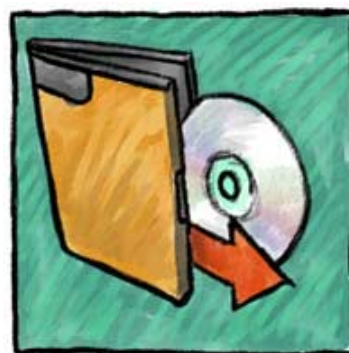


## Connecting Networks: A follow-up project to REReP 1.8, 2.1 and 2.3

### I. ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project aimed to strengthen linkages among three distinct groups of environmental professionals in South Eastern Europe: information system managers, journalists and NGO electronic network representatives. Activities built on the achievements of three respective projects<sup>1</sup> during 2001-2003, financed by the Ministry of Housing, Physical Planning and the Environment of the Netherlands. These three projects were implemented as part of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe (REReP)<sup>2</sup>. Specific activities of the Connecting Networks project are based on needs and priorities identified through direct feedback from the projects' beneficiaries and recommendations of the "Snapshot of Environmental Information Systems in South Eastern Europe"<sup>3</sup> publication.



The Connecting Networks project included two key activities. The first one was the production of an inventory of low-cost environmental software. Then, a training and strategic planning workshop was organised in Belgrade on 8-10 June, 2005.

### II. SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

#### Task 1: Development of a catalogue/inventory of open-source software

A PDF-only *inventory of low cost environmental software* was written, published and distributed by the project team.

In order to make optimum use of limited project funds, the project team was composed of a mixture of REC staff and interns (two employees and three interns).

Following the circulation of an internship position announcement and successful selection, the initial software research was performed by an IT expert at the Ministry of Environment of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Considering his tight schedule, he performed the work remotely (although at the commencement of the joint work one personal meeting was

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on these projects please visit their websites:

- Development of National Environmental Information Systems in South Eastern Europe:  
<[www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REReP/InformationSystems/](http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REReP/InformationSystems/)>
- Environmental NGO Electronic Networking in South Eastern Europe:  
<[www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE\\_Networking/](http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE_Networking/)>
- Regional Environmental Press Center for South Eastern Europe  
<[www.repc.net/](http://www.repc.net/)>

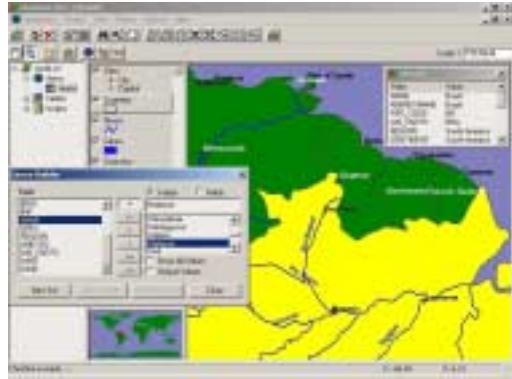
<sup>2</sup> You can read in more detail about the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe on its website at <[www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REREP/](http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REREP/)>

<sup>3</sup> This research publication was prepared as part of the Environmental Information Systems project and is downloadable from the project website (<[www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REReP/InformationSystems/](http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/REReP/InformationSystems/)>).

arranged at the REC's Szentendre head office). Specific tasks and responsibilities were outlined in detail in the *Terms of Reference*.

The intern identified more than 90 software applications through Internet research and by contacting relevant experts. In the first round of revisions, this number was reduced to 50 through computer testing and by narrowing the focus of the research. Basic information about the software and a short description were submitted to the REC for further processing through a searchable dataset file.

Using this raw material, the in-house REC project team continued the work on the detailed software review, final selection, writing and publishing. Jerome Simpson, head of the REC's Information Programme, served as supervising editor of the inventory. Gabor Heves, a project manager within the REC's Information Programme, provided peer review, text editing and quality control.



Detailed software review, final compilation and layout were performed by Evert Lammerts, an intern with the Information Programme and a university student of software engineering at Noordelijke Hogeschool Leeuwarden in the Netherlands. Writing and language editing was done by Karin Avila, an intern with the Information Programme and graduate student of environmental management at the University of San Francisco.

The inventory was first publicly presented at the project workshop described in Task 2. All participants received a colour copy. The PDF-format document was mounted online to the Connecting Networks website. It was advertised in various forums, such as the REC's quarterly magazine, Green Horizon. A short slideshow introduction was also prepared.

## **Task 2: Discussion fora/training workshop for representatives of past REReP information projects**

In line with the original project proposal, a project workshop was held on June 8-10, 2005 in Belgrade. Altogether 26 network representatives, four invited trainers and eight organisers were present.



The workshop was organised by staff at the REC head office (preparing the content of the workshop and inviting/registering participants), REC Country Office Serbia and Montenegro (preparing and selecting the conference and training facilities, arranging travel and accommodation) and invited trainers (planning and delivering the training programme within the agreed scope).

The workshop had three main elements: presentation of the software inventory and some sample software, strategic evaluation and planning, and training on geographic information systems.

The software inventory was presented using the outlines of a *PowerPoint slideshow*. Every participant also received one copy in his/her registration pack. Three software applications were presented in more detail to the audience. In response to on-site discussions and the high interest shown by the participants, two additional software programmes were presented. The software inventory received extremely positive feedback from participants.

To address the project's objective of connecting the networks of three stakeholder groups, strategic evaluation and planning took place, first by grouping participants by country, then by stakeholder groups, and then discussing findings in the plenary meeting. The forum proved to be a valuable contribution to the network's development. As a concrete outcome of these discussions, the *Belgrade Statement* was drafted and accepted.

This paper is composed of a two-page statement on "progress and priorities for environmental information management, exchange and public access in South Eastern Europe," followed by a 17-page attachment listing key issues of progress and priorities by country and by the three REReP project networks. This document will be presented at the upcoming REReP Task Force meeting in Brussels, acknowledging the Dutch support given to these networks, as well as drawing attention to the remaining priority areas.



As a third component to the workshop, a two-day training was held on geographic information systems (GIS). This training was co-sponsored and delivered by Geomatics d.o.o., the Serbian distributor of ArcGIS, the leading commercial GIS package. The training was held in the computing centre of the Belgrade School of Electrical Engineering, and covered theory as well as practice of spatial data handling.

#### **Task +1: project website**

All relevant project information was posted on the *project website*. This simple site gives access to all key background documents, the software inventory as well as workshop resource materials (*Belgrade Statement*, workshop presentations, country reports and logistical information). A photo gallery about the Belgrade workshop was also mounted online.

### **III. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND SOLUTIONS FOUND**

Compared to the broad objectives and large budget of the three previous Dutch-funded REReP projects, the current project had a much smaller budget and scope. Therefore the project team tried to bring in co-financing both to cover workday costs as well as direct costs.

Three interns were brought in. Zoran Lozanovski, an expert from the Macedonian Ministry of Environment performed basic software research (he worked remotely). Evert Lammerts performed software review and editing. Karin Avila performed language editing of the inventory and contributed to the logistic preparation of the workshop.

In an attempt to bring in further resources to the project the Serbian distributor of ESRI software products, Geomatics, volunteered to deliver the training course for free and also to cover the costs of the farewell dinner. As originally planned, the training course demonstrated the usability of alternative software applications. Although a commercial software package was presented, the training's scope was kept relatively general so that the knowledge could be readily applied to free software as well.