



Outline of the symposium and events

Namur (Belgium) 29-30 June, 2018

- The symposium
- **The Festive evening**
- The Bike tour

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- The symposium



Frédéric Razée opened the symposium **on behalf of Carlo Di Antonio, Minister of Public Works, Wallonia (Belgium) and cabinet minister**, who reminded us of Wallonia's role as a founder member of the European Greenways Association. He also expressed his satisfaction for the opportunity to organize the celebration in Namur, the capital of Wallonia, the city where EGWA was created.

He spoke of Wallonia and its role in the European vision for greenways, reminding his audience that since January 30, 2014 the Walloon government has adopted for RAVeL the international definition of greenways as proposed by EGWA in the Lille Declaration.

Razée reiterated Wallonia's commitment to RAVeL, in particular through its *Plan Wallon d'Investissement*, still under development, which as from 2019 will more than double the funding allocated to the development of the RAVeL and local greenways.

The first block of the symposium under the heading *EGWA's benefits - Progress in the greenways concept* was very moving. The main players who set the process in motion talked about its origins and its transatlantic inspiration; they all conveyed the passion they felt for this exciting project.

The origins

Gilbert Perrin, of EGWA and the Chemins du Rail association (Belgium), outlined the origins of the initiative. He referred to the key link with the US Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (*Why is it necessary to go to the USA to hear about Spanish Greenways*) and how the Americans made him discover other European players working along the same lines, leading to the creation of a European network. As a promotor of the Chemins du Rail association and later EGWA, Gilbert played a fundamental role in the setting up of the European association and its subsequent development.

Marc Bauvin, a member of the **cabinet of former minister Michel Lebrun (Belgium)**, stressed the key role played by Minister Lebrun at the birth and during the development of RAVeL in the Walloon region. He spoke about the origins of RAVeL greenways in Wallonia, the initial difficulties, and the keys to success, which he saw as believing in the idea, mobilizing assets, forging alliances, listening, and broadening horizons. He referred to the need to convince non-believers and to negotiate with Belgian railways to recover disused railway lines.

The importance of the continuity of the policies leading to the development of the 1500 km of RAVeL greenways there are today in the Walloon region was an underlying theme.

Paul Labovitz (USA), was invited to speak as recognition to the inspiration and help provided by Rails-to-Trails in the early days of the initiative in Europe and in the creation of the EGWA (*A vision for reconnecting America: the trigger*

towards a *European Greenways Association*). He conveys the passion he feels for the initiative and encourages everyone to continue to move forward in the expansion of the greenway network. (Presentation on video).

Joaquín Jiménez, the first president of EGWA (FFE/ADIF Spain) (*EGWA's birth; the challenges*), talked of his excitement for the project and remembered EGWA's early tasks, the key European and transatlantic stakeholders, and the essential cooperation received from players who believed in the initiative and supported such European projects as "The European Greenways Good Practices Guide", still relevant today. A large number of those present at the symposium participated in those project; we would single out for special mention Claude Bouchu, of EC Directorate General of the Environment, and the projects Interreg, REVER AMNO, and EuroVelo.

The master of ceremonies of the symposium was the well-known journalist and cycle-tourism expert, promotor and host of the cycle tour *Le Beau Vélo de Ravel* radio show, **Adrien Joveneau**.

EGWA's benefits - Progress in the greenways concept

Christoph Hendrich, East Belgium Tourism Agency (Belgium).

The importance of former railway lines and cross border connections is epitomized by the Vennbahn, a 125 km long greenway running through three countries (Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg). Inaugurated in 2013 it is already iconic. It forms part of the RAVeL and is a benchmark greenway in terms of quality and the development of a tourism product. The Vennbahn is a vital cyclo-tourism route for the touristic development of the German-speaking Community of Belgium. Christoph presented its origins, its major achievements, and examples regional and cross-border cooperation. He also spoke about the other side of the coin: how to face up to the new challenges in order to maintain and enhance visitor appeal.

