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IPA Bulgaria - North Macedonia

# Workshop Report

Development of SWOT Analysis







ГОЦЕ ДЕЛЧЕВ

ШТИП ASTIBO

ЦЕНТАР ЗА РАЗВОЈ НА ИСТОЧЕН ПЛАНСКИ РЕГИОН





# Executive Summary



The second regional workshop for the development of the Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy (2025–2035) was held on 28 May 2025 in Shtip, North Macedonia. This event was organized as part of the "EcoScape – Transforming Urban Environments with Green Infrastructure" project, funded by the Interreg VI-A IPA Bulgaria – North Macedonia Programme 2021–2027. The workshop brought together over 30 participants, including local government representatives, urban planners, environmental experts, civil society organizations, and academic institutions. The main objectives of the event were:

## Main Objectives:

- To define a long-term joint vision for green infrastructure in the cross-border region until 2035;
- To identify strategic goals and priority areas for intervention;
- To conduct a participatory SWOT analysis, serving as the foundation for the forthcoming strategy.

# Agenda

| No | Time | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **01** | 10:30 – 11:00 | Arrival and Registration of Participants<br>Coffee Networking |
| **02** | 11:00 – 11:15 | Welcome to the participants and<br>Workshop Objectives |
| **03** | 11:15 – 11:45 | Defining a Joint Vision to 2035<br>Identifying Main Goals and Strategic Areas |
| **04** | 11:45 – 14:15 | What is a SWOT Analysis?<br>Group Work: Division into Working Groups |
| **05** | 14:15 – 14:30 | Lunch and Departure of Participants |

Second Workshop for the Development of the Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy (2025–2035) Eastern Planning Region (Republic of North Macedonia) and Gotse Delchev (Republic of Bulgaria)
28 May 2025 | Hotel Oaza, Shtip





# Session details

## Opening and Introduction

The workshop officially began at 11:00 with welcoming remarks and a brief introduction to the objectives of the session.
Representatives from the project partner— Centre for Development of the Eastern Planning Region — greeted the participants and emphasized the strategic importance of green infrastructure for the future of both regions.
Participants were reminded that this was the second joint workshop, continuing the participatory process launched during the first event. The goal of this workshop was to build on initial discussions by shaping a shared long-term vision and strategic priorities for green infrastructure in the cross-border region.
The facilitator outlined the structure of the day and underlined the importance of active contribution in the working sessions, noting that the outcomes will directly inform the drafting of the Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy (2025–2035).

## Vision and Strategic Priorities Session

The first working session of the day focused on defining a joint long-term vision for green infrastructure development in the cross-border region. Facilitated through open discussion, participants were asked to reflect on what kind of urban and natural environments they would like to see in 2035 and what changes are needed to get there.
Participants expressed a strong desire to preserve biodiversity, reduce urban heat, and create inclusive public spaces accessible to all. There was wide agreement that green infrastructure should be planned not as isolated projects, but as a connected and strategic system that addresses environmental, social, and economic challenges.
**“We need to think about how children, the elderly, and people with disabilities move through our towns. Trees, parks, green roofs — all of this is infrastructure too, not just decoration,” said one participant from a local planning department.**





As part of the workshop's first interactive session, participants were divided into four groups and asked to imagine and articulate a shared vision for the Eastern Planning Region in the year 2035, focusing on green infrastructure, livability, and sustainability. Each group presented a unique but complementary outlook for the region's future, highlighting aspirations in terms of environmental quality, accessibility, urban design, and ecological protection.

### Group 1 – Vision 2035

- A large-scale urban park modeled after Tivoli Park in Ljubljana, located at the foothills of Mount Plachkovica, covering 500 hectares.
- Development of well-maintained, horticulturally designed walking trails, aimed at both international visitors and local/regional users.
- Emphasis on recreational green spaces that combine tourism, health, and nature education.

### Group 2 – Vision 2035

- By 2035, the Eastern Planning Region is characterized by:
  - 30% of its territory designated as protected areas
  - Significant expansion of blue and green zones
  - 30% green coverage within all urban areas regulated by Detailed Urban Plans (DUPs)
  - 15% of the region’s landscapes formally protected under national or local conservation status
- The group defined this as their final and measurable vision.

