

Living Landscapes

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NATURE
REGIONAL
LANDSCAPE PARKS

Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks –
model regions for the sustainable development of rural areas



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model regions for the sustainable development of rural areas

Imprint

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Preface

Dear Reader,

This book gives the first overview of Regional Nature Parks and their work in the Member States of the European Union, as well as Norway and Switzerland. There are almost 900 Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks in 22 European countries. They cover around 8% of the total area of the EU-28, along with Norway and Switzerland. In this book, they are collectively referred to as 'Regional Nature Parks'. What they have in common is that they play a forward-thinking role in combining the development of rural areas, the promotion of sustainable land use and nature-friendly tourism, and education for sustainable development with the protection of biological diversity. Regional Nature Parks are landscapes full of life, where people and nature are inextricably linked. They involve local people in their work, cooperate closely with local authorities, districts and cities and support achievement of sustainability objectives in each country. They are truly European, because they realize European objectives and funding programmes in their regions and make the European idea accessible to people.

The first part of the book shows what makes Regional Nature Parks special, how they benefit Europe and why they are the focus of this book. The second part goes into the distinctive features of Regional Nature Parks in the individual countries. Regional Nature Parks are represented by the umbrella organisation for Regional Nature Parks or the responsible ministry or authority, in each participating country.

This book was written within the 'Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks' project, undertaken by the Association of German Nature Parks (Verband Deutscher Naturparke, VDN) in cooperation with the Europarc Federation between October 2014 and July 2017. The project was supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Bundesamt für Naturschutz) with funding from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety

(Bundesministeriums für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit). The book is the result of collaboration between many organisations and people that supported this project. They are the partners from the 22 countries involved in the project, hosts in eleven countries that welcomed the VDN on its travels and presented their Regional Nature Parks, as well as members of the task force accompanying the project, including Regional Nature Park representatives from seven countries. They are all named at the end of the book.

Regional Nature Parks are unique landscapes that make up the character and richness of their regions. However, they are also large scale protected areas, managed by a responsible administrative body. Regional Nature Parks are described here together for the first time as a group of protected areas in Europe. They already play an important role in integration of conservation and sustainable development of rural areas. They intend to further expand this role in years to come. We would like this book to contribute to further raising the profile of Regional Nature Parks and the work of their administrative bodies. This would help them to receive the necessary support in their countries and at European level, for the benefit of people and nature.



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Introduction

The Association of German Nature Parks (Verband Deutscher Naturparke, VDN) conducted the project 'Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks' from October 2014 to July 2017, in cooperation with EUROPARC Federation, the European umbrella organisation for protected areas. The project was supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with funding from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety. The VDN has been the umbrella organisation for Nature Parks in Germany since 1963.

The aim of the scheme was to gather knowledge about and experience of the work of protected areas with comparable responsibilities and structures to Nature Parks in Germany, in European countries. This book is the first successful attempt to give this extensive an overview of the work of Regional Nature Parks in the European Union, as well as Norway and Switzerland.

In Germany, responsibilities of Nature Parks are defined as protected areas according to § 27 of the Federal Act for the Protection of Nature. According to the law, Nature Parks, along

with National Parks and Biosphere Reserves, are large scale protected areas.

To be able to fulfil the responsibility of taking a position on Regional Nature Parks in numerous European states, as the umbrella organisation of a country, a task force to accompany the project was convened at its start. This task force is composed of representatives of Regional Nature Parks from a total of seven European states, funding bodies and the cooperation partner Europarc Federation. The members of the task force, which advised the VDN on execution of the project in all phases, are listed in the

acknowledgments on the back page of the book.

Online Survey

The task force agreed on the following criteria to identify Regional Nature Parks in the European countries.

1. Regional Nature Parks are government recognised or government-designated protected areas that have the objective of protecting nature and landscapes, especially those landscapes that are characterised by long-term human use

(cultural landscapes), with their diverse species and habitats. They therefore correspond to the description of Category V 'Protected Landscape / Seascape' according to the management criteria of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources). However, they do not necessarily have to have been assigned by the IUCN to Category V or even categorised by the IUCN at all.

2. Regional Nature Parks have the following basic areas of work and objectives:

- Conservation, protection of biological diversity and preservation and further development of a landscape shaped by sustainable use
- Sustainable tourism and recreation
- Sustainable development of rural areas
- Environmental education and education for sustainable development

Regional Nature Parks fulfil their responsibilities and achieve their objectives in cooperation with a network of regional actors and involving

regional administrative organisations (e.g. local authorities) and the population.

3. Regional Nature Parks are large scale protected areas. Apart from exceptional and duly justified cases, the median size of Regional Nature Parks within a country should be at least 3,000 – 5,000 ha.

4. Regional Nature Parks are areas that are managed by permanent, salaried staff from the organisation responsible. They are considered to be one communication and development unit. Regional Nature Parks can be managed by their own office or administration or by an organisation responsible for several protected areas in one region.

This survey and accompanying research revealed a total of almost 900 Regional Nature Parks, according to the definition in this project, in 20 States of the European Union, as well as in Norway and Switzerland. These parks are not

communicated as protected areas in all countries. In some countries, greater emphasis is placed on the parks being areas of sustainable regional development.

Regional Nature Parks cover a total of 8% of the entire area of the EU-28, as well as Norway and Switzerland. The survey questionnaire was completed by all 22 countries that have Regional Nature Parks as defined by the project. An overview of these 22 countries and their Regional Nature Parks, along with a map, are included at the end of the book.

The protected areas covered by this definition have different names. In most countries, they are called Nature Parks, Landscape Parks or Regional Parks. The project name 'Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks' was chosen because of this variety of names. For better readability, the term 'Regional Nature Parks' is used throughout the following to refer to the areas as a whole.

Study Trips

In 2016, Project Coordinator Katharina Denkinger and VDN Director Ulrich Köster made study trips to eleven countries. The aim was to learn more about the work of Regional Nature Parks in the respective countries, building on the survey. However, the study tours also enable valuable information about the people and organisations responsible for the Regional Nature Parks and facilitated exchange of knowledge and experience by meeting in person. These trips were usually three to five days long. During this time, an intensive exchange took place between representatives of the respective umbrella organisation or responsible ministry. 1–3 Regional Nature Parks were visited in each country and intensive talks held with their managers and partners. All of the countries visited and the umbrella organisations/ministries, Regional Nature Parks and partner organisations, are listed in the acknowledgements at the end of the book. The websites of the organisations visited are listed at www.european-parks.org.

Results

The key results of analysis of the survey and study trips are presented in the following two chapters. A pamphlet created in parallel with this book contains more detailed results and can be found at www.european-parks.org.

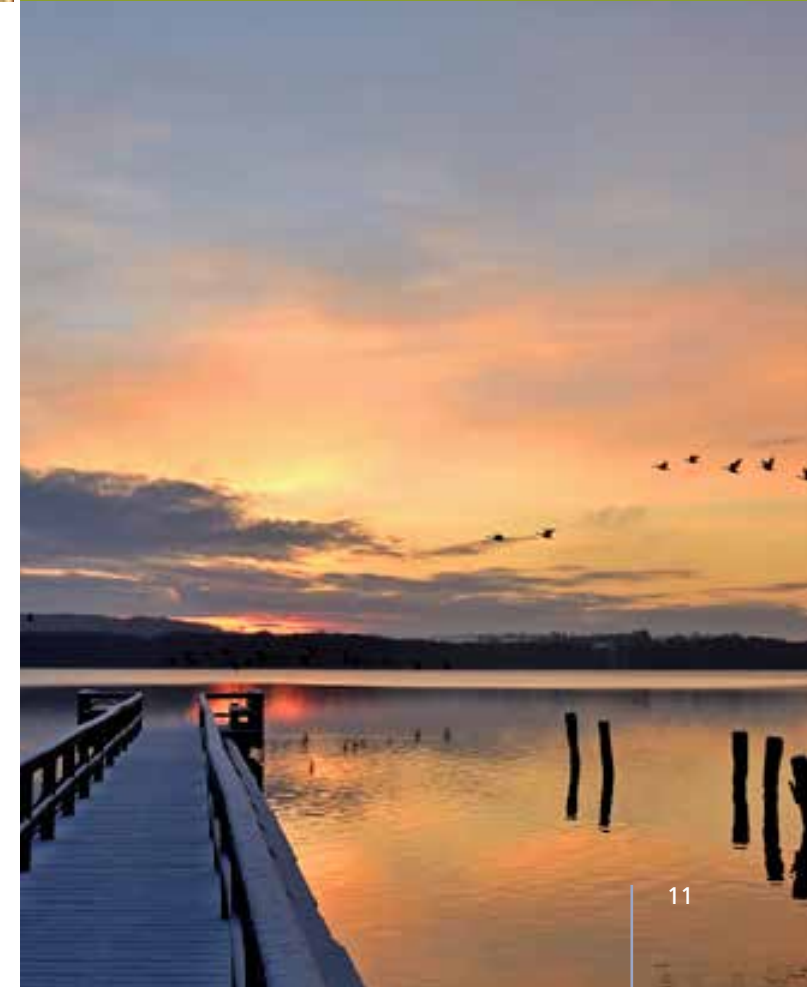
Thanks to their involvement in the survey, hospitality and numerous discussions during the study trips, the umbrella organisations of the Regional Nature Parks or the responsible ministries, as well as the individual Regional Nature Parks, have laid the foundations for this book and for successful conclusion of the project. We would therefore like to thank the many people who have supported the project in this way.

The results of the project should be viewed in connection with the approach and method used in this project: Defining the protected areas to be taken into consideration in the project, differentiated, for the first time the group of 'Regional Nature Parks' from the many protected areas in European countries. These Regional Nature Parks in European countries have common features on key points, in relation to their responsibilities and ways of working, with definite, valuable benefits for the individual countries, regions, local people and all of Europe.

It was consistently found that, full use of the benefits of Regional Nature Parks are not realised and they are often undervalued. This is especially noted at a European level. As a consequence, Regional Nature Parks sometimes lack the political and societal support that they need to develop their full potential to benefit people, nature and society. This project aims to improve the situation of Regional Nature Parks across Europe.

Analysis of this project involved detailed information from many European countries. A special viewpoint or distinctive feature of a country's Regional Nature Parks, may be absent from the book, although these were considered, time and financial constraints were prohibitive to include every detail.





Development and Tasks of Regional Nature Parks in Europe

Cultural landscapes that have been shaped by human use over centuries are very common in Europe. They are key to developing and preserving biological diversity. Many different types of landscapes and biotopes have developed in Europe, along with the associated flora and fauna, whose survival depends considerably on continued use.

In comparison with the rest of the world, Europe has most of the world's share of IUCN Category V 'Protected Landscape / Seascape' designated protected areas. This also shows how important cultural landscapes are in Europe.

The landscape and the culture associated with traditional use of the land is particularly important for people who live in rural areas.

Origins of Regional Nature Parks

Diversity of nature, landscapes and species has greatly decreased and is increasingly threatened in Europe. This is a result of growing industrialisation in European countries, along with the associated intensification of land use by farming and forestry and housing, transportation, commerce and industry. At the same time, this development has a negative impact on people,

for example, because of noise and air pollution, especially in conurbations.

It was against this background that Regional Nature Parks were created in many European countries in the 50s and 60s.

In 1956, Hamburg businessman Alfred Toepfer called for a programme for Nature Parks in Germany. His idea was well-received and rapidly implemented in all German states. The programme envisaged creation of large Nature Parks in 25 regions of Germany, with the objectives of preserving these natural environ-

ments, giving people from conurbations somewhere close by where they could relax in unspoiled nature.

Since their inception, Regional Nature Parks in Europe have always taken account of benefits for people and nature. In his programme, Toepfer took inspiration from American National Parks and from the conservation movement at the beginning of the 20th century. The first Nature Park in Germany was established in 1957 and the first 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) was created in the UK in 1956, with the ultimate aim of preserving the landscape's natural beauty. Development of Regional Nature Parks in France began in the 60s. Here, sustainable development of rural areas was at the forefront from the very beginning.

In the following years, Regional Nature Parks appeared in other European countries. As this study shows, their work focussed on comparable responsibilities and objectives. Today there are almost 900 Regional Nature Parks in 22 European countries.

Structure and Responsibilities of Regional Nature Parks

Regional Nature Parks normally each have an administrative body and a management organisation responsible for performing the functions that arise from designation or from the guidelines of the organisations that make up the administrative body.

Individual countries have developed different structural models for Regional Nature Parks. These models relate to the different political and administrative structures in the countries, among other issues.

In Germany, for example, districts and local authorities are the administrative bodies for Nature Parks in most states. Only in three states are the federal states themselves the administrative bodies of Nature Parks. Nature Parks in Germany are designated for the long term. Austria and Flanders chose a similar path for developing their Regional Nature Parks with

regard to the important role of local authorities and the long term designation. AONBs in the UK also have a support structure where local authorities play a major role.

France has developed a different model. A region's local authorities together with state and regional institutions, draw up a charter that sets down the park's development objectives. Based on this, parks are currently supported for a 12-year period, while these objectives are implemented. This is followed by evaluation of whether these objectives have been achieved. A new charter is drawn up that must be submitted again for approval at national level. The administrative body of French Regional Nature Parks is a "syndicat mixte", where local and government authorities are represented. The French Regional Nature Park model has proven to be very successful. Other countries such as Luxembourg, Belgium (Wallonia) and Switzerland have developed their Regional Nature Parks based on this model.

In the majority of participating countries, the work of Regional Nature Parks is based on a charter or, a Regional Nature Park plan that is drawn up in agreement with local authorities and interest groups.

Other countries, such as Spain and Italy, where Regional Nature Parks were established from the 70s, chose to organise Regional Nature Parks under the direct responsibility and support of the regions.

In terms of tasks, Regional Nature Parks across Europe have in common the fields of 'protection of biological diversity', 'sustainable development of rural areas', 'environmental education and education for sustainable development', as well as 'sustainable tourism and recreation'. However, the main foci can differ and change over the years.

Individual countries also have additional tasks. In France, in particular, and in countries that base their Regional Nature Parks on the French model, these are, for example, collaboration on spatial planning and focus on innovations. Regional Nature Parks in these countries explicit-

ly have the task of trying out new, future-related ideas and models for societal development. Overall, it is clear that Regional Nature Parks do not have a rigid structure. They are flexible instruments that set the main focus of their work according to the requirements of time and current political and societal objectives, within a legal framework.

Regional Nature Parks in Switzerland and Norway, which have been under development for about 10 years, are setting a new focus in European Regional Nature Park development. Involvement of citizens in designation, work and decision-making processes for Regional Nature Parks is particularly important in these countries.

Linking Local Authority and State Levels

A particular characteristic of European Regional Nature Parks is that they forge a link between local authority and state level and, in some

countries, with regional government levels in between. In most cases, their designation and remit are based on national law, as well as the local authorities' development objectives. This is the reason why governments and local authorities support and finance the management and projects of Regional Nature Parks.

Regional Nature Parks therefore implement government objectives at local level, headed by or in collaboration with local authorities and regional stakeholders, according to regional prevailing conditions and requirements. Regional Nature Parks work mostly, according to the bottom-up principle, taking particular account of the local authorities, but in a framework that is prescribed in a different way by each government.

The high level of acceptance of Regional Nature Parks among local people is something identified by the project partners and should be stressed. Regional Nature Parks not only contribute to



preserving nature and the landscape and to sustainable regional development. They also provide visible services for local people, such as creating and maintaining hiking and cycling trails, developing nature experience offers and active marketing of regional products. In this way, Regional Nature Parks make a noticeable contribution to improving people's quality of life, to a sense of attachment to the area and people's commitment to their region.

Regional Nature Parks lead people to identify with their region, which, in turn, provides the basis for citizens getting involved in the work of the Regional Nature Parks.

This acceptance, as well as management and local networks, enable Regional Nature Parks to transform state political objectives and state actions into practical actions that are tailored to suit the region.

Regional Nature Parks as Integrated Protected Areas

Large scale protected areas, such as Regional Nature Parks which are based on the principle of integration of people and nature, are becoming increasingly important in the global debate on sustainability. The strength of Regional Nature Parks lies in precisely this integrative principle. The work of Regional Nature Parks, combines conservation objectives with the aim of developing rural areas seeking to serve the interests both of nature and people. Regional Nature Parks are therefore protected areas that pursue the objectives of sustainable regional development in all three dimensions of sustainability: ecological, economic and social.

The IUCN has divided protected areas globally into categories according to management criteria and objectives. Categories include protected areas where the priority is pure conservation, such as Category II 'National Parks'. In this category, the focus is on allowing large scale ecological processes to be undisturbed in large natural or near natural areas, as a management objective. This kind of protected area follows a segregative approach, where

areas for protection and use are spatially separate from one another.

Protected areas in Category V 'Protected Landscape / Seascape' are areas where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated values. These areas therefore follow an integrative approach: Conservation and use take place in the same area and, what is more, use can even be necessary for achieving conservation objectives.

All of the Regional Nature Parks involved in the project 'Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks' are state-recognised protected areas that have the objective of protecting nature and landscapes, especially those landscapes that are characterised by long-term human use (cultural landscapes) with their diverse species and habitats. These parks correspond to IUCN Category V 'Protected Landscape / Seascape', but they do not necessarily have to have been assigned by the IUCN to Category V or even categorised by the IUCN at all. This is because not all areas have yet been listed on the IUCN list in Category V, even though the authors of this study think that their listing would be justified. Norway is currently still an exception with regard to being recognised at a national level although promoted at a Regional Level. Regional Nature Park development in Norway is very new and still in the process of evolving.