From Latvia, **Janis Sijats from the Latvian Greenways Association** ***exemplified the influence of other countries on a national project in the Baltic area.***

The Latvian association was formed in 2014 as a result of the participation of its promoters in European projects with EGWA and its partners, during which they saw just how interesting greenways were. Their work is based on the conversion into greenways of an extensive heritage of disused railway lines. To this end they have set various projects in motion, of which we would highlight a cross-border Interreg project with their neighbours in Estonia, which will put some 300 km of greenways at the disposal of users in those territories in the coming years. Greenway enthusiasts are energetically promoting the initiative in other Baltic countries.

Ireland: *From community movement to national vision.*

Denis McAuliffe (Great Southern Trail) contributed his experience of a community movement for the creation of the GST greenway, a continuous effort

over more than 25 years, since 1991. The tireless work of this group has succeeded in converting a disused railway line into a greenway to be enjoyed by everyone. The Great Southern Trail (GST) has recently been taken over by Limerick City and County Council becoming Great Southern Greenway (GSG).

Mary Stack of the **Irish National Tourism Development Authority (Failte Ireland)** provided us with her country's vision of the role of greenways in future tourism growth and the growing importance of greenways in Ireland. She highlighted the steadfast commitment of the Irish tourism authority to supporting greenways and the reasons behind this commitment. Among these reasons she cited the success of the first greenway (Great Western Greenway - GWG) opened in 2011 and its positive economic impact on tourism. It generated €1,065 million per year for the local area, which was seen by the government to be a worthwhile investment.

Mary specified the essential requirements that greenways should fulfil in order to be promoted as tourism products.

Management: finance, maintenance, mobility tools

Ecopistas in Portugal: their origins, present and future

Luis Silvestre and **Filipe Beja** (former and present managers of the **National Greenways Scheme**) from **Infraestructuras de Portugal** (Portugal), presented the origin of the *Plano Nacional de Ecopistas* in 2001, with a potential of close to 1,000 km of disused railway lines, of which 220 km (23%) are currently in use as greenways, and the challenges to continuity. A key component of the recovery of these disused lines are the agreements between *Infraestructuras de Portugal*, the owner of the land, and the town councils of the territories through which the lines run, including new funding methods.

They spoke of the greater interest in the development of opportunities for the territory through “*ecopistas*”, and of the cooperation required for their development and promotion at every level, nationally and internationally.

Gordon Clarke, **National Director for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland of Sustrans (UK)**, presented the **UK-wide Sustrans initiative**, “**One Path**”.

Or how to manage success in the utilization of greenways, illustrated by a fascinating example applicable to high-use greenways. The “One Path” initiative, implemented on the award-winning Comber Greenway with excellent results, is based on the following key messages: share, respect, enjoy; all essential values of the greenway movement. He also gave a brief but valuable overview of The National Cycle Network in the UK and the Greenway Master Plan in N. Ireland. The latter plan is based on a disused railway lines and calls for 1,100 km of new greenways and a budget of €150 M.

Mirko Radovanac (**Yugo cycling campaign**) and **Marija Trmčić Bogojević** (**Ucize City Council, Serbia**) presented the first greenway in Serbia (7.3 km) using a disused railway, promoted by the Ucize municipality with the support of

YUGO CC. This has had a great success; the extension of the greenway is ongoing, connecting attractions and natural areas around the city.

Serbia has 1,300 km of disused railways and a proposal for “converting disused railways into greenways in Serbia”. The concept of greenways is attracting great interest in Serbia (and the Western Balkans countries), and several municipalities are considering the reconstruction of their sections.

Promotion, tourism, heritage

Namur at the heart of European greenways and long distance cycle routes, by **Maxime Prévot, Mayor of Namur (Belgium)** and former Minister of Public Works of the Walloon region.

