.g. biomass, wind, solar) has started and extended in the Austrian side of the border. This process has a strong influence on the Hungarian side of the border via the cross-border activities of the European Centre for Renewable Energy in Güssing, the Energy Park Bruck/Leitha and the Energy Region Oststeiermark. Including also the experiences of public companies and municipalities the topic has become an intensive co-operation field among cross-border relations.

Water

Water is an important resource for the region. Common problems are changes in the water level of Neusiedler See as well as in some parts of the river Raab. Another topic of interest is food protection and the improvement of water quality. Drinking and waste water treatment is an important issue especially on the Hungarian side of the region.

Development tendencies

The great variety of eco-system in the region bears opportunities for future development. The issue environment will be among the most important factors for the region. For example the 'Grüne Mitte' concept was developed on the strategic level in the north part of the region. Simplified, this concept advises to produce added value and to make sustainable use of the outstanding natural resources and "green" core competences (biosphere management, organic food production, bridging, renewable energies, eco mobility) of the region. This can end in large-scale projects like common product brands or in sophisticated small scaled projects for local energy supply. By know-how transfer and institutional co-operations those positive trends and strategies can be extended to the entire border region.

Based on directives and traditional joint efforts within the Austrian-Hungarian "Cross-border Water Committee" co-operation in the field of flood prevention will be an important topic for the future.

Environment will also be a strong factor for further cross border co-operation. Austria has more experience and a more diverse landscape, Hungary has enormous agricultural potentials, both have experience in common nature management. Also there are already common risk prevention models and water concepts that will be enlarged for the whole region.

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