The objective of supporting sustainable land use in Regional Nature Parks is the fundamental approach for their work. This requires close cooperation between local authorities, land users and interest groups in the region. These actors can often be more concerned with aspects of further development of land use than with conservation objectives. In this case, one of the core responsibilities of Regional Nature Parks is to convey the significance of conservation objectives and the necessity of taking them into account in land use planning.



For the work of Regional Nature Parks to be accepted, it is important that they communicate to the groups of users mentioned that Regional Nature Parks are integrative, not segregative, protected areas, i.e. they do not exclusively pursue conservation interests.

In the conclusion of the project 'Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks', the authors recommend that Regional Nature Parks actively position themselves with regard to politicians, local interest groups and the public, as integrative protected areas that pursue conservation and regional development as equal tasks.

This is the best way to teach people about the natural values and the associated economic systems, culture and tradition that need to be preserved and to get them on board as supporters of the work of Regional Nature Parks.

At the heart of the work of Regional Nature Parks lies preservation and further development of values: the value of nature, landscape and biological diversity, the value of culture and





tradition that have developed in connection with the landscape, the value of people's knowledge of their region, and their identification with and commitment to their region.

Regional Nature Parks, together with the regions, are responsible for bringing these values into consciousness, preserving them and developing them. This forms the basis for building added value and valorisation that can then lead to sustainable development of the region and a high quality of life for the population.

Role and Tasks of Regional Nature Parks Today

The work of Regional Nature Parks is very important for society, because their work also always keeps in mind the good of the people in the regions. A motto for Nature Parks in Germany that is attributed to Nature Park founder Alfred Toepfer applies here: 'Nature and landscape can only be protected and preserved together with people'. Therein lies the major challenge for the administrative bodies and management organisations of Regional Nature Parks. They have to coordinate closely with local authorities and local interest groups and really get people involved in their work.

Regional Nature Parks have created good prerequisites for this, as, in most cases, they work together closely with local authorities and the local authorities are often part of the Regional Nature Park administrative structures. Involvement of local authorities, for example in drawing up a charter as a basis for the work of Regional Nature Parks, e.g. in France, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Wallonia, is institutionalised. It is foreseeable that the question of involvement of local authorities, regions, interest

groups and people in the work of Regional Nature Parks will become even more important in the coming years.

A further challenge becomes clear when we consider the necessity of sustainable development of society as a whole, for example, in order to protect the climate, preserve biological diversity and generally ensure that resources are available for the next generation. Innovative developments in Regional Nature Parks, in

conjunction with conservation and sustainable development, can act as models for development in other regions. This approach is used in France, in particular. Regional Nature Parks in France explicitly have the task of trying out new, future-related ideas and models for societal development.

Current achievements of Regional Nature Parks in the aforementioned areas are presented in detail in the next chapter.





How do Regional Nature Parks Benefit Europe and European Countries?

Introduction

There are almost 900 Regional Nature Parks in Europe, defined by this project. They are located in 22 European countries and cover 8% of the total area of the EU-28, plus Norway and Switzerland. They bring numerous benefits for nature protection, sustainable farming and development of rural areas.

Regional Nature Parks support sustainable tourism and environmental education. While preserving the beauty, biological diversity and cultural heritage of rural areas, they also support

healthcare, providing spaces for recreation for all segments of society.

The strength of Regional Nature Parks is that their work takes an integrative approach to different areas such as conservation, farming, environmental education, recreation and regional development. They carry out their projects accordingly and work together with actors from all areas.

In order to clarify the benefits of Regional Nature Parks for Europe and European countries, in individual policy areas, these are presented in

individual chapters with exemplary projects that illustrate the work of Regional Nature Parks in different areas. In actual fact, however, these policy areas are closely connected in the work of Regional Nature Parks. The following chapters also include extracts of the results of the survey conducted in this project.

The exemplary Regional Nature Park projects presented in the following chapters with a photograph and a short text come from Austria, Croatia, France, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and the UK. The authors of the

study got to know these projects on study trips in 2016. There are also examples from German Nature Parks.

There are undoubtedly numerous good project examples from Regional Nature Parks in the other ten countries too. Unfortunately, due to the time and financial conditions under which this project was carried out, we were not able to get to know these Regional Nature Parks more in-depth.

The benefits of Europe's Regional Nature Parks support numerous European Union objectives and strategies, such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy, creation of a functioning Natura 2000 Network, the Green Infrastructure, EU policy on

development of rural areas and the overarching aims of the Europa 2020 strategy. Furthermore, they help to implement the Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe (CoE), as well as helping with implementation of the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention.

In most of the participating countries, financing of measures taken by Regional Nature Parks with European Union funds, have made use of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and of the support programmes LIFE, LEADER and INTERREG.

Regional Nature Parks therefore play an important role in ensuring that European Union funds

are used to benefit people and nature in Europe's various rural areas.

On a global level, Regional Nature Parks also support Europe's contribution to international agreements, such as the United Nations 'Convention on Biological Diversity' (CBD) or the 17 'Sustainable Development Goals' of the United Nations.





Brown bears have been returned to the wild as part of the 'Ursus' LIFE Project in the Adamello Brenta Nature Park, in the Italian Alps. In order to avoid conflicts with shepherds and residents, a feasibility study was conducted and bear ambassadors were given communications training in advance.

As part of the Austrian Nature Parks' biodiversity strategy, a process involving Nature Parks and the federal states analysed and recorded the measures with which Nature Parks can contribute to implementing the Austrian Biodiversity Strategy 2020+ and thus support the EU's Biodiversity Strategy.



Preservation of Biological Diversity and Natura 2000

The United Nations International Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) from 1992 emphasises the particular importance of protected areas for preserving biological diversity. The CBD – and, above all, the “Programme of Work on Protected Areas”, which was adopted in 2004 – emphasises the importance of protected areas for securing biological diversity, especially against the background of the consequences of climate change. In the face of deteriorating environmental conditions, only intact ecosystems offer the opportunity to preserve habitats for animals and plants. They also improve stability of adjoining

areas, secure income through sustainable use of less developed regions and preserve highly attractive landscapes for future generations.

The influence of people has transformed original natural landscapes in Europe into cultural landscapes. Different uses also created habitats for a variety of species. The diversity of species and biotopes that has grown over time is the most important asset of Regional Nature Parks and is worthy of protection. This asset is now under threat from the modern, industrialised way of life. This way of life is associated with

changed types and intensities of use in farming, forestry and water management, as well as in transportation, housing and infrastructure policy. Climate change is another threat to biological diversity. It is responsible for species range shifts and loss of species.



There are numerous projects in French Regional Nature Parks for preserving and restoring ecological corridors, such as hedges, flower strips and rivers. This reconnects links between habitats with endangered species.

Diverse conservation activities in Regional Nature Parks

All Regional Nature Parks in Europe contribute to safeguarding characteristic cultural and natural landscapes and to preserving their biological diversity. They do this by supporting sustainable farming, forestry and water management, as well as with specific protection, maintenance and development measures and sometimes also by monitoring selected species.

Conservation activities in Regional Nature Parks are many and varied. They range from protection measures for particular species, such as lynx, black grouse or fire salamander, through biotope protection projects for species-rich mountain pastures, arid grasslands or ravine forests, to visitor-management measures to keep people away from sensitive biotopes. Another activity is

tackling invasive alien species. Public relations work and environmental education offers in Regional Nature Parks also contribute to conservation. Active marketing of regional specialities, such as high-quality cheeses or meat products, for example, also contributes indirectly to conservation, if it supports preservation of species-rich meadows, pastures or juniper heath, by sustainable, economical use of grassland with cattle, sheep or goats.

Close cooperation with local authorities, farmers and foresters, conservationists and other important stakeholders from their region, as well as support of the population, is crucial for successful conservation work by Regional Nature Park administrative bodies. This enables Regional Nature Parks to bring together important partners for the various measures and to win their support for joint conservation projects.

The Italian Nature Park Alpe Devero is following changes in black grouse numbers, with regular monitoring and support from hunters and volunteers. It is also working together with universities to establish possible negative effects of ski tourism on the population.



In cooperation with the national water authority, fishers and communities, Regional Park Mura Drava in Croatia is supporting preservation of the species-rich Mura River, which, as a tributary of the Danube, is part of the "Blue Heart of Europe".

The AONB Shropshire Hills in England is committed to the intact river ecology of the River Clun and therefore to protecting its population of river pearl mussels, by advising farmers in a Natura 2000 area.



Supporting international, European and national conservation objectives

In this way, Regional Nature Parks support the national conservation objectives of the individual countries, international conventions such as the CBD, the Bonn and the Berne Convention and, in particular, European strategies and directives, such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the Water Framework Directive and the EU Strategy on Green Infrastructure.

[left] The Obersauer Reservoir in the Obersauer Nature Park supplies 70% of the population of Luxembourg with clean drinking water. The Nature Park raises the population's awareness of the importance of water as a resource. It also advises farmers and communities on how they can protect groundwater by reducing pesticide use.

Furthermore, Regional Nature Parks make a significant contribution to effective implementation of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. A significant proportion of Natura 2000 sites, designated by these directives, in the individual countries are in Regional Nature Parks – 25% on average and in some countries almost 50% (sample from 16 participating EU Member States).

In some countries, such as France, Italy and Spain, Regional Nature Park administrative bodies are directly responsible for conservation management of Natura 2000 sites in their region. Thanks to good links with regional actors, Regional Nature Parks in most participating countries communicate the benefits of the Natura 2000 network to farmers and other landowners and support implementation of corresponding measures. Regional Nature Parks also contribute to communicating the topic to

the general public, e.g. with themed walking routes, information boards and events on Natura 2000.

Regional Nature Parks also play an important role in ecological connectivity and as stepping stones between strictly protected areas. This enables Regional Nature Parks to make up part of the green infrastructure that allows endangered species to spread between suitable biotopes. Regional Nature Parks implement habitat connectivity projects in 70% of participating countries. Furthermore, numerous Regional Nature Parks in Europe extend beyond national borders making a valuable contribution to connectivity among national protected area networks in Europe.



The Sava floodplains in the Croatian Nature Park Lonjsko Polje are a paradise for waterbirds. The Nature Park closely involves local people in its conservation activities and supports house-owners in the stork village of Cigoc with advice and compensation payments.



Haymaking and extensive grazing of marshland with a herd of the rare Hungarian grey cattle keep the grassland in the Vertesi Nature Park open for grassland birds. It also contributes to the mosaic of marshland and steppes at the foot of the Vértes mountain range.



Europarc España, the umbrella organisation of Spanish Nature Parks and other protected areas, publishes a comprehensive report every two years on the state of Spain's protected areas, supports creation of Natura 2000 management plans and offers further training courses on Natura 2000 management.



Regional Identity, Landscape and Culture

Regional Nature Parks in Europe are cultural landscapes with a centuries-old tradition of extensive human use. Traditional, European cultural landscapes can be mountain pasture and meadows used for farming cattle, sheep or goats in the Alps, Pyrenees and Carpathian, Dinaric and Scandinavian Mountains. But they can also be fruit orchards in Western and Central Europe or hay meadows in areas such as the Mura and Sava floodplains in Croatia.

Cultural landscapes are more than characteristic landscapes with species-rich habitats – they include, numerous cultural traditions, types of

construction, old buildings such as half-timbered houses, castles and churches, as well as regional specialties and products associated with cultivation of the landscape.

Regional Nature Parks are responsible for shaping mutual cooperation between people and nature within the regions. Their aim is to preserve the characteristic landscapes with their valuable species and biotopes and to enable the regions, with their traditions, culture and regional products, to continue developing. Landscape protection is a fundamental component of the work of Regional Nature Parks.

They are concerned with preserving diversity of species and habitats, as well as the beauty, experiential and recreational value of the landscape highlighting the overall value for people and the region. Regional identity of the population is inextricably linked with the landscape.

European Landscape Convention

In most participating countries, the European Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe (CoE) is an important basis for landscape protection by Regional Nature Parks. The

[top] Spanish Nature Park Montseny is diversely committed to preserving the plateaux of the Montseny mountain range. In cooperation with shepherds and scientists, it tests various methods for keeping the landscape open, improves conditions for sheep farming in the mountains and communicates to visitors the biological and cultural value of this unique landscape.

[bottom] Like all Regional Nature Parks in France, Montagne de Reims also takes on spatial and landscape planning tasks. It assists the town council with development plans, draws up innovative local concepts and even has its own architect, who advises residents on typical construction methods for the region.



[top] Nature Park Mëllerdall in Luxembourg supports preservation of ecologically valuable fruit orchards and their variety of species, by supporting fruit growers and cider-making with product marketing and by offering pruning courses for residents.

[bottom] The Landscape Convention is centrally important to the work of Norwegian Regional Parks – it involves residents closely in recording and assessing information about the countryside, as here in Regional Park Nærøyfjorden.

Convention emphasises the value of the landscape for society and people. It also offers a comprehensive definition of the concept of landscape and deals with support, protection, care and design of European landscapes. It is important to create societal awareness of the value of landscapes, of their role and of the changes that affect them. Promotion of landscape-related values and landscape protection issues in school teaching, and analysis of the features of landscapes and the forces and pressures that change them, are also important. The work of Regional Nature Parks makes an essential contribution to implementing the European Landscape Convention.

Landscape protection and spatial planning

In the first step, landscape protection is often associated with ascertaining which are the typical elements characterise the landscape and where they occur. Together with local authorities and responsible authorities, it is possible to analyse which landscape elements require protection or further development. In many European countries, e.g. France, Belgium, Spain, Lithuania, Slovakia and Poland, Regional Nature Parks also have responsibilities in the sphere of spatial planning. In these countries, assessment of Regional Nature Parks is part of spatial and landscape planning. In France, for example, planning law states that the stipulations of the park charter must be taken into consideration in local authority and regional planning. Regional Nature Parks in France are also important catalysts for land use planning and regional development. Some employ their own architects. They advise local authorities on drawing up development plans and on the issue of land use, as well as homeowners on use of traditional, regional construction methods. Regional Nature Parks in Spain and Switzerland also support regional construction methods and advise homeowners. In Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania, Regional Nature Parks are involved in approval of building projects.

'Home is where the heart is' - the logo of Norwegian Regional Park Valdres picks up the runic character of the medieval stave church, which is characteristic of the region, and appeals to young and old.



Together with school classes and refugees Swiss Regional Nature Park Chasseral has mapped the drystone walls that characterise the landscape and rebuilt them as an important habitat for insects and lizards.



The 'Hortus urbis' city park in Italian Nature Park Appia Antica is a popular meeting place for the people of Rome and shows young people, in particular, the joys of fruit and vegetable growing.



Keeping traditions alive: Luxembourg Nature Park Obersauer has restored this former woollen mill and expanded it into a Nature Park centre - high-quality woollen products are now produced here again and marketed under the Regional Nature Park label 'Duch vum Séi' (cloth from the lake).



Value of landscapes for regional identity and culture

In Regional Nature Parks within rural areas of European countries, landscapes and associated culture, with festivals and traditions, are key factors with which large sections of the population identify and associate with their Region.

At the same time, these identification points are currently under great pressure: the landscape is being harmed by excessive use, development and infrastructure measures. Traditional culture and customs are disappearing because of mechanisation in farming and trades and from societal changes. Furthermore, population is decreasing in many rural areas, because they are too far away from the employment opportunities offered by large towns and cities.

Rural regions have to strike a balance between dynamic development and preserving their own identity. The work of Regional Nature Parks contributes to contemporary preservation and continued development of landscape, culture and traditions. Regional Nature Parks are therefore where tradition and modernity forge a successful connection. In an increasingly globalised world, they offer anchor points for people to identify with their region, where they feel at home.

Regional Nature Parks help people to feel an attachment to their home region, with cultural offers such as concerts, readings and contemporary art exhibitions, as well as educational work. This increases the chance that people will then become actively involved in and for their region. Active involvement of local authorities, farmers

and foresters, tradesmen and women, interest groups and residents in the work of European Regional Nature Parks is an important building block for the population's identification with the Regional Nature Park. It is therefore also important in the creation of a regional identity, as well as for preservation and contemporary development of landscape, culture and traditions.



In the 'Pays'art' art project, artists put the landscape of French Regional Nature Park Montagne de Reims in the limelight for residents. The aim of the art installation is to get visitors to think about the landscape and to examine which aspects, for them, are worthy of protection.



Sustainable Farming, Forestry and Water Management

Generations of farmers, forest owners, foresters, winegrowers and other land users have contributed to creating the characteristic cultural landscapes in Europe's Regional Nature Parks. Continuation of environmentally friendly land use in farming and forestry, wine-growing and beyond is a prerequisite for preservation and further development of these landscapes.

However, as land use has become more intensive and as industrial society developed in European countries, this has seriously harmed landscapes and their variety of species. Numerous studies

show that loss of biodiversity in Europe in recent decades although particularly high in agricultural land, has also taken place in forests and bodies of water. Intensification of farming, unsustainable use of forests and river training measures are responsible for the loss of important pollinators such as bees and butterflies, rare bird species such as the lesser spotted eagle or migratory fish species like the European eel.

How do Regional Nature Parks contribute to environmentally friendly land use?

Environmentally friendly farming

Regional Nature Parks see themselves as partners of farmers and forest owners, as well as of land users in general. In around 80% of participating countries, Regional Nature Parks advise farmers and other actors on how to farm sustainably. In more than 80% of participating countries, Regional Nature Parks conduct joint projects with actors from farming and forestry.