The mayor of Namur presented the features that places the city of Namur at the heart of European greenways and cycle routes. It lies at the confluence of the Sambre and the Meuse where now three European cycle routes converge:

- EuroVelo 3 Trondheim – Santiago de Compostela (Way of St. James)
- EuroVelo 5 London - Brindisi (*Via Romea Francigena*)
- The international cycling route "*La Meuse à Vélo*" recently validated by the European Cyclists' Federation as EuroVelo 19.

He also referred to measures being introduced to establish Namur as a bicycle-friendly city for citizens and visitors alike, especially the creation of a new cycle/foot bridge over the Meuse to connect Namur and Jambes.

Carmen Aycart and Arantxa Hernández (former and current manager of the greenways programme, from the Spanish Railways Foundation, Spain).

They presented the Greenways in Spain programme, which has over 2,700 km of railway-based greenways and 110 stations recovered for touristic use. The programme has had an investment of over €161 million (1994-2018), only counting the recovery of infrastructure, and is a European benchmark for communication and the mobilization of stakeholders for the development and nationwide promotion of greenways.

They provided an overview ranging from the beginnings of the programme 25 years ago to the present day, focusing especially on the promotion work carried out using a wide range of methods. In this way, Spanish greenways have achieved a high level of visibility throughout Spain and internationally; by way of example they have over 40,000 FB followers. They also highlighted the programme's close collaboration with greenway managers and other stakeholders, and its involvement in Europe and support of EGWA from its inception.

Christa Mrozek, Wuppertalbewegung e.V. (Germany). *The Wuppertal greenway. Railway and industrial heritage, cycle path or greenway?*

Christa spoke of the role of the Wuppertalbewegung e.V association in the creation, maintenance and encouragement to use greenways through all kinds of activities, including, to a large extent, artistic activities. It is an excellent example of citizen mobilization in order to convert this old railway line, with a very important industrial past and heritage, into a focal point of regional community life. Actions included demonstrative actions for the construction of the greenway and fund raising by obtaining sponsorship from companies in order to co-finance the implementation of the project. Nordbastrasse Greenway is 23 km long and there are plans to extend it.

From Austria, Sylvia Gleitsmann, Niederösterreich-Werbung (Lower Austrian Tourism Board) and Christian Schrefel, FbW4 (Austria) presented the example of the Dampfross und Drahtesel Greenway, located in the outskirts of Vienna and easily reached by public transport. They describe the exceptional promotion of railway heritage: the story of the railway is told along the route, with plenty of railway relics and art objects acting as guideposts

The start of the conversion dates back to 2000 while greenway was opened in 2005, initially with a length of just 12 km. Over the years the route has been lengthened with the addition of new municipalities and now totals 50 km. New features, including the reuse of old railway signals along the way, are planned for the coming year, as well as better information about the greenway in order to attract more visitors.

Greenways, heritage and tourism: the point of view of the Walloon Region, Stéphanie Villance, General Commissariat for Tourism (Belgium)

Stéphanie talks about the development of a tourism product with the RAVeL as the underlying infrastructure for the development of cycle tourism which enables tourists to discover the rich heritage of Wallonia. The tourism offer is structured under the label “*Bienvenue vélo*”(cyclists welcome) and aims to improve services for cyclists and create a task force with the collaboration of stakeholders to enhance the quality of the cycle routes of Wallonia and improve their promotion at home and abroad.

And now...

Olga Lakimenko, from ICSEER Leontief Centre. Coordinator of Green Mobility Project Development

Olga explained how in Saint-Petersburg they also subscribe to the concept of greenways inspired by EGWA. They are working on various initiatives to promote the construction of greenways in their region and in the Baltic area. They are also striving to promote sustainable mobility for a cleaner environment, in particular via their “Green mobility” project.