### Group 3 – Vision 2035

- Each municipality in the region hosts:
  - A minimum of three parks
  - All parks are connected by pedestrian and cycling infrastructure
- A region where green spaces are accessible, interconnected, and serve as focal points for community life and recreation.

### Group 4 – Vision 2035

- Creation of a functional, green, practical, and sustainable infrastructure system, defined by:
  - Energy-efficient buildings
  - Safe pedestrian and bicycle routes
  - Integration with green areas
  - Clearly designated protected landscape zones
- The vision emphasizes the balance between development and nature conservation, and the need for resilient urban systems that protect the region’s ecological integrity.

# VISION

## Shared Vision for 2035

The Eastern Planning Region is green, sustainable, and connected.
By 2035, 30% of its territory is designated as protected, urban areas contain at least 30% greenery, and 15% of landscapes are formally protected. Each municipality has a minimum of three parks, all linked by safe cycling and pedestrian paths, and integrated with green and culturally landscaped public spaces. Protected zones preserve the region's natural balance, while encouraging active lifestyles and eco-tourism.







In a second step, participants discussed and proposed strategic areas of intervention. Through plenary brainstorming, the following priority themes emerged:

- Urban-rural ecological connectivity: creating green corridors and networks between natural and built environments
- Nature-based solutions for risk mitigation: especially addressing flooding, heat islands, and air quality
- Sustainable urban development: ensuring land use planning integrates green elements at all scales
- Community involvement and awareness: engaging residents, especially youth, in design and stewardship
- Cross-border synergies: exchanging knowledge and coordinating investments across municipalities

These shared priorities set the stage for the subsequent SWOT analysis session, in which participants explored the internal and external factors that can enable or constrain the realization of this vision.





# Session details

## SWOT analysis

Following the visioning exercise, the core part of the workshop was dedicated to a structured and participatory SWOT analysis, serving as a foundational step in the development of the Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy (2025–2035). The session aimed to identify the key internal and external factors that influence the potential for planning, investing in, and maintaining green infrastructure in the Eastern Planning Region (North Macedonia) and the Municipality of Gotse Delchev (Bulgaria).

To encourage detailed and focused discussion, participants were divided into four thematic working groups, with each group assigned one component of the SWOT framework:

- Group 1 – Strengths
- Group 2 – Weaknesses
- Group 3 – Opportunities
- Group 4 – Threats

Each group drew on their local expertise and institutional knowledge to identify relevant issues from their geographic and thematic perspective. The results of the discussions were shared in a final plenary session and are presented below:

## Strengths

- Abundance of water resources
- Strong agricultural potential
- Rich natural heritage including the Plachkovica, Osogovo, and Maleshevo mountains
- Availability of thermal springs
- Presence of scientific and research capacity
- Developed railway and road infrastructure
- High solar exposure, suitable for renewable energy
- Established tourism sectors (natural, cultural, mountain-based)
- Locally distinctive food production (e.g., rice, grapes, traditional cuisine)
- Social cohesion and collaboration among the population

## Weaknesses

- Limited financial resources for green infrastructure implementation
- Complex and slow administrative procedures
- Insufficient or outdated urban planning documentation
- Long delays in adopting urban plans
- Lack of political will to prioritize green development
- Weak investment management and oversight of public enterprises
- Lack of monitoring and evaluation systems
- Insufficient databases with relevant environmental and planning data
- Ongoing urban sprawl and loss of green areas
- Low public awareness on the importance of green infrastructure
- Limited stakeholder participation in planning processes

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**SWOT ANALYSIS**

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## Opportunities

- Active citizen involvement in planning and greening initiatives
- Rising interest in sustainable tourism and nature conservation
- Afforestation efforts using native species
- Potential to green urban areas and create microclimate benefits
- Creation of botanical and educational gardens
- Youth and student engagement in environmental projects
- Use of alternative energy sources
- Improved air and water quality through nature-based solutions

## Threats

- Climate change impacts, including extreme weather events
- Environmental pollution (air, water, soil)
- Droughts and flooding
- Decline in biodiversity
- Outmigration and demographic shifts
- Unsustainable use of natural resources
- Lack of comprehensive environmental education
- Global urbanization trends lacking green growth
- Political instability
- Exclusion of youth and vulnerable groups from planning and development processes

# Closing of the Workshop



The workshop concluded with a brief reflection session, where participants shared key takeaways and impressions from the group work. Facilitators summarized the outcomes of the visioning exercise and the SWOT analysis, highlighting how the inputs gathered would serve as a foundation for drafting the Joint Strategy for Green Infrastructure (2025–2035). Participants expressed strong interest in continuing the cross-border collaboration and emphasized the importance of maintaining active stakeholder involvement throughout the strategy development process. The session ended with an outline of the next steps, including the preparation of a draft strategic framework and upcoming consultations.
The event closed with a networking lunch, providing participants an opportunity to deepen connections, exchange ideas, and discuss potential synergies for future initiatives.