Regional Nature Parks support traditional forms of land use and sustainable land-use methods,



With the support of the AONB Shropshire Hills in England, a Marches Meadow Group was set up, in which farmers and other landowners sign up to extensive meadow management. The hillside pasture is home to an abundance of plant and insect species and is the habitat of the Eurasian curlew, as well as other ground nesting birds.



[top] Historic alternative forest uses, such as silvopasture in southern Germany (shown above) and forest conservation projects are important building blocks of semi-natural forest management in Regional Nature Parks and are practised in close consultation with forest owners.

[centre] Spanish Nature Park Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa in Catalonia advises farmers on environmentally friendly use of fertilisers, extensive grazing and organic farming.

[bottom] High-quality alpine milk (Stølsmjølk) is produced on the mountain pasture of the Valdres Regional Park during Norway's few summer months. The park is working to preserve alpine farming, which is under great threat, by marketing dairy products and supporting an adequate income for dairy farmers.

such as organic farming. They therefore contribute to preserving biodiversity in agricultural landscapes and forests. For example, in Swiss Regional Nature Parks, the proportion of areas that are farmed according to the criteria for organic farming or where biodiversity is specifically supported, is higher than in the surrounding landscape.

In Regional Nature Parks, floriferous mountain pasture, for example, is obtained by extensive use as pasture for cattle and for hay-making. Herds of sheep ensure the survival of the heathland or oligotrophic or arid grassland that characterise the landscape. Characteristic drystone walls in sustainably cultivated vineyards are preserved. They have been built over the course of centuries and provide a habitat for plant and animal species that require warmth, as well as giving the landscape a charming appearance.

Regional Nature Park administrations are actively involved in these and similar activities as coordinators, in close cooperation with farmers and foresters and with the agreement of landowners. The parks sometimes also undertake landscape conservation work or pasturing activities directly. In this way, they support regular, environmentally friendly cultivation that is necessary in these biotopes for preserving diversity of species.

Regional Nature Parks also support sustainable farming with measures for commercial exploitation of regional products. This is often in conjunction with Regional Nature Park Brands and Regional Nature Park Partner Businesses, as well as publicity work and events such as Regional Nature Park Markets. This is explained in more detail in the chapter 'Sustainable Development of Rural Areas'.

Semi-natural water bodies

Regional Nature Parks support implementation of the European Union Water Framework Directive. They remove barriers in streams and rivers to allow fish species to migrate again and to restore the natural course of flowing water

bodies. Riparian boundary strips are exempt from agricultural use, so the water bodies there have, where possible, more room to develop naturally. Measures are also being taken to rehydrate wet areas that were drained decades ago, such as moors and marshland. The aim is to restore the original species-rich habitats and valuable roosting and breeding areas for birds.

Advising farmers on reducing pesticide use also makes an important contribution to improving water quality. The objective is to restore water bodies and entire river basins, as well as ponds and lakes, and the plant and animal species that live in them, to good ecological condition, with good water quality, from source to estuary.

The special variety of herbs in the mountain pastures of the Italian Nature Park Alpe Devero, which is 2,000m above sea level, make the unique flavour of Bettelmatt cheese. The park organises events where residents and tourists can experience for themselves cheese production in Nature Park partner businesses.



The Croatian Nature Park Lonjsko Polje supports preservation of the ancient, semi-wild Turopolje breed of pig. The pigs can dive and eat mussels, making them perfectly adapted to the flooded areas of the Sava floodplains.



In the 'Concours des Prairies Fleuries' (meadow championships), farmers are awarded prizes for particularly species-rich grassland and pastureland. The result of initiatives of French Regional Nature Parks and National Parks, the competition in France has now made it to national level – over 500 farmers and 250 experts from agronomy, ecology and bee-keeping have taken part since 2010.



Once a forgotten variety of fruit, the Hirschbirne has now become the star of the region and of the Austrian Nature Park Pöllauer Tal. The beautifully flowering standard trees bring in thousands of visitors in the spring. The marketing of Regional Hirschbirne specialities such as schnapps, juice and chocolate generates a lot of added value for the region.



Nature Park economics experts in the French Regional Nature Park Baronnies provençales. In the InnovAlps project, alparc, together with three pilot Regional Nature Parks from France, Austria and Switzerland, analyse and develop innovative approaches to regional development in Alpine park regions.



Sustainable Development of Rural Areas

Europe's rural areas provide the life support system of our continent. They are where natural resources for food, water, energy and raw materials come from, as well as the vital resource of biological diversity. Rural areas are relaxation and recreation spaces for urban centres, places to live and work, and places of cultural diversity and regional identity. The heart of Europe beats in its rural areas.

Europe's rural areas have been under intense pressure for years. They are partly subject to creeping urbanisation because of their proximity to urban centres; partly subject to creeping loss

of infrastructure and population because of their distance from urban centres and lack of investment and employment opportunities.

Europe's Regional Nature Parks are located in rural areas and make important contributions to their sustainable development, so that they remain "Living Landscapes".

Regional Nature Parks support landscape-related development of tourism, as well as regional added value and local economic cycles. They are partners for sustainable development of mobility and transportation and use of renewable energies that does not harm nature or the

landscape. Their strength is that they consider and integrate different fields of work in connection with each other. In Regional Nature Parks, conservation is a basis for tourism offers but, at the same time, visitor guidance contributes to conservation. Some of the benefits of Regional Nature Parks for rural areas are examined in more detail in other chapters of the book.

The work of Regional Nature Parks is based on close cooperation with local authorities, providing a valuable shared platform for cooperation. There are also networks with actors from farming and forestry, tourism, hotels, restaurants,



German Nature Parks Südschwarzwald and Schwarzwald Mitte/Nord market regional products with campaigns such as 'Nature Park brunch', Nature Park trade fairs with cookery demonstrations and Nature Park markets. They also work together with 'Nature Park hosts'.

conservation, culture and many more. Over 60% of participating countries say that there are many activities in their Regional Nature Parks that are aimed at connecting different actors in the rural area.

In this way, Europe's Regional Nature Parks support the objectives of EU policy on development of rural areas and successfully use European funding for their work, including funding from the European Regional Development Fund

(EFRE) and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Additional added value achieved by Regional Nature Parks and the associated positive economic effects are clearly proven by studies from several countries, such as Germany, France, the UK, Austria and Switzerland.

Regional products

Regional Nature Parks support commercial exploitation of high-quality, regional products, e.g. from agriculture. This supports regional added value, creates local jobs and contributes to preserving landscapes, such as species-rich meadows and pastures. In turn, the region's characteristic habitats, such as orchards and grassland, attract tourists.

Over 60% of the countries involved have regional and/or national Regional Nature Park brands for commercial exploitation of regional products, e.g. for the Swiss Parks or the Lazio Regional Park in Italy, with clearly defined criteria.

By enjoying these Regional Nature Park products, buyers make a culinary contribution to supporting conservation. For example, buying high-quality cheese indirectly contributes to preservation of grassland. Furthermore, regional products encourage producers and consumers to identify with their region, help to spread the idea of conservation and contribute to climate protection with short transportation routes. Mainstreaming individual products in a region, such as the Hirschbirne pear in the Austrian Pöllauer Tal Regional Nature Park is equally beneficial to regional identity, economic development and conservation.

Processing and refinement of regional products by winegrowers or in distilleries or breweries creates additional added value that remains in the region.

Regional Nature Parks as cooperation models

Regional Nature Parks often work closely together in networks with partners such as farmers and foresters, hotels and restaurants and other actors and businesses. In over 50% of participating countries, appropriate businesses that meet certain sustainability criteria can be designated as Regional Nature Park partner businesses. These partner businesses help to inform residents and guests about the Regional Nature Park. For their part, the participating businesses benefit from swapping ideas with other partner businesses in the network.

Regional products and partner networks provide a good basis for special regional festivals and markets, with which Regional Nature Parks support the coming together of a region's residents and visitors. Good examples of this are the Rakfisk Festival in Naeroyfjorden Regional Park in Norway, the Regional Nature Park festival in the Our Regional Nature Park, Luxembourg, or the Nature Park Markets of the Nature Parks in Baden-Württemberg, Germany.

Innovative and sustainable development

Regional Nature Parks are model regions for sustainable development. This is made particularly clear by the slogan of the French Regional Nature Parks, 'Une autre vie s'invent ici' ('Creating now another way of living'). Regional Nature Parks look for and test out regional solutions to global problems. This results in innovative approaches to climate protection, preservation of cultural and biological diversity of rural areas and new job opportunities that are optimally suited to the conditions in the region. To this end, Regional Nature Parks in some countries cooperate closely with universities and other scientific institutions.

Innovative projects at the interface between conservation, tourism, education and regional development are particularly important for the work of Regional Nature Parks in more than 60% of participating countries.

Innovative approaches are important, especially for economic development of Europe's mountainous regions in the Alps, Pyrenees, Carpathian, Dinaric and Scandinavian Mountains. For example, this was also shown by the 'InnovAlps' project by Alparc, the Alpine Network of Protected Areas (Netzwerk Alpiner Schutzgebiete). The project investigated the particular challenges of regional development in Alpine parks and developed innovative offers together with three pilot Regional Nature Parks in France, Austria and Switzerland.

Europe's Regional Nature Parks therefore support sustainable development of rural areas in many different ways. They create job opportunities as well as part-time work in tourism and agriculture and contribute to thriving rural regions. People and communities in Europe's rural areas therefore benefit greatly from their Regional Nature Parks.



[top] Up to 30,000 visitors attend the Rakfisk Festival in the Norwegian Regional Park Valdres every year. Products from the region and Rakfisk, a speciality made from fermented fish, are on sale at the festival.

[bottom] Farmers from the region sell their products in 'Ferme du Pilat' in the French Regional Nature Park Pilat. This supports regional economic cycles.



[left] During migration, up to 50,000 wild geese stop over on the Tata lake in the Hungarian Nature Park Gerecse. The annual Wild Goose Festival draws in large numbers of visitors.

[right] Many European countries and regions have labels for park products, such as here, in Switzerland.



Sustainable Tourism

Tourism is an important factor in the creation of added value in Europe. The tourist industry in Europe employs around 12 million people and produces around 3,6% of total European turnover. In 2016, more than 619 million people travelled to Europe or to other countries within Europe, and that number is rising. And then there are the many visitors who travel or make day trips within the individual countries. Given the increasing pressure on areas with a rich natural and cultural offer, environmentally and socially sustainable tourism is becoming increasingly important.

Europe's Regional Nature Parks are important actors in developing sustainable tourism in the regions. Around 90% of participating countries regard the issue of 'Sustainable Tourism and Recreation' as an important area of responsibility of Regional Nature Parks. The issue is becoming increasingly relevant.

Protecting nature and landscape and preserving habitats are priorities for Regional Nature Parks. By preserving impressive natural and cultural landscapes, with their diversity of species, Regional Nature Parks simultaneously also secure the basis for tourism. Tourist infrastructures

developed by the protected areas enable guests to experience nature. These infrastructures include, e.g. signposted networks of routes for walkers or cyclists, nature discovery trails, information boards, visitor centres and guided tours.

In almost all countries, Regional Nature Parks are responsible for setting up and maintaining an infrastructure for recreation, such as walking and cycling routes. These activities mean Regional Nature Parks can be relied upon to provide high-quality experiences in nature and sustainable and natural tourism.

[top] Visitors can explore the hot karst springs in the Hungarian Nature Park Gerecse via a nature trail. The karst springs are an important habitat for endangered bird, amphibian and plant species.

[centre] Numerous Regional Nature Park partner businesses who have dedicated themselves to sustainable tourism, such as 'Alpe Crampio' in the Italian Nature Park Alpe Devero, have now been awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.

[bottom] In the energy-independent restaurant 'El Bellver' in the Spanish Nature Park Montseny, guests can enjoy the finest cuisine from ancient grain and vegetable varieties and learn about the Nature Park. El Bellver is a park partner according to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.

In over three quarters of countries, involvement of Regional Nature Parks goes beyond infrastructure measures and leads to joint development of offers with regional or national tourism partners. When it comes to developing innovative offers, Regional Nature Parks play an important role as an interface between different interest groups, such as tourism, education, regional development and conservation.

To guarantee that leisure offers are sustainable for nature and the landscape, Regional Nature Parks show guests how to sustainably enjoy sports. To prevent critical levels from being exceeded in sensitive, natural landscapes and habitats, flows of visitors are managed in terms of both time and space. Regional Nature Parks take measures to achieve this, such as route infrastructures or by offering guided tours.

Along with nature compatibility, the issue of sustainable tourism in Regional Nature Parks is often associated with other areas of work. For

example, trained nature and landscape guides also offer fascinating tours on environmental education issues. Cooperation with local businesses involves companies that support regional added value chains in shaping the tourism offer. Regional Nature Parks use initiatives and projects to position current socially relevant issues in their tourist networks. For example, this includes issues such as inclusion, and ensuring that nature can be experienced by all groups of visitors, or the topic of climate-neutral tourism.

Regional Nature Parks are not normally responsible for marketing tourist offers. This responsibility is assumed by national or regional destination marketing organisations. Nevertheless, Regional Nature Parks support communication of tourist offers through their work in the sphere of communications and PR with examples such as the development of special apps, or their websites or social media activities.

In order to support European protected areas in developing sustainable tourism, the 'European Charter for Sustainable Tourism' was developed by the EUROPARC Federation. The Charter is a management instrument that supports protected areas in designing sustainable tourist activities. It aims to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the areas and to shape development of tourism in the interests of the environment, local population, tour companies and visitors. Protected areas that want to accede to the Charter have to implement various measures. These include, for example, initiation of network forum and development of a strategy and an action plan involving all partners including businesses. The second part of the Charter is concerned with supporting and designating partner businesses from the protected areas. These businesses share the views of the Charter and practise and continue to develop sustainable tourism in their operations. The third part of the Charter recognises sustainable tour operators in the region. These businesses express their

agreement with the objectives of the Charter and the protected areas, especially through raising awareness among their customers, i.e. visitors to the protected areas, about natural and environmental issues in the areas visited. Protected areas from 19 countries have so far signed up to the Charter. Spain, Italy, France and the UK are particularly active.

Activities for developing sustainable tourism in Regional Nature Parks give visitors attractive opportunities to experience nature, landscape and regional culture in an attractive way. Offers are sustainable and high-quality. Visitors receive information about the Regional Nature Park and its objectives and regional added value supports job opportunities and quality of life in the region.



On the 'experience tour with fisherman and estate chef on Schaalsee' in the German Nature Park Lauenburgische Seen, guests accompany a fisherman while he fishes, prepare the fish with an estate chef and, at the same time, learn about conservation, sustainable use and regional cuisine.



The Swiss Parks Innotour Project supported Nature Parks in the development of tourist offers that made the park's special landscape, natural and cultural features into multi-sensory experiences for guests, and contribute to regional added value.



Recreation and Health

The growing strain on people in their everyday working life and the simultaneously increasing awareness of health and wellbeing create a need for peace, relaxation and a healthy lifestyle.

Regional Nature Parks satisfy this need and offer a wide range of recreation and health offers, including numerous offers for actively experiencing nature by walking and cycling routes or by canoe. These offers benefit local people, as well as visitors to Regional Nature Parks. Natural or semi-natural landscapes offer people space for activity, peace and quiet and social contact.

Studies in recent years have shown that exercise and experiences in nature contribute to keeping people healthy, boosting their creative energies, as well as their well-being and satisfaction with life. Spending time in nature has positive effects.

These include relief from symptoms of ADHD or dementia, support of recovery after accidents or illnesses such as depression, as well as improvement in rehabilitation of patients suffering from burn-out or addiction. By enabling people to experience nature and the landscape, Regional Nature Parks can therefore preventively support and maintain health,

prevent deterioration of existing conditions and improve well-being and quality of life even in people with a health condition.

A significant health benefit of spending time in nature is that it encourages exercise. Semi-natural and varied surroundings are the most effective in this respect. Many Regional Nature Parks offer walks that focus on health, with a Regional Nature Park guide. Offers range from mindfulness hikes and yoga tours to tours with a healthy eating theme, followed by making local products together. The topic of health also plays a role in the infrastructure measures of



'Flowering Health' (Blühende Gesundheit) - under this theme, Styrian Nature Parks in Austria show that nature and landscape, with their powers and energies, are the foundations for health.



Hiking for health. Together with its partners, AONB Lincolnshire Wolds in England holds the Lincolnshire Wolds Walking Festival once a year. It plays host to up to 5,000 enthusiastic participants every year.



Numerous European Regional Nature Parks are located near cities, such as Appia Antica Nature Park at the gates of Rome. They offer residents important places for relaxation and exercise.



Europe's Regional Nature Parks, such as the German Nature Park Lahn-Dill-Bergland, offer people an attractive experiential and recreational infrastructure, with their numerous hiking and cycling trails, rest facilities, nature and experience trails.

Regional Nature Parks, for example, paths are created with healthy facilities, such as a Kneipp pool.

Some Regional Nature Parks work closely together with social institutions, hospitals or other actors from the health sector, in order to develop programmes for special target groups. Walks and nature experiences for people with dementia and their families are an example of this. People who participate in Regional Nature Park offers find out how nature can have a positive effect on their health.

AONB 's in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are recognised as a type of Regional Nature Parks by this project. They encapsulate the healthy influence of their work by calling themselves the 'Natural Health Service', making reference to the 'National Health Service'. They therefore emphasise the beneficial effect on health of the high-quality natural surroundings offered by the AONB.