EGWA and its future

Representing the European Greenways Association (Europe), Giulio Senes and Mercedes Muñoz (President and Director of the EGWA) provided an overview of the EGWA’s most recent period and of the European

projects completed or in progress in order to promote and give continuity to greenways in Europe. Abundant documentation concerning those projects is available of EGWA's website, containing information which is very practical and useful for anyone interested in the subject. This will shortly be followed by documentation on the new, recently launched European projects, [Greenways Heritage](#) and [OurWay](#).

The future is what we do now: what we sow today we will reap tomorrow.

Results are not immediate; they are seen with the passage of time, as we had the opportunity to see in the course of the day. Let's continue working every day to build a present and a future with more and better greenways in Europe, for the benefit of and accessible by everyone.

Long live European greenways!!

*Note: A presentation was planned on a national scheme, cycle routes and greenways, planning and predictions on the scale of a country with 67 million inhabitants, to be delivered by **Camille Thomé, director of Vélo & Territoires** (France), but unfortunately a rail strike in France prevented her from arriving, despite all her best efforts. Camille, we all really missed you.*

*Other colleagues from **France**, such as **Danielle Delaye**, were also unable to arrive for the same reason, while the rail strike in Belgium prevented the arrival of confirmed attendees from Brussels and other cities in Belgium. This presented a challenge for the organizers of the event, Wallonia and the Chemins du Rail association, who had to prepare an alternative transport plan to ensure that the attendees could come and go from the event. Another reason for congratulating the organization for all their efforts.*

*We would like to thank **Jean-Paul Lepetit (France)**, creator of the AF3V movement in France and founder member of EGWA, who congratulated the Association so warmly for all the work performed, and also **John Grimshaw, the founder of Sustrans**, who was present at the very first EGWA meeting and who introduced greenways into the UK, where he continues to promote new routes.*

*And let us not forget **Pedro Ortún, the former Director of Tourism of the European Commission**, whose support has been essential for the development of greenways in Europa. He has sat on the jury of the European Greenway Awards and has acted as a speaker on all those occasions when his tight schedule allowed.*

➤ The Festive Evening:



- ✓ **Gala dinner at the Théâtre de Namur**, with an amazing surprise: a street performance by the stilt jousters (*echasseurs*) of Namur, for the delight of our attendees and other visitors to Namur. This tradition harks back to 1411.
- ✓ Welcome drink on the terrace of the Théâtre de Namur for a friendly get-together.
- ✓ Musical gala dinner at a very beautiful venue, the Théâtre de Namur where, naturally, a very special birthday cake made its appearance in a spectacular presentation!

➤ The Bike tour:



- ✓ First there was a **bike ride in the morning to downtown Namur to discover the landmark sites, including a UNESCO heritage site, of this beautiful city on the banks of the Meuse and the Sambre.**
- ✓ Next came a **bike ride along the RAVeL towards Wépion, to visit a beautiful stretch of the *Meuse à Vélo*, recently recognized as EV19 and with greenway category for much of its length in Wallonia.**
- ✓ **Lunch** was taken **in Wépion**, beside the greenway at the restaurant “Le Val 9”; a delicious set meal washed down with a tasty craft beer. The tour ended with a visit to the **Strawberry Museum** where the delicious Wépion designation of origin strawberries could be tasted,

Namur’s tourist office organized and led a guided tour around the city, while the RAVeL tour was led by **Chemins du Rail**.

A great day was had by all, in excellent company!

*Here at EGWA we would like to give **our sincerest thanks** to the Walloon Region for having made possible the organization of this gathering of European greenways and to Chemins du Rail and the city of Namur, to the speakers from the various countries for giving their time so generously to share their experiences with us, and to all the attendees, experts in the subject, and friends of the greenways, who have made this event a truly memorable one.*

See further information of:

- [Programme of the symposium and presentations](#)
- [Article of the conference and events](#)
- [Photos](#)

Mercedes Muñoz,
Director, European Greenways Association
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www.aevv-egwa.org www.greenwayseurope.org



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