## Annexes

Annex 1 – List of Participants- Includes names, institutional affiliations, and contact details.

Annex 2 – Photo Documentation
A selection of photos from the workshop sessions and networking activities.

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**ЛИСТА НА УЧЕСНИЦИ**

**Втора работилница за подготовка на Заедничка стратегија за зелена инфраструктура (2025 – 2035) за Источен плански регион, (Р. С. Македонија) и Гоце Делчев (Р. Бугарија),**
во рамките на проектот: **"ТРАНСФОРМИРАЊЕ НА УРБАНИТЕ ДЕЛОВИ СО ЗЕЛЕНА ИНФРАСТРУКТУРА" ECOSCAPE BGMK0300060**

**Дата:** 28.05.2025 година (среда)
**Место:** Хотел ОАЗА – Штип
**Време:** 10:30 часот.

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# THE GALLERY

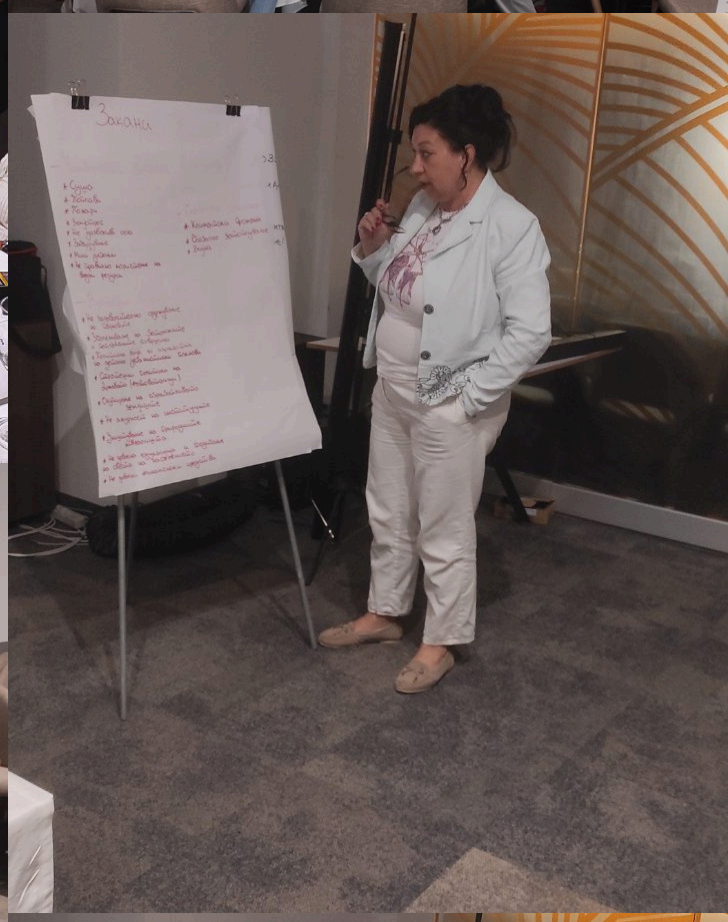


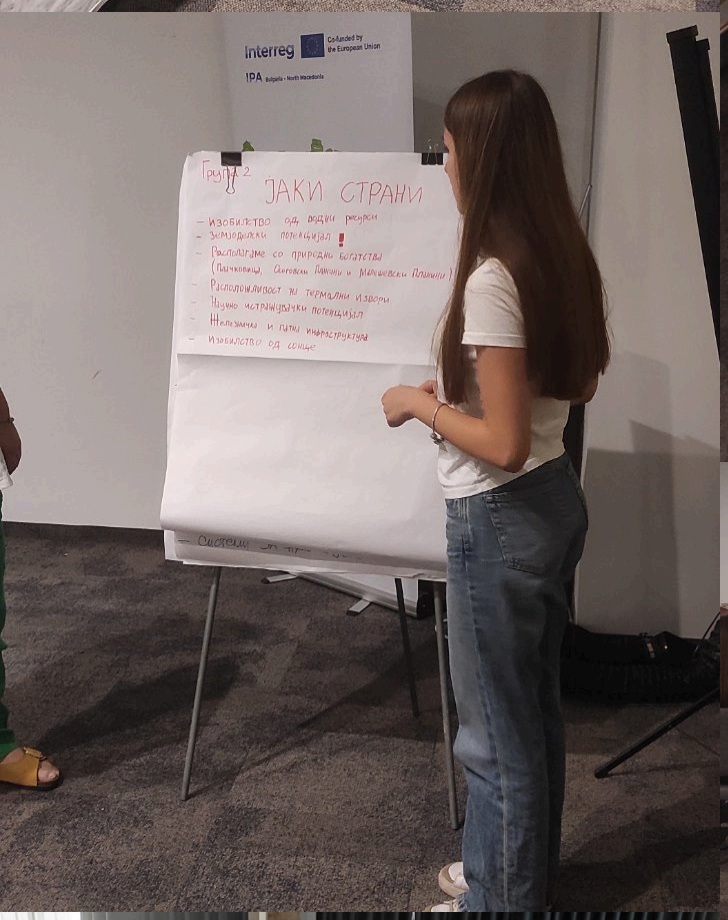

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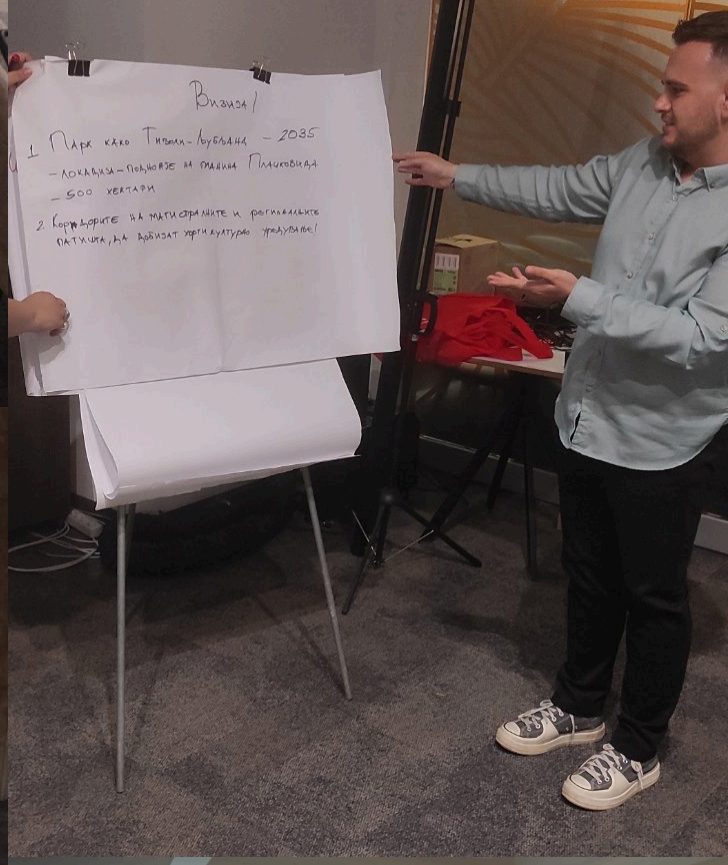

ВИЗИЈА
до 2035 КПР е
да заштити
да создаде




Закана


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Група 2
ЈАКИ СТРАНИ
– Изобилство од родни ресурси
– Земјоделски потенцијал !
– Располагаме со природни богатства (Пчиковица, Осоговски Планини и Малешевски Планини)
– Распоширеност на термални извори
– Културно историјски потенцијал
– Железничка и патна инфраструктура
– Изобилство од сонце




Визија!
1. Парк како Типови-Кубљана – 2035
– локација – подножје на планина Пчиковица
– 500 хектари
2. Коридорите на магистралните и регионалните патишта да добијат хортикултурно уредување!