Under the motto 'Flowering Health' (Blühende Gesundheit), Styrian Regional Nature Parks in Austria emphasise that Regional Nature Parks are predestined to become healthy areas. In Regional Nature Parks, nature is a life source with its remedies and healing powers that interacts with the human being at the centre. Regional Nature Parks also contribute to people's health because they contain 'nature's medicine cabinet'. Many medicinal plants, such as the protected arnica that grows on mountain pasture, depend on intact biotopes. By preserving these habitats, Regional Nature Parks help to safeguard the ecosystem services of unspoilt nature. Provision of clean drinking water and clear air using the filtration effect of the ground and forests is another health-related benefit.

Let the peace wash over you, take a Kneipp cure in the fresh spring water and enjoy the stunning view - it's all possible at the Schwandalpweiher Kneipp facilities in the Entlebuch Regional Nature Park and UNESCO Biosphere in Switzerland.



Involving sportsmen and other interest groups, German Geo-Nature Park Bergstraße-Odenwald has developed an extensive network of mountain biking trails that leave out sensitive areas. This prevents conflicts with other groups of forest users and protects sensitive natural areas that are susceptible to harm.



In the Nature Park House of Luxembourg Nature Park Our, visitors can learn with all of their senses about the origin of the landscape, nature and environmentally friendly energy supply.



Monti Lucretili Nature Park in Lazio, Italy, actively involves children in the work of the park. As 'young rangers', they can do tours through the park or open exhibitions, for example.



Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development

Regional Nature Parks are ideal places to learn about and experience nature, the environment and sustainability. With their many offers for environmental education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Regional Nature Parks reach broad sections of the population. They also make important contributions to conservation, environmental protection and sustainable development.

With their environmental education offers, Regional Nature Parks give children, young people and adults information and teach them about connectivity, not just concerning

habitats and their plant and animal life, but also the history and culture of the region. Multi-sensory experiences prompt visitors to interact with nature responsibly and to experience their environment consciously. Studies show that people need knowledge and experience of nature, in order to be willing to behave considerately towards nature and the environment. The aim is therefore to raise awareness of what makes the region unique among visitors to Regional Nature Parks. Education for Sustainable Development teaches skills for actively and responsibly shaping the future.

Regional Nature Parks across the whole of Europe work closely together with schools and other public educational establishments. They are important out-of-school places of learning for these schools and offer pupils a wide variety of experiences outside the classroom. Exciting study trips into different habitats arouse pupils' interest in natural processes. Issues about nature and landscape, farming and forestry, as well as cultural topics, such as art and trades, history, legends and customs of the region are picked up in cooperation with additional partners such as nature and landscape guides, farmers, fores-



In numerous campaigns, volunteers support mountain pasture and biotope maintenance projects in the Austrian Nature Park Karwendel, as part of the 'Team Karwendel' volunteers' platform.

ters or tradesmen and women. This gives pupils a complete picture of their own environment.

In some countries, such as Austria and Germany, schools and kindergartens that enter into long-term cooperation with Regional Nature Parks are designated as Nature Park Schools or Nature Park Kindergartens. These schools permanently include the themes of Nature Parks in their work, with a high degree of practical relevance. In Austria, the Educational Board of Burgenland and the Teacher Training College have also recognised the benefits of this cooperation and support designation of Nature Park Schools with numerous offers, such as development support, further training seminars and networking meetings for head teachers.

Regional Nature Parks support teachers in schools, kindergartens and other educational establishments with their know-how. They provide teaching materials and arrange contact with partners that are not connected to schools. This makes them valuable partners for schools in the sphere of Education for Sustainable Development.

However, Regional Nature Parks are also important actors for environmental education, for young and old, outside of schools. Visitor centres provide comprehensive information about the region and the natural resources of its landscapes, as well as about the work and responsibilities of Regional Nature Parks.

Regional Nature Parks produce pamphlets and maps, exhibitions and multimedia presenta-

tions for this purpose. Regional Nature Park guides and rangers invite visitors to come with them and discover the most beautiful corners of the Regional Nature Park. Unusual routes such as moorland or treetop paths or special sensory trails give visitors a different perspective on nature. Mobile navigation systems are also becoming increasingly important.

Regional Nature Parks also offer regular group activities and camps especially for children and young people. They enable them to continuously gather many and varied experiences of nature, e.g. as Junior Rangers. Local young people and adults can also become actively involved in their region and conservation in volunteering projects. For example, this could involve haymaking, tree planting, building information towers or maintaining information trails. Being actively involved in the Regional Nature Park fills people with enthusiasm. It conveys a fundamental and lasting awareness of nature and landscape.

Europe's Regional Nature Parks set standards in Education for Sustainable Development, for example by cooperating with schools and kindergartens or with guided excursions for families, nature experience camps or voluntary projects. They are therefore particularly well-placed to inform the population about the objectives of the European Union in the sphere of biodiversity, Natura 2000 and sustainable development. Regional Nature Parks work together across borders and support European exchange programmes such as Erasmus+. They therefore contribute to cohesion within the EU and to transnational exchange of knowledge and experience.

When cranes migrate during autumn, the Landscape Parks of West Pomerania in Poland, in cooperation with the German National Park Unteres Odertal, hold the German-Polish crane week, with numerous activities for children and adults.



In close cooperation with out-of-school partners such as bee-keepers, biologists and farmers, Nature Park School St. Martin in Raab Nature Park in Austria, teaches pupils about nature and the region where they live. Nature Park Schools in Burgenland are closely advised and supported by the State Educational Board and the Teacher Training College.



[top] On study trips by Croatian Regional Park Mura Drava, pupils can get to know the fascinating flora and fauna of the Mura River, experience old domestic animal breeds such as Medimurje horses and watch waterbirds from the observation tower built by the park.

[left] In numerous German Nature Parks, certified nature and landscape guides teach people of all ages about topics such as plant and animal species, biotopes, landscape history and regional culture, on study trips and with environmental education offers.



Climate Change Mitigation and Adaption

With their work in different areas, Regional Nature Parks contribute to mitigation against climate change. Protecting existing moors, forests and grassland areas prevents the release of carbon dioxide that is bound in the plants and soil there. Active measures for renaturation of moors or grassland support binding of carbon dioxide in these biotopes.

As a result of development of attractive recreation and nature experience offers, more people are taking advantage of recreation and holiday offers near where they live, instead of travelling to regions that are further away. Regional

Nature Parks therefore contribute to reducing the volume of traffic and help to conserve fossil energy resources and reduce emissions that are harmful to the climate. This effect is intensified by the fact that Regional Nature Parks are often also partners for sustainable mobility and transportation development and support arrival by public transport, and facilitate mobility within the region using public transport, car sharing or electric bikes.

Transportation routes can be shortened and volume of traffic therefore reduced by active marketing of regional products and strengthen-

ing of general, regional economic cycles. Furthermore, Regional Nature Parks raise awareness among regional partners from commerce and industry, e.g. hotels and restaurants, of the issue of 'climate protection' and provide them with support for taking appropriate measures.

Regional Nature Parks support nature and landscape sustainable use of renewable energies and renewable raw materials, such as use of wood as fuel for wood pellet heating systems and for building construction. They implement energy-saving utilisation concepts for their own



French Regional Nature Park Pilat, near Lyon, contributes to reducing volume of traffic with offers for car-sharing and flexible rented workplaces. Advice on energy-saving housebuilding is another contribution to climate protection.



Together with myenergy, Luxembourg's Nature Parks offer a professional energy consulting service. Residents can get answers to individual questions about energy efficiency and use of renewable energies with free basic advice, at myenergy info points in the Nature Parks.



The 'landscape climate adaptation strategy' (Klimaanpassungsstrategie Landschaft) is a project of German Nature Park Südschwarzwald. It investigates the effect of climate change on farming, and therefore the landscape, and tourism in the Nature Park, and derives recommendations for action for farmers.



Regional Nature Park Montagne de Reims in France offers residents thermographic diagnostics of their houses, to highlight opportunities for energy saving, and advises, for example, on heating with pellets made from regional wood.

information centres and buildings and also advise private households and local authorities. Individual Regional Nature Parks also contribute to climate and resource protection, in particular through energy advice in collaboration with local authorities, e.g. combined with thermographic diagnostics of buildings. It is about supporting energy conservation, increasing efficiency of energy use and making conversion to renewable energies sustainable for nature and landscape. Furthermore, there are projects in some Regional Nature Parks, in Spain and Germany, for example, for adapting land use and protected area management to climate change.



[top] The umbrella organisation of Spanish protected areas, Europarc Espana, together with the Ministry and other cooperation partners, has drawn up guidelines for how Regional Nature Parks and other protected areas can take into consideration climate change in management and planning.

[bottom] As a partner of Swiss Nature Parks, PostAuto Schweiz AG has used its post van to advertise travel to Swiss Nature Parks by public transport, in various regions in Switzerland.



Nordeifel Nature Park in Germany has set itself the aim of making the region something everybody can experience. With its extensive, accessible network of paths, guided tour offers and communication measures, the region now leads the way in accessible tourism in Germany.

The Regional Nature Park centre and the herb garden of the French Regional Nature Park Pilat are multisensory experiences with an accessible design. Visitors with visual or hearing impairments and wheelchair users can learn about the history of the park, bee-keeping and geology.



Benefits for People and Society

The previous chapters have already shown in detail that the work of Regional Nature Parks has a strong societal dimension. Regional Nature Parks involve people in their region in their work and always keep in mind the common good. The motto of Nature Parks in Germany, 'nature and landscape can only be protected and preserved together with people', makes this clear.

Exchanging ideas and working together with the population is very important in more than three quarters of participating countries. Many Regional Nature Parks actively involve residents

in questions about their development. In particular, close cooperation between Regional Nature Parks and local authorities takes the interests of the population into account.

At the same time, residents can become actively involved in conservation and other projects through voluntary programmes. The Regional Nature Park and its services, e.g. in the areas of environmental education and promotion of regional identity, motivate residents to become committed to their region.

The work of Regional Nature Parks is for the common good. Furthermore, they contribute to maintaining ecosystem services, where people derive benefits from intact ecosystems. Examples of ecosystem services are pollination of fruit trees by insects or provision of usable drinking water by natural filtration of precipitation through healthy ground. For this reason, among others, Regional Nature Parks are committed to preserving species-rich meadows and protecting the soil as a biotope.

As shown in other chapters, the work of Regional Nature Parks contributes to sustainable eco-



A signposting system guides visually impaired people along this accessible info trail in the Italian Nature Park of Appia Antica. Information about flora and fauna is written in relief and Braille and animal sounds can be heard at the touch of a button. This makes the info boards exciting and experienceable for all visitors.

conomic development and therefore to maintaining and creating jobs. Regional Nature Parks support social inclusion, e.g. through community employment projects.

When they put together offers, Regional Nature Parks are also concerned with enabling everybody to participate in the shared assets of nature and landscape. They want to convey that nature and landscape are beautiful and worth experiencing and protecting, and to bring to life the special features of each region. By doing so, they contribute to making an 'inclusive' society a reality. A society in which each person can participate with equal rights, regardless of gender, age, origins, religion, education or any disabilities.

Thus, Regional Nature Parks in two thirds of participating countries offer people with disabilities barrier-free, accessible opportunities to experience nature. This includes projects such as information centres and exhibitions that are accessible to everyone, including, for example people with physical or visual impairments or people who are hard of hearing. Other examples are suitable walking routes or guided tours by specially trained staff, for people with physical disabilities or learning difficulties.

The offers often do not just benefit people who depend directly on accessibility. Involving family and friends in activities considerably increases the target group for accessible offers. Offers such as accessible walking routes are also enormously beneficial to older people or

families with young children who need a pushchair. Accessible offers therefore greatly benefit society. Furthermore, studies from the field of leisure and holidays show that experiencing nature is a key motivator for travel, especially among people who depend on accessible offers. This means that suitable offers will also increase tourist demand.

It is important for Regional Nature Parks to combine the issues of 'accessibility' and 'conservation'. For example, building wooden boardwalks of sufficient width that enable people to experience nature in areas with sensitive ground vegetation, such as moorland, protects vegetation and, at the same time, manages flows of visitors. In this sense, a well thought-out accessibility concept can also mean progress in

terms of sustainable tourism in the Regional Nature Park.

Regional Nature Parks are also increasingly committed to involving people from a migrant background or refugees in their offers and work. Regional Nature Parks can help these people to get to know their new region, with its landscape, plant and animal species, food and traditions, and thus support their integration into society.

In the areas presented here, Regional Nature Parks make a positive overall contribution with their work to securing a livelihood for the next generation and to positive development of society in their regions and countries, as well as in Europe.



NuP Aktiv is a non-profit-making employment project of the Association of Austrian Nature Parks. In the project, job seekers from the Lower Austrian Nature Park community obtain qualifications and employment in temporary jobs that support the Nature Park in its work.

La Fageda cooperative, a partner business of Spanish Regional Nature Park Zona Volcánica de la Garrotxa, employs people with disabilities and produces yoghurt with milk from its own cows. The cooperative is open to visitors who can see the cows and learn about the Nature Park.

Regional Nature Parks in the Individual European States





AUSTRIA

Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

Conservation in Austria is the responsibility of the federal states, so protected areas of countryside are awarded the rating 'Nature Park' by their state's government. Nature Parks have the statutory mandate of protecting and preserving their characteristic cultural landscapes in accordance with their use. This is based on the four pillars of protection, recreation, education and regional development. Their objectives are to preserve the natural landscape in all its diversity and beauty with sustainable cultivation, to build leisure facilities that fit in with the protected area and the character of the landscape, to bring nature, culture and the links between them to life with interactive forms of nature education and to give stimulus for regional development, in order to boost regional added value and, at the same time, guarantee quality of life. In Tyrolean Nature Parks, the four columns are complemented by a fifth, research.

Operation

Austrian Nature Parks essentially follow two organisational models. The most common administrative body is a separate, non-profit-making organisation, which takes over the responsibilities of the Nature Parks, while the individual Nature Parks have different membership structures. In the second model, Nature Park organisations manage themselves under or in cooperation with a regional develop-

Facts and Figures

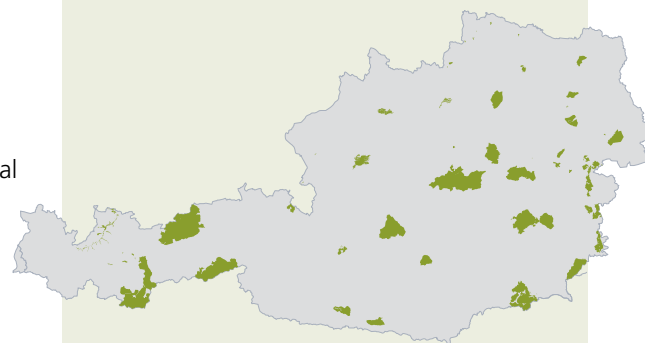
48 Nature Parks (Naturparke)

Total surface area: 5,000 km²,
= 6% of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 102 km²
(0,2 - 727 km²)

Oldest park: 1962. Most recent park: 2012.

Umbrella organisation: Association of Austrian Nature Parks (Verband der Naturparke Österreichs), founded in 1995.



ment organisation, for example, regional development associations or LEADER management organisations. The Association of Austrian Nature Parks (VNÖ) develops and helps to implement joint projects for the current 48 Nature Parks, in a team consisting of representatives of the Nature Parks and specialists from the federal states where the Nature Parks are located.

Financing

Austrian Nature Parks have a very heterogeneous financial structure, both with regard to the amount of funds available and the sources of finance. Financing is provided by the federal states, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and contributions from local government. Nature Park activities, membership subscriptions, donations, sponsoring and project funding also contribute to financing.

Successful Projects

Sustainable land use for conservation

Around 20 Nature Parks in Austria have now come together to further develop their leading culinary products and market them under the brand 'Austrian Nature Park Specialities'. Nature Park Specialities represent enjoyment and prime quality, closeness to nature and preservation of cultural landscapes. Production focuses on sustainable cultivation, conscientious husbandry and especially high quality. Sustainably cultivated areas are habitats for a particularly diverse range of species. For example, the structural diversity of fruit orchards offers lots of 'ecological niches' for a large number of animals. In many cases, fields that are used as pasture or only cut twice at most can develop a diverse range of plants.

Selling products as Nature Park specialities gives farmers the opportunity of production in the future that is orientated towards sustainability and preserves habitats for endangered animal and plant species.

A particularly successful example of direct marketing of a regional product is the Pöllauer Hirschbirne pears. The standard Hirschbirne pear tree is typical of the Pöllauer Tal Nature Park and its landscape. Their orchards are among the most species-rich habitats in Central Europe, with little owls, hoopoes, various species of bat and many others, including rare flora and fauna. Enjoying these products in over 15 different ways, from dried fruit and marmalade to schnapps, makes a culinary contribution to conservation. The Pöllauer Hirschbirne was included in the European register of Protected Designations of Origin in 2015.

Learning through sensory experience

Austria currently has 93 Nature Park Schools and 31 Nature Park Kindergartens that work together very closely with Nature Park management and communities. To achieve this designation, the school or kindergarten must be in a Nature Park community, integrate into its model and profile the content, objectives and intentions of the Nature Park in question and meet Austria-wide criteria.

Nature Park schools and kindergarten actively put into practice the philosophy of Austrian Nature Parks by firing children with enthusiasm for nature by providing them with interactive ways to experience it, for example, with traditional teaching, nature trails or project weeks, as well as self-directed learning, such as landscape conservation and setting up small ecosystems. Activities at Nature Park schools and



kindergartens can make a valuable contribution to children and young people identifying with their Nature Park region and developing an awareness for biological diversity and ecological connections from a young age.

