

# From the Iron Curtain to the European Green Belt Creating a Vision for a 2<sup>nd</sup> Transformation to a Life-Sustaining Europe/World

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**Abstract:** The European Green Belt developed from the wasteland of the former death strip along the iron curtain over decades to a green life line of biodiversity. It is an ecological network with a unique natural and cultural heritage, an emotional human and political history, meaning and transformative power. Due to the former border situation, it is a transnational green infrastructure with biodiversity hotspots in a more and more fragmented, intensively used and degraded European landscape and connects people from 24 European countries and valuable landscapes. But now, nearly 30 years after the peaceful transition in 1989, the gaps in the European Green Belt cover already 50%. These gaps are not protected and are subject to adverse effects, like ongoing landscape fragmentation and ongoing chemo-industrial agriculture. Alarming signals of a new death zone are not only the gaps within the European Green Belt, but generally and closely related the mass extinction of species, climate change, resource depletion, financial and economic crisis, demographic change, emigration, unemployment and/or precarious work worldwide. To save the European Green Belt and life on earth there is a great need of a 2<sup>nd</sup> transformation to a life-sustaining world.

**Key words:** European Green Belt, transformation, narratives, active hope.

## 1. Introduction

The European Green Belt and former Iron Curtain is a symbol for a gentle transformation: from death zone to life line, an unexpected change or peaceful transition. Some people call it even a miracle.

Now, 29 years after the historical fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, this life line and ecological network full of biological diversity with a unique natural and cultural heritage, an emotional human and political history, meaning and transformative power [1] as seen in Fig. 1 is once again endangered. Moreover, 50% of this Green Belt through Europe are now unprotected gaps [2], a result of current policies, habits, priorities, related to a “business as usual” approach.

Signs of a newly arising death zone are not only the gaps within the Green Belt as presented in Fig. 2,

but also closely related to the mass extinction of species, further climate change, resource depletion (peak soil, peak oil and peak everything), a worldwide destruction of ecosystems [3], financial and economic crisis, demographic change, emigration, unemployment and/or precarious work in Europe and worldwide.

This development highlights that now, 29 years later there is an urgent need of a 2<sup>nd</sup> transformation to maintain and restore the biological and cultural diversity to save life, including human life, god’s creation.

## 2. Materials, Results and Discussion

In thankfulness to the development within the “GreenNet” project for the European Green Belt [2], working with project partners, scientists, people from the pilot regions, administrations, politicians and the transformations 2017 conference [4], there is now a 2<sup>nd</sup> transformation on the way!

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**Fig. 1** European Green Belt: Pictures from top to down right: Graphic: © European Green Belt Initiative [5]. Aerial photo: The European Green Belt as a green infrastructure [6] within an intensive land use, © Klaus Leidorf [7], Embracing neighbours at the German border in 1989 after opening the wall in Moedlareuth, Germany, © Arndt Schaffner, Muenchberg [8].

It appears in form of a transformative science for sustainably living, a holistic science for example at the Schumacher's College in the UK [9].

The transformation is spreading up from the transition town movement [10], with head, heart and hand. The peace and alternative Nobel Prize winner Helena Norberg-Hodge shows in projects, books and movies, that local economy is the key to biological and cultural diversity and happiness [11].

Happiness is an important factor for human well-being. The Kingdom of Bhutan is a leading example of including it in economic accounting.

There is as well an urgent need to include natural capital with its ecosystem services in the economic accounting worldwide (TEEB: The Economics of Ecology and Biodiversity). Human kind depends on ecosystem services, the natural capital, for life, further decision making and real accounting for economy [12].



**Fig. 2** Gaps within the Green Belt, mainly caused by still ongoing landscape fragmentation, for example by a new built autobahn, Germany © Marion Mueller [13] and still ongoing intensive chemo-industrial agriculture, Germany © Klaus Leidorf [14].

In 2009, the Nobel Prize for Economics was awarded to Elinor Ostrom with the topic of commons. Commons appear along the European Green Belt and general in forms of land sharing, food sharing, car sharing, repair cafes, urban gardening, social and ecological farming, local food, regional money, reskilling of crafts, intersectoral and transdisciplinary cooperation and in many forms more.

### 3. Conclusions

There are a lot of small signs of change, but to create a real impact it needs a strong vision, many people and a miracle like 29 years ago.

How to strengthen humans to contribute to transformation, change or miracles? Joana Macy and Chris Johnstone have developed a very relieving answer and book: "Active Hope How to Face the

Mess We're in without Going Crazy" [15].

The history and gentle transformation of the Iron Curtain/European Green Belt is a strong symbol, a ray of hope for the vision of creating a 2<sup>nd</sup> transformation to a life-sustaining Europe/world celebrating cultural and biological diversity and future.

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