The state of Burgenland has embraced this initiative with particular dedication. Everybody responsible, from the president of the state, through Burgenland Teacher Training College (Pädagogische Hochschule Burgenland) to the Nature Parks, is working towards this goal.

For example, the College of Education has designed several further education events for Nature Park School teachers and promotes exchange of information with a joint learning platform.

Working together for professional development

‘NuP-Aktiv’ and ‘Arbeitsplätze für steirische Naturparkregionen’ are employment projects in the federal states of Lower Austria and Steiermark that are the result of cooperation between the umbrella organisation and the respective state employment offices. They support men and women from Nature Park communities as they enter or re-enter the world of work. They offer temporary work in the Nature Parks and provide support with personal and professional further development. In turn, the people employed by the projects help the Nature Parks to move forward with implementing their projects and plans.

In cooperation with the Steiermark Rural Further Education Institute (Ländliche Fortbildungsinstitut Steiermark), the Association of Austrian Nature Parks has offered training to become a ‘Nature and Landscape Educator’ in a diploma course that runs every year.

Around 300 interested students completed this further training and learned methodical basic knowledge for successfully planning and holding experience-orientated events on the theme of

nature and countryside education. Since then, they have been enriching what the Nature Parks can offer, providing valuable resources for teaching people about the distinctive features of their natural area and contributing to awareness-raising among the population and visitors.

Outlook

Austrian Nature Parks are mainly concerned with protecting their characteristic cultural landscapes with their varied structures and associated high biodiversity. The interaction between the plants and animals that live in these semi-natural habitats performs numerous functions that benefit people. They provide food and raw materials, contribute to recreation, create an identity, regulate the climate and much more. The aim of the conservation project ‘Biodiversity in Austrian Nature Parks’, which is coordinated across Austria, is to protect and maintain biological diversity in the Nature Park regions.

With the central theme of ‘Landscapes Full of Life’, numerous measures are being taken to that effect. One example is the ‘Nature Park Roots’ scheme that plants trees in pilot campaigns to secure diversity of native copses and

to anchor their importance in the consciousness of the population. In all projects, the Nature Parks work together in partnership with various actors on location so they play an integrative role. This, in turn, creates effective prerequisites for successful implementation of ‘Biodiversity Strategy Austria 2020+’.

The idea of Nature Parks has undergone positive development in Austria. Nature Parks are very well anchored in national affairs, it is impossible to imagine politics without them, they are widely accepted by the population and the concept has positive connotations. With their central idea of protecting cultural landscapes, Nature Parks make a valuable contribution to many different spheres. EU strategies, such as the ‘Biodiversity Strategy Austria 2020+’, the ‘Natura 2000’ network of protected areas and involvement in the sphere of ‘Education for Sustainable Development’ should be integrated and their implementation reinforced in this context. With on-going work in mind, a basic budget with longer term security would be desirable, for example by anchoring Nature Parks more firmly in funding programmes and national strategies.

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BELGIUM FLANDERS

Regional Landscapes

Goals and Statutory Mandate

A Regional Landscape is both a region and a non-governmental organisation. The region represents a specific cultural landscape with valuable and characteristic cultural and natural heritage. There are no designation criteria referring to the quality and/or quantity of open areas or their heritage values. This is a weak point of the approach and explains why 69% of Flemish municipal authorities are part of a Regional Landscape.

The organisation can be set up by any group of municipal authorities and/or other bodies, with the mission of improving spatial and ecological quality and the resilience of rural areas, and using this quality as a lever for regional development, by stimulating rural tourism, for example.

Operation

Any relevant partners can become a member of the non-governmental organisation and as a consequence, a voting member of the general assembly, which appoints a board. A unique feature is the fact that members are a combination of governmental bodies and non-governmental organisations.

The municipal authorities and the province are members, along with organisations dealing with nature conservation, heritage, tourism, agriculture or regional development.

Facts and Figures

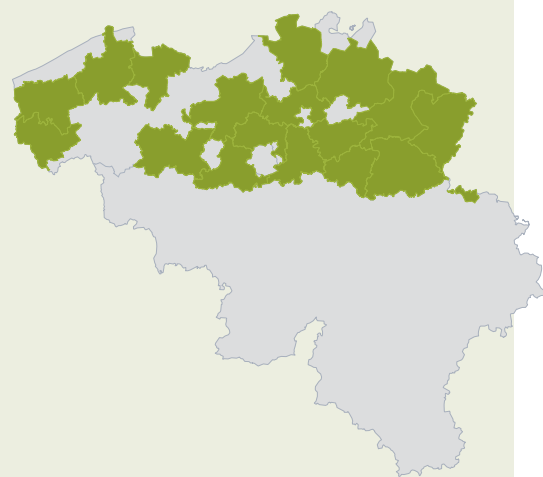
17 Regional Landscapes (Regionale Landschappen)

Total surface area: 6,800 km²

Park sizes: Average of 381 km²
(238 – 582 km²)

Oldest park: 1990. Most recent park: 2009.

Umbrella organisation: Flemish Platform for Regional Landscapes (Vlaams Overleg Regionale Landschappen), founded in 1999



Annotation: Since the Flanders Regional Landscapes differ in size and concept from the other European Regional Nature Parks, they will not be included in the statistical analysis for this study and are not shown on the overview map of all European Regional Nature Parks.

On average, a Regional Landscape in Flanders has 42 members. The operational work is undertaken by a multidisciplinary team of professionals, with the average number of employees (full-time equivalents) being 7.5. For specific projects and initiatives, partners and stakeholders are involved in special steering committees or working groups.

Financing

From 1992 to 2014, the Flemish government was responsible for general funding. The five provinces (counties) took on this responsibility in 2015. Most of the participating municipal authorities add funding to this subsidy. Additional funds are linked to particular projects and are donated by the municipal authorities, provinces, the Flemish government (agencies and departments dealing with heritage, tourism, spatial planning, agriculture, forestry and rural development) and European funds and funding programmes (the European Regional Development Fund, Interreg, LEADER, and LIFE). In 2014, the total budget spent by the 17 organisations was €15 million. About 80% of this amount is generated by specific projects. This expenditure does not include the additional budget funding secured by members as a result of projects which are initiated and/or coordinated by a Regional Landscape.

Successful Projects

The focus and field of work of each Regional Landscape is as diverse as the specific cultural landscapes in the different regions. Nevertheless, there are many common activities.

Regional Landscapes improve the quality of the rural landscape by restoring or creating ponds,

hedges, orchards, unpaved hiking paths and small architectural structures such as chapels, bridges and the like.

They inspire, encourage, support and coordinate municipal authorities, organisations, farmers and landowners in order to improve the quality of rural landscapes. Action is not always limited to open areas: introducing natural elements into children's playgrounds, schools, industrial sites and even graveyards improves quality of life. They also invest in better facilities which enable enjoyment of the landscape: small-scale facilities for hiking, cycling and even horse-riding are created as part of larger-scale networks. The added value in this approach is the fact that these developments consider the sensitivity of forests, nature reserves and agricultural land. It is an integrated, multidisciplinary approach which is a precondition for sustainable regional development.

Diverse innovative measures involve local biomass energy, organic farming or even the establishment of a National Park. All measures and projects are supported by educational programs and press and communication initiatives.

Outlook

The borders of a Regional Landscape are defined as the borders of the participating municipal authorities. As a consequence, the area of a Regional Landscape includes forests, natural conservation areas and traditional agricultural landscapes, as well as settlement areas and degraded peri-urban landscapes. Despite the initial idea, the Flemish concept has shifted from being a territorial quality mark, to a regional organisational structure, with the aim of encour-



aging cooperation between both governmental and non-governmental bodies, organisations and landowners in the field of forestry, nature conservation, sustainable tourism and heritage.

This shift, due to Flemish policy, has resulted in a debate about the creation of new territorial concepts. The idea of Landscape Parks ('Landschapsparken') (strictly limited in number and size), which will be areas of outstanding natural beauty with exceptional and characteristic (cultural) landscapes, is gaining support. Land use will be mixed: agriculture, forestry, nature conservation, recreation and tourism. In exceptional situations, nature conservation may be the main priority, which means the area can be developed as a National Park.

Currently, about 10 projects with different histories, identities and backgrounds, have

resulted in the creation of Landscape Parks. In one region, the 'Hoge Kempen', a National Park, was created. Landscape Parks and National Parks will be embedded in a broader regional approach in which a Regional Landscape will be the driving force. In such cases, the Regional Landscape may be responsible for the coordination, development and communication of this approach, the jewel in the crown of Flemish open space.

Despite the fact that most of these initiatives are supported by regional and local governments, there is no regulatory or legislative framework, nor any criteria, for limiting their number in order to guarantee outstanding quality.

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BELGIUM WALLONIA

Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

A Nature Park is an inhabited rural area with outstanding diversity of fauna and flora and remarkable landscapes. The area is enhanced by projects intended to protect its environment, in harmony with the aspirations of the population and the economic and social development of the area concerned. This does not mean turning them into areas where human beings and their activities are excluded but, on the contrary, ensuring that such activity safeguards the long-term viability of these rural geographical areas.

The functions of the Nature Parks are described in a Regional decree dated 1985 and substantially amended in 2008 to broaden the scope of action of Nature Parks. Their functions may be summarised as falling within three main task areas: protection, the management and enhancement of natural and landscape heritage, and the development of spatial planning according to the principles of sustainable development and balanced economic and social development. In addition to these three main task areas, they also have three cross-functional responsibilities: raising awareness and providing information to the public, experimenting with new management methods and developing national and international cooperation projects. Nature Parks are therefore dynamic rural areas devoted to landscape and nature conservation while developing the local economy in accordance with the guidelines of sustainable develop-

Facts and Figures

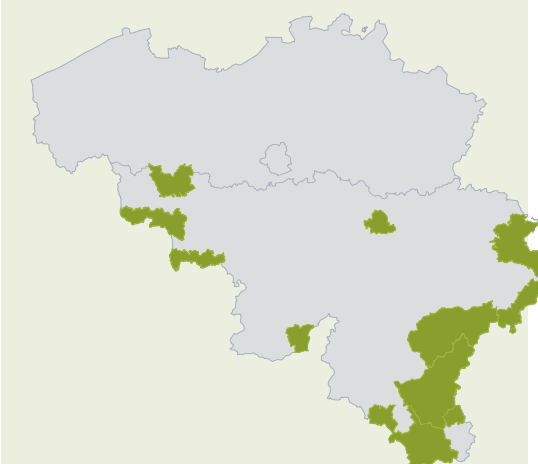
10 Nature Parks (Parcs naturels)

Total surface area: 3,800 km²
= 22 % of the Wallonian territory

Park sizes: Average of 380 km²
(71 – 802 km²)

Oldest park: 1972. Most recent Park: 2014.

Umbrella organisation: Federation of Nature Parks of Wallonia (Fédération des Parcs naturels de Wallonie)





ment. The Nature Parks of Wallonia are very close to the French model of regional nature parks, on which they drew extensively.

Operation

Nature Parks are municipal partnerships. Municipal authorities initiate the creation of a Nature Park by coming together in a partnership of at least municipal authorities. Once the Nature Park has been recognised by municipal authorities, the Parks must set up a non-profit organisation referred to as a Management Committee. The organisation brings together the elected representatives of the municipal authorities and representatives of the area's civic interest groups (farmers, naturalists, stakeholders in tourism, etc.). This mixed structure involving political representatives and representatives of civil society is quite unique in Wallonia and provides an objective basis for decision-making.

The Management Committee is the organisation that sets out the broad guidelines for the work of the Nature Park; to achieve this, it draws up a Management Plan that is valid for 10 years. The plan lists the strategic and operational objectives and the priority measures to be adopted on the ground.

The Management Committee hires a technical team composed of 4 (for the smallest Park) to 20 people (for the largest Park). The team is tasked with implementing the measures in the Management Plan. The profiles of Nature Park team members are highly diverse and include agronomists, biologists, architects, geographers, communications officers, secretaries, accountants, manual workers, etc.

Financing

The funding base for the Nature Parks is provided by the Walloon Region and the municipal authorities that they comprise. In most Nature Parks, however, this funding only accounts for half or even a quarter of the total funding. In fact, Nature Parks develop many projects funded by European programmes such as LEADER (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development), Interreg and LIFE. Furthermore, the Parks regularly respond to regional calls for projects. At a financial level, the Nature Parks have developed genuine expertise in European Funds in particular, helping their region to derive significant economic benefits.

Successful Projects

There is considerable diversity in the projects implemented by the Nature Parks: nature and landscape management, support for agricultural diversification, development of sustainable tourism, building awareness in schools, among senior citizens, tourists, etc.

As regards nature conservation, Nature Parks play an active part in restoring the ecological network. Between 2009 and 2013, Nature Parks planted 67 km of hedges and 1,935 old varieties of fruit trees, dug more than 300 ponds, distributed 23,800 trees to the population, etc. A significant example of a large-scale project is the Best LIFE Nature Project to rehabilitate the heaths and mires on the Hautes-Fagnes Plateau, which was designated "Best of the Best LIFE Nature project".

Nature Parks were also among the first areas to rehabilitate orchards planted with ancient varieties of fruit trees aimed at preserving fruit

diversity in Wallonia. Their work has led to many old varieties being rediscovered. Nature Parks involve the population in these projects, particularly schools, which help with restoring old footpaths and planting orchards and hedges. Parks also work with municipal authorities on the implementation of the Zero Pesticide measure. For this purpose, they prioritise the differentiated management of green spaces by proposing tailored solutions for the different contexts involved (regularly mown lawns, late mown meadow areas, natural areas of recolonisation, etc.).

As regards landscape management, Nature Parks were among the first to develop Landscape Plans within the scope of the ratification of the European Landscape Convention. These Plans contain an accurate diagnosis of the landscape issues in the Nature Park, complemented by recommendations for better management and an improvement in the quality of life. Nature Parks provide official opinions on major town-planning projects and thereby make it possible to conserve and manage the typical landscapes of their territory in the best possible way.

Economically speaking, Nature Parks are very active in the development of short agricultural and non-agricultural supply chains

(wool, wood, etc.). They set up markets that bring local farmers together, enabling them to sell their produce more easily. Nature Parks assist farmers in developing new crops (such as spelt in the Ardenne) or new ways of working (food self-sufficiency for livestock). From a tourism perspective, the Nature Parks participate in the Walloon Forest Enhancement project aimed at developing soft forest tourism.

Outlook

At present, Nature Parks cover 22% of Walloon territory and many municipal authorities wish their area to be recognised as a Nature Park. The Walloon Region is subject to substantial budget cuts and municipal authorities are also under pressure. Funding for the Nature Parks remains a current priority for the Walloon Government, but it is becoming clear that diversification of funding sources is a necessity in order to avoid too great a dependence on regional power. The trend is therefore very positive, but a balance needs to be achieved at territorial level in Wallonia to preserve the specific character of Nature Parks and refrain from covering the whole of the Walloon Region with Nature Parks.

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BULGARIA

Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

According to the Bulgarian Protected Areas Act, Nature Parks are one of the six categories of protected areas. In total, there are 11 Nature Parks.

The status of Bulgaria's 11 Nature Parks corresponds to IUCN category V. Two of the Nature Parks (the Rusenski Lom and Rilski Manastir Nature Parks) are home to UNESCO World Cultural Heritage sites. Another two Nature Parks, Vitosha Nature Park and Strandzha Nature Park, encompass biosphere reserves. In one of the parks (Persina Nature Park), there is a Ramsar site.

The Protected Areas Act defines Nature Parks as a type of protected area comprised of various ecosystems, which encompass villages or towns, and where production activities are permitted, provided they do not pollute the environment.

According to the Protected Areas Act, the Nature Parks' main missions and aims are to:

- maintain the diversity of ecosystems and conserve their biodiversity
- foster nature-based scientific, educational and recreational activities
- ensure sustainable usage of renewable nature resources while preserving traditional livelihoods, and conditions that support the development of eco-tourism.

Facts and Figures

11 Nature Parks (природни паркове)

Total surface area: 2,570 km²
= 2% of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 248 km²
(13 – 1,161 km²)

Oldest park: 1934. Most recent park: 2007.

Umbrella organisation: Association of Parks in Bulgaria (ABP)



Operation

The 11 Nature Park Directorates are part of the forestry authority in Bulgaria and as such they are subsidiary to the Executive Forestry Agency, which is part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The Nature Parks' functions are mainly focused on nature conservation and the sustainable use of resources to support local development and livelihoods based on protected nature – pro-biodiversity businesses, ecotourism, etc. Apart from the restrictions that apply to all Nature Parks (e.g. a ban on clearcutting), depending on the specific Nature Park's designated objectives and specific ecosystems, particular working aims for management must be defined in a Management Plan - however, only 8 out of the 11 Nature Parks have established Management Plans.

Financing

Nature Parks are designated following the preparation of proposal documentation (so far, proposals have come mainly from NGOs and in some cases from municipal authorities and academic institutions). The proposal is then validated and the decision on designation made by the Minister for Environment and Water.

The Nature Parks' budget is centrally allocated, as part of the funding for the Executive Forestry Agency within the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Any revenue generated by the Nature Park Directorates goes to the central budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

All Nature Parks are beneficiaries of the EO Environment and recent years have seen significant political pressure in respect of the

staffing of Nature Parks, due to the level of interest in managing the large OP Environment budgets. Nature Parks were all members of the Association of Parks in Bulgaria until 2014, when some of the Directorates were forced by the central authority to leave the Association, as APB is sometimes seen as an opposition to some of the management decisions of the Executive Forestry Agency.

Successful Projects

Biodiversity conservation

Some key successful Nature Park projects involve biodiversity conservation. Important reintroduction results have been achieved for vultures, Balkan chamois and the European ground squirrel. Various species of flora have been the subject of conservation and restoration activities in Nature Parks, e.g. orchid habitats, forest, shrub and meadow habitats.

As part of the Bulgarian WWF's project for "Conservation and Restoration of 11 Natura 2000 Riparian and Wetland Habitats in 10 SCI's Bulgarian Forests", the conservation status of 10 Natura 2000 sites within Nature Parks has been improved through the conservation and restoration of 11 riparian and wetland habitats in forests.

Eco-tourism

Most of the parks concentrate on developing eco-tourism activities. For example, Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park has 14 discovery trails covering various themes related to the nature and culture of the local area, with educational and information infrastructure (signs, shelters, recreational facilities, bridges and steps).



The most recent Nature Park – Belasitsa – has 8 discovery trails and 11 mountain trekking itineraries. Tourist information centres have been built and fitted out in almost all the Nature Parks, although new methods of visualizing and interpreting natural resources have yet to be

introduced and developed. Out of the 11 Nature Parks Directorates, the most visited is undoubtedly the oldest one – Vitosha Nature Park – close to the capital city of Sofia. Vitosha Nature Park has more than 300 km of walking routes and visitors come to the Park for all kinds of nature-based sports and recreational activities.

Management

Efforts in recent years have focused on the development of management plans and the improvement of management in general, including the training and retention of expert staff. All Directorates have started or completed the development of their Management Plans, and some focused projects have been developed. So far 8 out of 11 Management Plans have been adopted by the Ministry of Environment and Water. The Association of Parks in Bulgaria has been the body organizing trainings to build capacity and encourage networking between Nature Park staff and other stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Environment and Water, NGOs, etc.

Since 2013, these training and networking events have been organized by the Association of Parks in Bulgaria as part of the “For the Balkan and People” project. The project is developed in partnership with 10 Swiss and Bulgarian NGOs in 2015 and was awarded the Natura 2000 Socio-Economic Benefits Award in 2016.

Cooperation with local communities and nature-based businesses

Some Nature Parks developed voluntary schemes for payments for ecosystem services, where companies contribute part of their profits from nature-based products to the management of

the Nature Parks. Three Nature Parks developed local Nature Park trademarks.

Furthermore, Bulgarian Nature Parks organise a number of local events based on traditional and contemporary arts and culture. Rusenski Lom Nature Park organises the Lomea art festival. Strandzha Nature Park Directorate supports traditional village tourism and organises the “nestinari” festivals, where the tradition of dancing on fire, which was handed down from Thracian tribes, is performed.

Belasitsa Nature Park Directorate supports traditional cuisine tours, stages the Chestnut Festival (jointly with the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation), and arranges local guest house accommodation.

Outlook

Future management goals for the Nature Parks include:

- developing capacity, increasing the number of staff, and expertise-based staffing, including training, evaluation and a strict policy for objective appointment on the basis of competition

- finalizing all Nature Park Management Plans and working to ensure their application
- development of partnerships with local businesses, payments for ecosystem services and using revenue generated by the Nature Parks to fund their future activities
- strengthening the parks’ educational and interpretation programs, including partnerships with schools, universities and other potential users of nature education and interpretation services.

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CROATIA

Nature Parks and Regional Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

According to the Nature Protection Act, both Nature and Regional Parks are "an extensive natural or partly cultivated area of land and/or sea of great biological and/or geological diversity, distinguished by valuable ecological features and a marked landscape". While Nature Parks also have educational, cultural and historical value, a Regional Park's features are characteristic of the area in which it is located.

Economic and other activities and projects which do not pose a threat to its essential features and role are permitted in Nature and Regional Parks. A Nature Park is designated by law, as decided by the Croatian Parliament, while a Regional Park is designated by the representative body of the regional self-government unit (county).

Both Nature and Regional Parks are managed by public institutions whose statutory mandate is to carry out activities to preserve, maintain and promote the protected area with the aim of protecting and conserving the original state of nature. As such, they ensure that natural processes are unimpeded and that use of natural resources is sustainable, monitor the implementation of nature protection requirements and measures in the territory they manage, and participate in the collection of data for the purpose of monitoring the state of conservation of nature.

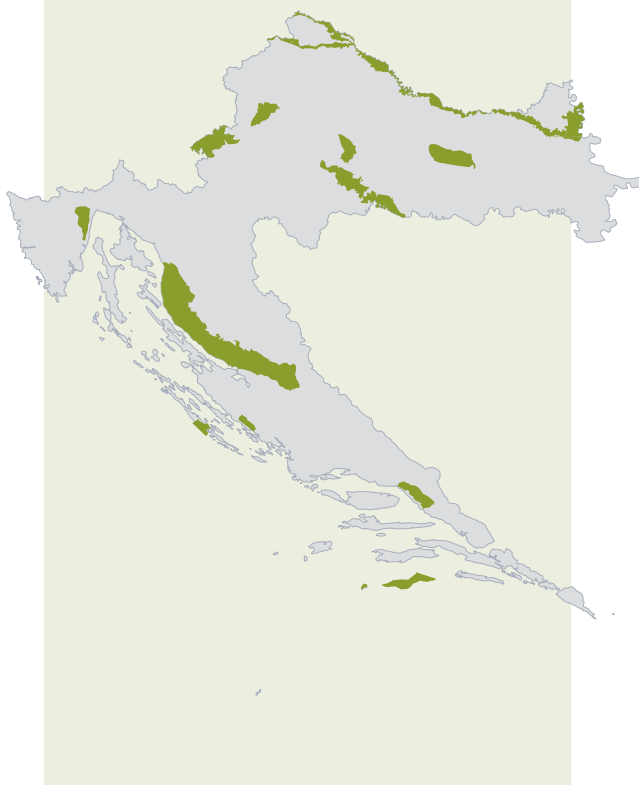
Facts and Figures

11 Nature Parks (parkovi prirode) and 2 Regional Parks (regionalni parkovi)

Total surface area: 5,345 km² = 6 % of national territory

Park sizes: Average of 396 km² (25 – 2,035 km²)

Oldest park: 1967. Most recent park: 2011.



Operation

Public institutions carry out their activities as a public service. They are governed by a governing council whose tasks include the adoption of a Management Plan and an Annual Programme for the protection, maintenance, conservation and promotion of the park.

Each public institution has a Director, appointed by the Minister/county representative body, and a Conservation Manager, appointed by a governing council. Supervision within the parks is carried out by a Head Ranger and other rangers.

The Ministry of Environment and Energy (hereinafter: MEE), as a competent authority, together with the Croatian Agency for Environment and Nature (hereinafter: CAEN), as a central expert institution for nature conservation, are responsible for the supervision and control of the protected areas system in Croatia. The spatial organisation, use, planning and protection of the land area in a Nature Park are regulated by a Spatial Plan for an Area with Special Features, on the basis of the expert background document developed by CAEN.

Financing

Funds for the operation of Nature Parks come from the State Budget, while funds for the operation of Regional Parks are provided by counties.

Other means of financing include income from the use of protected areas, which can be regulated through concessions (for a period of 6 to 55 years) and concession approvals (for a period of up to 5 years). Income from fees (e.g. entrance fees for particular areas or attractions

in the park, entrance fees for vessels etc.) is also a potential means of self-financing for the parks. In recent years, European funding programmes have become a significant and valuable source of funding for various projects implemented in Nature and Regional Parks.

Successful Projects

Institutional and financial sustainability of Croatia's national protected area system – PARCS project

The PARCS Project is being implemented by MEE and the United Nations Development Programme with the aim of ensuring more efficient management of protected areas, in partnership with public institutions (National Parks and Nature Parks) and funded by the Global Environment Facility.

The PARCS Project will assist in the elimination of key institutional weaknesses, while simultaneously strengthening the financial management capacities of public institutions, in order to mitigate cost ineffectiveness, increase revenue from user fees and develop a mechanism of fee-sharing across parks. By helping to conserve Croatia's natural values and protect biodiversity, the Project will also assist in improving the quality of life and raising awareness of the importance of protected areas, thus contributing to sustainable development in general.

EU Natura 2000 Integration Project – NIP project

The overall development objectives of the project are to help support National Parks, Nature Parks and county public institutions in implementing European ecological network Natura 2000 objectives in investment programs, strengthen capacity for biodiversity monitoring



and EU-compliant reporting and introduce programs that involve a wide group of stakeholders in Natura 2000 network management. The most important component is site investment, encompassing infrastructure, the purchase of priority technical equipment for supervisors, fire protection equipment and supporting consultant services. The project is managed by MEE and financed through a World Bank Investment Loan.

Sustainable development of border areas through conservation of indigenous breeds and the establishment of gene-centres in Buhovo and Biokovo – BBio project

This project was implemented in the Biokovo Nature Park, with the Public Institution of

Biokovo Nature Park and Public Institution RERA SD as its Croatian partners.

The BBio project was developed with the aim of preserving and promoting the agricultural and biological diversity of border areas through territorial cooperation between Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In order to ensure the sustainable development of the aforementioned areas, the BBio project has established an educational information centre at Ravna Vlačka in the Biokovo Nature Park. The goal of the centre is to maintain a base flock of breeds of domestic animals for further selection and reproduction, promote the establishment of unique research units which will contribute to the preservation of priceless genetic wealth, raise public awareness of the preservation of breeds through educational activities and develop adventure and ecotourism. It also aims to preserve breeds in their natural habitat, which at the same time preserves the diversity of the landscape and directly contributes to fire protection; this is especially important within the context of preserving the Biokovo Nature Park.

Increasing capacities for the sustainable use and monitoring of wildlife – Wildlife Watch project

This project was implemented in the Velebit Nature Park by non-governmental organizations BIOM and LEA, together with several public institutions for the management of protected areas in Lika – Senj County.

The overall objective was to increase the role of civil society organisations which are linked with public institutions in the sustainable use of natural resources of protected areas. The Wildlife Watch project aimed to increase the capabilities of civil society organisations and public institu-

tions to deliver wildlife protection services and their sustainable use in the local economies of the Velebit Mountain and Lika area.

The main activities were training sessions for project coordinators and target groups, the development of wildlife watch services and designation of wildlife trails for hiking and biking, and the networking of four public institutions and environmental civil society organisations. They also included the creation of a project website which will promote the Velebit Mountain and Lika area as a unique area for wildlife tourism, and the production and dissemination of promotional materials and communication with the end beneficiaries.

Sustainable Economic Activities in Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas – SEA-Med project

The goal of the SEA-Med project in Croatia is to develop sustainable economic activities in the Telašćica and Lastovo Archipelago Nature Parks. Specifically, the project aims to implement Management Plans for the Lastovo Archipelago and Telašćica Nature Parks, developing a sustainable tourism plan to encourage sustainable tourism practices, promote nature-based tourism initiatives, and identify financing

mechanisms for marine protected areas, as well as promoting sustainable fisheries.

Project SEA-Med Croatia is coordinated and implemented by an NGO, Association Sunce, in partnership with WWF, MEE, CAEN, the Ministry of Tourism and the Public Institutions of the Telašćica and Lastovo Archipelago Nature Parks.

Outlook

The main goals of the Ministry of Environment and Energy for the future development of Nature and Regional Parks in Croatia are:

- to develop a system for evaluating management effectiveness in Nature and Regional Parks
- to integrate the concepts of education and visitor management into park management
- to ensure stakeholder participation in the management of the parks
- to foster international cooperation between parks
- to ensure the financial sustainability of the parks through coordination, rationalization and income diversification.

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CZECH REPUBLIC

Protected Landscape Areas

Goals and Statutory Mandate

Protected Landscape Areas (PLAs) are IUCN category V areas in the Czech Republic. They are designated by the Government of the Czech Republic and each governmental order sets out the mission and specific conservation measures for each PLA. The definition of a PLA and the process of its designation are specified in the Nature Conservation Act. The process of designation includes negotiations with land-owners, municipal, regional and central authorities, and other stakeholders.

PLAs are large areas of congruous landscape with characteristic relief and with a significant proportion of the area covered by natural ecosystems, often permanent grasslands and natural forests accompanied, in most cases, by well-conserved settlements with typical features. The objective of each PLA is to preserve a harmonious landscape and its typical features while ensuring the existence of properly functioning ecosystems and conserving all the area's natural values.

When considering the designation of a PLA the following criteria are assessed: adequacy of size, typical landscape features (geomorphology and configuration of landscape features), the proportion of ecosystems that are either natural or have not been significantly altered by human activity, and the focus on zones important for their biodiversity. As such, the network aims to be representative of the types of landscape in

Facts and Figures

26 Protected Landscape Areas
(Chráněná krajinná oblast)

Total surface area: 11,372 km²
= 14 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 440 km²
(40 – 1,205 km²)

Oldest park: 1955. Most recent park: 2016.



the country, from mountain habitats to areas with pond systems, and from orchid meadows to floodplain forests.

With two exceptions, all IUCN category V areas in the Czech Republic are administered by the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic (NCA). The Šumava PLA, though, is governed by the authority of the national park of the same name and uniquely, the last IUCN category V area in the Czech Republic, the Krkonoše Mountains National Park, is a separate organisation and is administered by its own authority.

A management plan is developed for each of the PLAs, usually for a period of 10 years. The management plans are prepared by the NCA, and approved by the Ministry of Environment in a process that includes stakeholder consultation.

Operation

The Protected Landscape Areas are governed by the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic through its regional offices. The NCA is a governmental body performing specialised state administration tasks in the field of nature conservation and landscape protection. Within the PLAs, the NCA designates small-scale protected areas and permits exceptions from PLA restrictions. In cases of breach of the Nature Conservation Act, the NCA imposes penalties for damage to protected aspects of nature and the landscape (and performs further administrative duties in line with the Nature Conservation Act). The NCA issues official statements with regard to various activities affecting the state of nature and the landscape (such as construction projects). These statements have to be respected by other state administrative bodies.

The NCA does not only use administrative tools to protect the nature and landscape; it also develops and implements management plans for PLAs and small-scale protected areas. The NCA secures funds and provides management of highly valued zones (the NCA supports management through mowing and pasturage), establishes conditions for endangered species (such as ponds for amphibians), keeps non-native invasive species in check, and cares for the landscape. The NCA is an expert body; it monitors the state of nature, develops detailed inventory research, oversees the effectiveness of management interventions, etc.

The NCA cooperates with other governmental authorities, regional authorities, property owners and stakeholders on nature conservation and landscape protection. The NCA also focuses on public awareness and education (establishing nature trails, organising lectures and excursions, and publishing information materials).

Financing

As a state entity, the core funding for the NCA comes from the state budget. The management of protected areas, carried out in accordance with approved management plans, is financed from national funding programmes as well as from programmes administered by the European Union. The national funding comes from Ministry of Environment budget lines and is administered by the NCA. European funding sources for nature conservation include the Operational Programme "Environment", LIFE, EEA and Norway Grants, and the Rural Development Programme.



Successful Projects

LIFE+project “Steppes of the Louny Region”

There was a serious decline in the number of farm animals in the Czech Republic at the end of 20th century and pasture as a traditional method of farming, unfortunately, almost ceased to exist. Precious steppe areas have therefore been stifled by briar, hawthorn, dogwood and ash tree for more than two decades.

There were also several species of foreign origin being planted in the past, such as locust or black pine tree, which spread quickly at the expense of other indigenous species. As a result, there is a danger that many rare species tied to the dry

steppe grasslands and white hillsides will be progressively lost. A LIFE+ project (running from 2011 to 2016) which was implemented in the České Středohoří Hills PLA, focused on active conservation of sites of European significance with thermophilous species.

The expected project outputs are the creation of a functional structure for thermophilous habitats, the expansion of functional steppe habitat areas for selected species and the improved connectivity between metapopulations. Other aims of the project are the familiarization of the general public with the problems of steppes in an agricultural area and the importance of traditional forms of farming and involvement of local farmers in care of the landscape. The project was awarded the Natura 2000 Award in 2014.

Robečský Brook Basin landscape protection measures

The Novozámecký rybník Fishpond National Nature Reserve (NNR) was established in 1933 and covers an area of 357.89 ha. The NNR is home to an ornithological reserve, a nesting ground for water birds with reed beds and adjacent meadows with peaty flora. The area is listed as a Ramsar Site, the wetlands are part of Natura 2000 network, and the reserve is part of the Kokořínsko-Máchův kraj PLA.

In order to improve the awareness of visitors to the reserve, two wooden structures were built (visitor infrastructure), an ornithological observation deck and an observation pier, enabling visitors to observe rare bird species. Both structures are easily accessible, and on-site information boards provide more detailed information on the species present, along with pictures of the birds.

In 2012, as part of the complex care of the land under management, the NCA led a project to clean up the Robečský Brook bed at its mouth at Novozámecký rybník Pond, in order to improve the water outflow ratio. The project was undertaken at the request of the local authority.

The House of Nature Programme

The “House of Nature” programme comprises the implementation and operation of visitor and information centres in PLAs and forms the backbone of the NCA’s visitor infrastructure system. The funds needed for project implementation were acquired from EU structural funds. The programme has provided support to both governmental and private investors (NGOs, municipal authorities) and was built on the principles of public-private partnership projects.

The House of Nature is a living project built on regional partnerships and resources. The project does not just mean attractive exhibitions to appeal to visitors, but also provides places and means for actively involving the local public in the protection and care of local natural and cultural heritage. The design and focus of the centres that are part of the House of Nature project were developed in accordance with the unified architectural concept and a design manual for the NCA visitor centres. Thanks to ERDF (European Regional Development Fund)

financing, 8 Houses of Nature are currently up and running alongside 7 information centres, in 12 PLAs.

Outlook

The top priority for the future is to continue providing competent protection and management of the nature and landscape values of each of the PLAs. This requires sufficient staffing capacity for the NCA and adequate financial resources for direct intervention in the natural environment.

Another important long-term goal is to educate owners, visitors and entities active in the areas, to help them understand and accept the aims of the nature conservation authorities and cooperate as partners in working towards this common goal.

There are a number of areas in the Czech Republic that fulfil all the legal requirements to be designated as PLAs but which remain unprotected. It is expected that at some point in the future, the obstacles to their designation will be resolved and they will be considered for the designation process.

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DENMARK

Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

Danish Nature Parks is a certification scheme coordinated by the Danish Outdoor Council, and is based on voluntary partnerships between one or more municipalities, governmental institutions, and private landowners. The Danish Outdoor Council is a non-governmental organization founded in 1942. It operates as an umbrella organization, today boasting 94 individual member organizations. The project on Danish Nature Parks started in 2013.

Nature parks are locally or regionally designated areas that do not require any special legislation. The certification scheme is a management tool aimed at supporting collaboration processes and encouraging dialog as well as contributing to the development of the municipal management of larger nature areas.

The Danish Outdoor Council defines Danish Nature Parks as follows:
Nature parks are larger, coherent landscapes of regional importance. They often contain nature areas of national and international importance. They are well-defined with great scenic beauty, natural wealth, and a high cultural-historic value. The represented landscapes are characteristic for the different parts of the country and should receive special protection in relation to present and future generations.

The certification scheme constitutes a framework for achieving a local vision, which is carried

Facts and Figures

9 Nature Parks (Danske Naturparker)

Total surface area: 1,455 km
= 3 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 162 km²
(13 – 442 km²)

Oldest park: 2013. Most recent park: 2016.

Umbrella organisation: The Danish Outdoor Council (Friluftsrådet)



out in collaboration with anyone interested in the protection and use of the natural resources in the nature park.

Operation

The Danish Outdoor Council coordinates and operates the certification scheme and supports the certified Nature Parks, i.e. by offering advisory assistance regarding the engagement of volunteers and education, providing a joint logo and design manual, and arranging workshops for managers and administrative employees within the Nature Parks. In order to apply for membership in the Danish Nature Parks, the municipalities must submit an application that contains a project description including the demarcation of the area, an outline of the status and potential of several elements, and a nature park plan containing the long- and short-term development goals and designated tasks along with a budget for the operation of the nature park.

In order to become members, the Nature Parks must furthermore fulfil the 10 criteria of Danish Nature Parks:

1. A minimum of 50% of the nature park must be protected nature
2. The nature park must have a precise geographic demarcation
3. The nature park must have an administrative associate
4. The nature park must have a nature park council
5. Sufficient funding for the operation, development, and realization of the nature park plan needs to be provided
6. The nature park and its demarcation must be part of the municipal plan or a supplement to it
7. The nature park needs to be locally embed-

ded through processes that involve the public

8. Nature park communication must be coordinated with respect to both Danish and foreign visitors
9. The nature park needs to have at least one nature interpreter attached
10. An approved nature park plan must be available and politically accepted

The application is thereafter assessed by the National Committee, a committee appointed by the Danish Outdoor Council consisting of representatives from the 12 most important Danish organizations and authorities with interests in and knowledge about nature, outdoor recreation, and cultural heritage. Once approved by the National Committee, the Nature Parks hold the certificate for a five-year period after which the nature park must re-apply based on an assessment of the goals achieved in the previous nature park plan and of its overall development.

Financing

The management and projects of the Nature Parks are funded by the municipal resources deployed for the management and operation of the nature areas within the borders of the Nature Parks. The municipalities additionally pay a fee of 25,000 DKK each year for their membership in the Danish Nature Parks. In some cases, the municipalities have further set aside a yearly operational grant for the nature park. Often, additional resources from both national and European funding programmes are also deployed for local projects in the Nature Parks. The certification scheme was developed with funding from the Nordea Foundation (Nordea-fonden), which also supports a number of development projects in Danish Nature Parks, including the four below.



Successful Projects

Young Nature Parks guides

The Danish Outdoor Council has created an education program for high school students. The aim is to provide students with the tools and

skills necessary to work as young nature guides in Nature Parks and to improve the connection between the local communities and the Nature Parks. Furthermore, the project brings the Nature Parks and schools closer together, linking environmental education with local knowledge and hands-on experiences. At the end of the program, the students present their project process at an open event in front of parents, press, and municipal politicians, and are then handed their diploma and awarded their new title as Young Nature Park Guides. In 2015, 200 students became Young Nature Park Guides.

Volunteer program

The volunteer program includes a range of courses targeted toward nature park employees along with nature interpreters and municipal employees who collaborate with volunteers on nature and outdoor projects in the Nature Parks. Each of the courses has a different topic – i.e. Involvement of volunteers in nature conservation or Establishment and operation of facilities – with land owners – but all aim at providing useful tools for managing projects that are based on volunteer work. The program consists of 10 courses.

Nature Park theatre

Nature parks offer a range of experiences and settings. This was explored in a theatrical production throughout the summer of 2015. The goal of the show was to combine nature with a scenic experience and give young and old new impressions of what nature can be and do. The troupe worked closely with the employees in the nature park to make the show possible. The show started with a short bike trip to the first location in the nature park. Throughout the show, the viewer followed the actors from place to place, exploring different settings ranging

from dark forest to open, sunny meadows. Varying weather conditions leant each show its own unique character and allowed it to develop and adapt to the given conditions. The concept of the Nature Park Theatre is in the progress of being transferred to other Nature Parks.

Design manual

Improving and strengthening the brand of Danish Nature Parks is an important task of the secretariat. As such, efforts have been put into the development of a joint design manual. Here, the Nature Parks can find instruction, i.e. for the design of signposting and use of the logo related to marketing. By establishing a collective approach to the design and use of Danish Nature Parks' logo, the brand is strengthened, and it becomes easier for the public to recognize certified Nature Parks.

Outlook

An important development goal of Danish Nature Parks is to support the continued development of the recreational infrastructure in the Nature Parks, allowing visitors to gain extraordinary natural experiences and giving them the chance to take up many different forms of outdoor activities. The infrastructure should aim at opening the Nature Parks up to visitors, creating and

improving access for many different user groups, and offering facilities that support outdoor life, in a way that allows for a coordinated approach towards the use and protection of the Nature Parks. A further goal is the strengthening of the national and local marketing of both Danish Nature Parks as a whole and the individual Nature Parks. This is to be done through campaigns and cross-cutting initiatives, as well as events in the Nature Parks, thereby increasing the public's knowledge of the Nature Parks, as well as the number of visitors. Along with branding and drawing attention to the icons and recreational possibilities of the local nature park, it is important that every nature park generate its own unique local identity and narrative.

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FRANCE

Regional Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

In France, a Regional Nature Park is an inhabited rural area that is nationally recognised for its valuable local heritage and landscape, but also for its character as a sensitive area. These parks are underpinned by extensive sustainable development plans for the protection and promotion of their resources. An area is designated as a Regional Nature Park by decree of the French Prime Minister, further to review of a report by the Ministry of the Environment. The designation is valid for a renewable period of 15 years. The purpose of a Regional Nature Park is to protect and promote the area's natural resources, landscapes, human resources and cultural heritage by implementing an innovative and environmentally friendly policy of land-use planning and economic, social and cultural development. Parks provide education and information and encourage experimentation.

Operation

A Regional Nature Park is managed by a combined association of all authorities that have approved the Park Charter. To implement its Charter, a Regional Nature Park relies on the expertise of local authorities and fosters interaction between stakeholders to carry out local nature conservation and sustainable development initiatives. It also drives exemplary innovative action. The experience of a Regional Nature Park is also intended to benefit other regions in France and abroad. One of the particular

Facts and Figures

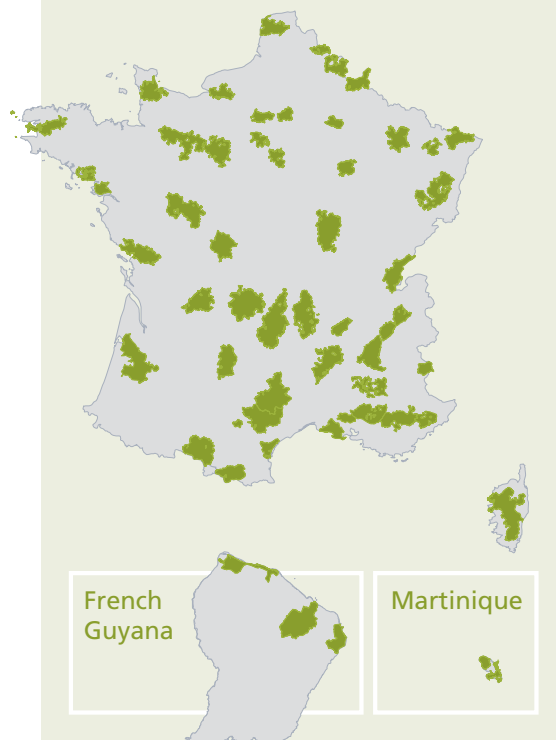
51 Regional Nature Parks (Parcs naturels régionaux)

Total surface area: 87,398 km²
= 15% of the national territory

Park sizes: 485 km² – 6,595 km²

Oldest Park: 1968. Most recent park: 2015.

Umbrella organisation: French Federation of Regional Nature Parks (Fédération des Parcs naturels régionaux de France), founded in 1971



features of Regional Nature Parks is that they are required to evaluate their efforts.

Action by Regional Nature Parks embraces a broad range of initiatives undertaken by the authorities that approved the Charter, depending on their area of expertise: socioprofessional bodies (associations, farmers, producers, etc.), through partnership agreements; the government, for land use and regulation; the management body for the park, and the multidisciplinary technical team.

Financing

Each Regional Nature Park has an operating budget and an investment budget. The operating budget is mainly funded by the combined association that manages the park. Additional budget funding is provided by the Ministry of the Environment and by occasional operating subsidies from various sources. The activities and facilities of the Regional Nature Parks are co-funded in varying proportions, mainly by local authorities and sometimes within the scope of various European programmes and/or through contributions from government and public sector bodies.

With reference to the Park Charter, these subsidies may result from an agreement as part of the "local development" component of the Government/Regional plan. This agreement may also receive further financial support from the "regional development" component of the contract for the Government/Regional plan, particularly with regard to assessment and engineering assignments that may be performed by the park. Private companies and individuals can assist Regional Nature Parks by providing financial support for their efforts.

Successful Projects

Will promoting biodiversity save our wetlands? (Scarpe Escaut Regional Nature Park)

The park is pursuing efforts after the WECAN [Working together on Economically-prosperous Communities through Assets of Natural heritage] European research programme to increase awareness amongst elected representatives of the necessity of preserving the region's wetlands. Working with the Mediterranean Institute of Marine and Terrestrial Biodiversity and Ecology, the park has refined the concept of ecosystem services. With input from users, experts and researchers, the benefits derived from these environments have been identified and categorised according to the three types of service that they provide: provisioning services (food, wood, water, etc.), regulating services (pest control, flood control, water quality, etc.), or cultural services (iconic landscapes, recreational areas, etc.). Forty sites can be used to simulate the long-term human impacts, to provide tangible evidence for elected representatives, stakeholders and residents of the close relationship between biodiversity preservation and control/mitigation of climate change, and factor these findings into decision-making for planning, visitor attendance or "ring-fencing".

Enerterre (Marais du Contentin et du Bessin Regional Nature Park)

The park has been running an experiment since October 2011 in an effort to combat energy insecurity, renovating earthen houses occupied by low income families who lack the resources to finance thermal and humidity retrofits in these traditional dwellings. This experimental scheme is based on participatory construction projects involving insulation or the preparation of



Short channels in organic farming (Avesnois Regional Nature Park)

The role of the park is that of coordinator and unifying force, to fold the different initiatives into a collective strategy, increase cooperation between partners, launch additional efforts to remove barriers and attract funding. There are four aspects to the strategy: developing organic production and supply chains, promoting the spread and set-up of organic farms, promoting local market opportunities and contributing to the development of organic farming in areas that are critical for drinking water quality.

2010: The goal for 2022 of having 30% of the agricultural land in the park under organic farming was written into the new Charter.
2011: A steering committee was established and a territorial assessment carried out.
2012–2013: Development and launch of a shared multi-stakeholder programme of measures, led by the park and run by partner organisations.

Promotion of recreational walking (Landes de Gascogne Regional Nature Park)

Discovering the glorious, hidden and vulnerable settings that the park has to offer means heading off along the forest tracks and losing oneself, following in the willing footsteps of more than two-thirds of visitors to the park.

Digital technologies promote these areas and make them more accessible, but do not necessarily consider aspects such as the pressures that they face, their vulnerabilities or their owners.

The Regional Nature Park and six Tourist Offices have a shared ambition to:

- showcase the region's distinctive heritage and enhance its appeal

- enhance practices and cater for growing expectations
- educate the public
- and to offer reliable genuine, sustainable experiences of discovery.

They also share a digital resource: an online site for walking and rambling, launched in 2014 and connected to the itiAQUI walking app developed by the regional council for Aquitaine. By pooling resources and ideas, they have heightened the level of ambition and initiated cooperative efforts that the stakeholders are keen to develop further.

Regaining the status of a grand cru cocoa area (Martinique Regional Nature Park)

The park is fulfilling one of its missions of protecting and developing natural and cultural heritage by combining agroforestry and biodiversity to produce high quality commercial beans, creating supply chains for high value-added “fine cocoa” products in a region with a history of cocoa production.

Measures adopted by the park since June 2013 have resulted in the recruitment of 15 employees, who have been given training in agroforestry and cocoa-growing as part of a back-to-work project to restore and maintain a number of

cocoa plantations. The first replanting and pilot farm site will occupy an area of 120 ha made available to the park by the departmental council.

Outlook

Fifty years after they were first founded, France's Regional Nature Parks continue to be a modern tool for reconciling the challenges of biodiversity and economic development in rural regions. By 2020, France will be home to some 60 Regional Nature Parks, encompassing 20% of its national soil, 5,000 towns and villages and nearly 5 million residents. The major building blocks for living up to the parks' slogan of “Une autre vie s'invente ici” (“Creating now another way of living”) in the future are the environmental and energy transition, the well-being, the quality of life and the health of the parks' communities, high quality food from land within the parks, and the creation of new development models that involve their inhabitants. Now more so than ever, the preservation of biodiversity must be considered as a factor for economic and social development.

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GERMANY

Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

In Germany, Nature Parks are designated by the federal states on the basis of state-level nature conservation legislation in connect with the Federal Nature Conservation Act. According to their statutory mandate, these parks should preserve and develop a landscape characterised by diverse uses, as well as the diversity of species and biotopes native to it, and toward this end, the aim should be to use land in a way that is environmentally sound for the long term. The parks are ideal for relaxation in harmony with nature and for the support of sustainable tourism and lasting regional development. Another important task is environmental education or education for sustainability. All Nature Parks are thus connected in their work under the four pillars of nature conservation, relaxation and sustainable tourism, environmental education and sustainable regional development.

Operation

In Germany, administrative bodies are commissioned to implement the tasks. Nature Park administrative bodies are predominantly districts, cities and municipalities and in part also regional states. But the development of a Nature Park is not only a task for the Nature Park management. Just as important is the formation of regional networks and collaboration with partners in the region from the worlds of municipal government, the hotel business, the restaurant busi-

Facts and Figures

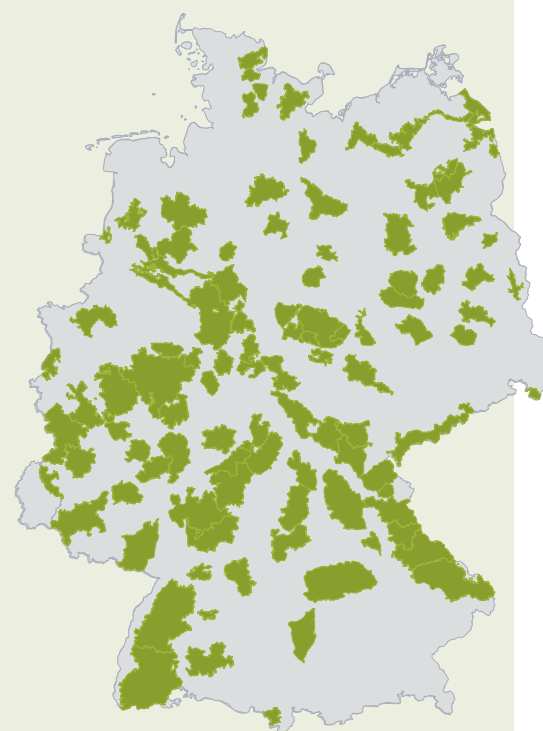
103 Nature Parks

Total surface area: 101,250 km²
= 27 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 950 km²
(112 – 3,826 km²)

Oldest park: 1957. Most recent park: 2016.

Umbrella organisation: Association of German Nature Parks (Verband Deutscher Naturparke), founded in 1963



ness, nature conservation, land management, handicraft trade, etc. These partners conceive their Nature Park work as a common task, help to reach the Nature Park goals and support the Nature Park management in carrying out its diverse duties. A Nature Park plan that specifies the development goals and designates tasks, and is jointly developed and coordinated with the partners from the region in many Nature Parks provides a basis for the common work of the Nature Park management and its partners.

Financing

Federal states as well as administrative districts, cities and municipalities provide funding for the Nature Park administrative bodies and their management and project costs as they carry out the statutory duties and strengthen the region. Often, additional resources from European funding programmes are also deployed for projects.

Successful Projects

Nature Park Quality Campaign

In 2006, the Verband Deutscher Naturparke launched the "Nature Park Quality Campaign" with the aim of supporting the Nature Parks in their work. The goal of the quality campaign is lasting qualitative development for the Nature Parks. Nature parks take part in the project on a voluntary basis. They fill out an extensive catalogue of questions relating to their work. An employee of another Nature Park specially trained by the VDN (a quality scout) takes a tour of the Nature Park, reviews the information given and advises the Nature Park with regards to its future development. If they attain at least 250 of 500 possible points, the Nature Parks are honoured with the designation of "Quality Nature Park". Re-evaluation takes place every five years.

Nature park schools

The Association of German Nature Parks and the Nature Parks themselves can designate schools as "Nature Park schools". In teaching or even in field trips or on project days in cooperation with partners such as forest rangers, conservationists and farmers, these schools work closely with Nature Parks and regularly address important Nature Park topics such as biological diversity, nature and landscape, culture and handicraft trade as well as agriculture and forestry. Students get to know their native region and, in the process, learn concepts and contexts of sustainable development. Through the project, they are put in a position to make sustainable life and consumer decisions and actively contribute to the forming of a sustainable society. "Nature park explorer vests" are used in many Nature Park schools - these are vests whose pockets contain various field trip materials. With this equipment, the children slip into the role of an active nature explorer.

Nature Parks are collaborating with "Nature Park Kindergartens" in a similar way.

Nature park guides

Nature parks often cooperate closely with specially trained Nature Park guides. Many are trained as "certified nature and landscape guides" in cooperation with the nature conservation academies of the regional states. As a rule, Nature Park guides work for the Nature Park on a volunteer or part-time basis and offer excursions and environmental education activities.

Nature conservation

Many German Nature Parks are involved in the protection of nature and landscape in the form of various projects. Through extensive grazing or



endangered species such as the red kite, the midwife toad and the hazel grouse. A well-developed network of hiking, bicycling and rowing paths as well as specially designated climbing areas keep visitors away from especially protected regions and breeding and courtship areas. Through measures such as the preservation and renaturation of moors, Nature Parks also contribute to the protection of the climate. Likewise, many Nature Parks provide management, monitoring and public relations work for NATURA 2000.

Nature experience

Nature parks offer a range of possibilities for relaxing and experiencing nature, and ensure the preconditions for sustainable tourism. Nature parks provide diverse opportunities to experience nature for old and young, for hikers, bike riders, equestrians, and for water and winter sports enthusiasts. These include, for instance, guided tours, a good infrastructure of sign-posted route networks, information boards, Nature Park nature adventure paths and info centres. Tourist organisations and service providers can thus authentically advertise for their region with the label of "Nature Park".

Numerous Nature Parks also offer possibilities for "barrier-free nature experiences". For this purpose, hiking paths and information centres are designed in such a way that they are also available for the use and experience of those who, for instance, sit in a wheel chair or have a visual, hearing or learning impairment. Furthermore, well-developed hiking paths benefit seniors and families with prams as well. The VDN, in cooperation with various handicap associations, has published a set of guidelines for Nature Parks with concrete examples of barrier-free design.

mowing, fields and wetlands, as well as the diversity of species they contain, are preserved. The Nature Parks are home to numerous projects toward the renaturation of wetlands and bodies of water. Special species conservation measures are even implemented to protect particularly

Regional development

Nature parks serve to protect the livelihood of future generations as well as the economic and societal development of rural regions of Germany. They contribute to the creation of value, to successful regional development, to the safeguarding of jobs, and thus overall to the strengthening of the rural area in their surrounding regions. In the process, they cooperate closely with partners in the region from the worlds of municipal government, tourism, agriculture and forestry, conservation and handicraft trade, and integrate the general public into their work. They thus support the development and marketing of regional products and of regional brands like "Echt Schwarzwald", the brand "Eifel" or the "Rhön" umbrella brand.

Outlook

The highest-priority goal for Nature Park development in Germany is the sufficient provision of personnel and funding for Nature Park management in all Nature Parks. This is not yet the case for all Nature Parks. This is the necessary foundation in order to further develop the service offerings and quality of work of

Nature Parks in the individual areas of responsibility. In this context, the further expansion of partner networks that support the Nature Parks in their work is important. These include networks of Nature Park schools, Nature Park kindergartens or Nature Park guides, but just as much a partner network of engaged companies from the region, e.g. from the world of the hotel business, the restaurant business, mobility, etc.

A further goal is the strengthened integration of the public into the work of the Nature Parks, particularly through the support of Nature Park projects in the form of volunteer work. In the individual areas of responsibility, important topics include stronger support for NATURA 2000, the development of sustainable nature experience offerings together with tourism partners and of educational offerings for schools and kindergartens, as well as the development of regional products and regional brands. In this way, Nature Parks can take on an even larger role in implementing regional and national strategies in the area of sustainable development, biodiversity preservation and education.

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HUNGARY

Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

The concept of Nature Parks was defined by statute in Hungary in 2004, with the amendment of the Nature Conservation Act no LIII./1996. According to the law, Nature Parks are 'extensive areas that are rich in characteristic, natural, regional and historico-cultural values, making them particularly well-suited to active, outdoor recreation, rejuvenation and recovery, as well as conservation education, environmental education, teaching, sustainable tourism and non-intensive farming'.

Hungarian Nature Parks organise their activities according to the 4-pillar model for Nature Parks (conservation, education, recreation and development) that is common in Europe. The aim is to develop and put into practice good models for conscious cooperation between nature, the countryside and people, while recognising and acknowledging ecosystem services, as well as the local characteristics of nature, the countryside and society, both as a basis to be preserved in the long term and a prerequisite for lasting local prosperity.

Operation

Nature Parks are designated by the minister responsible for conservation, but the opinion of the Hungarian Nature Park Association (Magyar Natúrpark Szövetség) is also taken into consideration. Nature Parks are created as a result of cooperation between local actors (including at

Facts and Figures

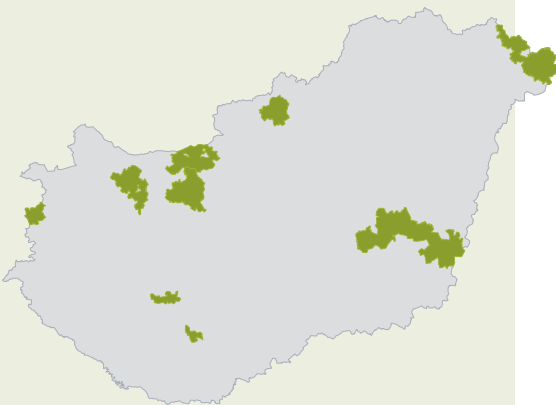
9 Nature Parks (natúrparkok)

Total surface area: 6,086 km²
= 7 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 676 km²
(102 – 2,072 km²)

Oldest park: 2005. Most recent park: 2015.

Umbrella organisation: Magyar Natúrpark Szövetség (Association of Hungarian Nature Parks), founded in 2005.



least 3 local authorities), in a bottom-up process. Requirements are a minimum area of 10,000 ha, an independent representation and management organisation (association or foundation) and the presence of natural and cultural treasures that are under national or local protection. Nature Parks follow a cooperative approach and work with local actors in the interests of sustainable preservation, use and development of nature, the countryside and the economy.

'Nature Park Advisory Boards' have been set up in most Nature Parks with the aim of strengthening local and regional cooperation. They discuss and agree on the current and/or strategic aims and responsibilities of the respective Nature Parks with the actors concerned (local authorities, schools, foresters, farmers, tourism companies, National Parks, Local Action Groups in LEADER programmes and NGOs etc), keeping the 4-pillar model in mind.

Nature Parks also see awareness-raising, creation of consciousness and mobilisation of the population in the interests of the shared objectives of Nature Parks as another important responsibility. Hungarian Nature Parks founded the Hungarian Nature Park Association to coordinate and represent their interests.

Financing

Hungarian Nature Parks are mainly funded through projects using national and European funds. Funding also comes from membership subscriptions from local authorities or revenue from products and services that are produced and provided by the individual Nature Parks. Nature Parks in Hungary currently do not receive any direct support from national or regional sponsors (i.e. state or county). Nature Parks

submit their project proposals independently or as cooperation partners of local authorities, enterprises or other Nature Parks, etc.

Successful Projects

Extensive cultivation of steppes and marshland in Nature Park Vértes

Nature Park Vértes is working to save a mosaic of marshland and steppes at the foot of the Vértes Mountains, around 50 km west of Budapest. The 500-hectare Csikvarsa marshland was purchased and added to Nature Park Vértes to create an ecological network. Nature Park Vértes has a great deal of experience in cultivating conservation areas and has helped to implement several successful LIFE projects with its international partners.

Development of a cross-border Nature Park at the former Iron Curtain

Nature Parks Geschriebenstein (AT) and Írótk (HU) were founded and designated as two sides of the first and so far only cross-border Nature Park between Austria and Hungary. The most famous landmark of both Nature Parks is the Írótk /Geschriebenstein observation tower, which was built in 1913 and through the centre of which the state border has run since 1921. Sustainable cooperation between the partners aims to increasingly develop both Nature Parks into a unified Nature Park in the Günser mountain range (K szegi-hegység). Establishment of the alpannonia® panoramic hiking route that runs from the Fischbach Alps (Steiermark), over hills and mountains and through valleys, into the Pannonian Basin, made an important contribution to the amalgamation of the two Nature Parks. alpannonia® offers hikers a unique variety of geographical, natural, cultural and gastronomic experiences.



Renaturation of tributaries in the 'Által-ér' river basin

Bauxite mining and the aluminium industry all but killed the river 'Által-ér' and caused cavern water levels in the surrounding karst to plummet drastically. Sustainable, close cooperation

between the local authorities in the inflow region of the 'Által-ér' achieved considerable improvements in water quality and the 'return of karst springs', in several stages. Nature Park Gerecse was set up to preserve and make use of regional natural and cultural treasures, as a result of conscious expansion of the cooperation.

Environmental education in small and peripheral rural communities

Intensive project work has enabled Szatmár-Bereg Nature Park in the remote, north-eastern region of Hungary, on the border with Ukraine, to extend long-term cooperation with schools within the Nature Park. The Nature Park recognised that financial restrictions prevented children of local families using ecotourism offers and started to work together with schools to teach pupils from poor families basic knowledge about the ecological diversity of their immediate environment, free of charge.

Outlook

The appeal of Nature Park work in Hungary has increased greatly in recent years. New Nature Parks are expected to be established and Nature Parks could increase to cover over 10% of the land area. A task force has been set up to coordinate development of Nature Parks, with representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Herman Ottó Institute, the Hungarian National Rural Network (Magyar Nemzeti Vidéki Hálózat) and the Hungarian Nature Park Association.

The above partners worked together closely to come up with a regulatory approach as a set-up guide for new Nature Park initiatives, in 2013. In order to support further development of Nature

Parks, the partners also devised the development concept for Hungarian Nature Parks, with a timescale of up to 2030.

Standards for Nature Park work should be further improved, according to jointly defined standards, as part of a 'Nature Park Quality Campaign', using the model of the Association of German Nature Parks (Verband Deutscher Naturparke, VDN) as an example. This instrument is supposed to contribute to Hungarian Nature Parks, which had developed 'separately' due to lack of regulation in the past, being able to work according to shared standards, but still being able to retain their characteristic features and diversity. The task force wants to develop the 'Nature Park Charter' model as a new, narrower and more conscious framework for cooperation. Within this framework, all local and regional Nature Park partners take on

very concrete responsibilities derived from the 4 pillars of the Nature Park model. This applies to Nature Parks where local and regional partners demonstrate a particularly high willingness to become actively involved in conscious cooperation.

Broader professional and societal recognition of the work of Nature Parks and/or a stable source of financing is necessary for further professional development of Hungary's Nature Parks. Hungarian Nature Parks have to work very hard to achieve greater acceptance by society, in order for their contribution to the common good to be recognised, including in the form of increased financing from public funds. Another particularly important task is involvement of Nature Parks in international cooperation between European Regional Nature Parks and Nature Park Networks, which is being pushed ahead by the Hungarian Nature Park Association.

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ITALY

Regional Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

The 1970s and 1980s saw an innovative approach to the establishment of Regional Parks. In fact, while at the state level there was a lack of focus on nature conservation, regional authorities developed new park models. Their experience contributed to the formulation of the framework national parks law (Law n.394/91). In the second half of the 1990s, the strategy for National Parks was launched, on the basis of the improved national legislation. With the new century, a better balance has been established between the two systems of National and Regional Parks, with joint efforts for the conservation and enhancement of Italy's natural heritage.

National Law 394/1991, the "Framework Law on Protected Areas" defines the different categories of protected areas in Italy. According to this law, Regional Parks are: "Land, river, lake and coastal and marine zones with recognised natural and environmental value, which constitute, in the context of one or more neighbouring regions, a homogeneous system, identified by the natural assets of the locations, the landscape values and the artistic and cultural traditions of the local people." A Regional Park should give even greater prominence than a National Park to the close relationship with human use and to the values that link territory and local population. The National Law establishes that Regional Parks are created by regional laws; these must indicate

Facts and Figures

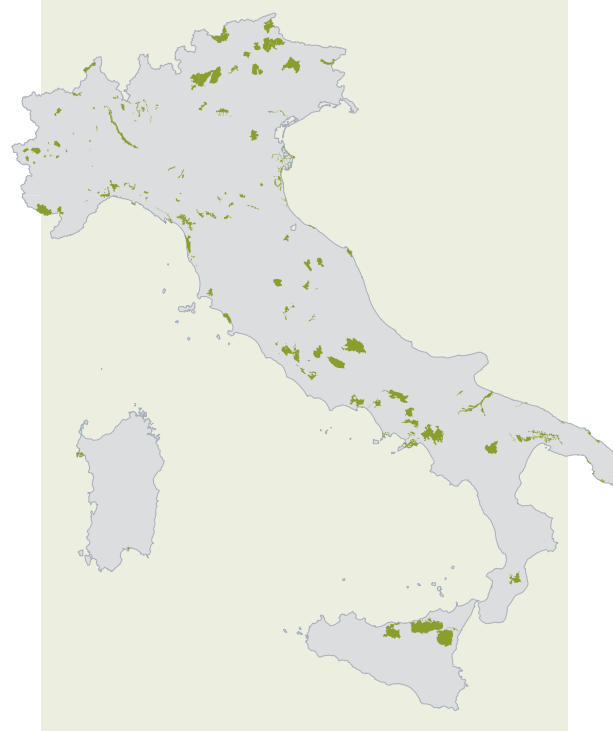
134 Regional Parks (Parchi Regionali)

Total surface area: 12,977 km²
= 4% of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 83 km²
(0.1 km² - 856 km²)

Oldest park: 1974. Most recent park: 2014.

Umbrella organisation: Federparchi –
Europarc Italia (Federazione Italiana dei
Parchi e delle Riserve naturali), founded in
1989



the park's boundaries, the management body for the park and the general principles of protection that will be detailed and regulated by the Management Plan. The composition and organization of the management body (Council, President and Director) is not fixed but should be adapted to the particular characteristics of each park.

Operation

The 20 Italian Regions define their own regional framework legislation. Significant differences may therefore be seen among the Regional Parks in the country. As a result, the "world" of Regional Parks is varied: although there is general uniformity, thorough analysis reveals substantial differences. With regard to management, in general there is an autonomous body, in which local authorities are always involved. In certain cases, however, management is entrusted to local communities or municipal authorities, or even private associations (e.g. reserves managed by WWF Italy). Recently, some regional authorities, such as Piedmont and Emilia Romagna, merged the existing management bodies, dividing the region into macro-areas.

In addition, regions have delegated administrative responsibilities to Regional Parks for the conservation of biological diversity (e.g. monitoring in connection with the EU Habitats and Birds Directives) and in many cases, parks are responsible for the implementation of specific regional laws (e.g. about natural monuments, geological monitoring etc.).

Financing

Regional Parks are usually financed by the corresponding regions. Budget is always a critical issue: funds have decreased in recent years and

in some regions, this negative trend has been considerable.

Therefore, several Regional Parks are very active in fundraising. With some rare exceptions, entrance to Italy's Regional Parks is free, but Parks charge for some services and specific activities. The EU is a very important contributor to the Regional Parks, with the LIFE, INTERREG and ENPI Programs and the Structural and Cohesion Funds being the most commonly utilized sources of funding.

Different levels of funding are allocated by the regions to support the management of the parks, depending on the complexity of the park and on the availability of other sources of funding for the park. Some regions, taking the view that establishing a park necessitates ongoing operating expenses, give parks equal sums (e.g. Tuscany). Other regions start from a common baseline then attach resources based on parameters such as the area of the park, its staffing, etc.

In the case of parks managed by other authorities, regional funding is often very low-level or even non-existent (e.g. the Liguria Region finances six park authorities, while it does not assign any funding to the three parks managed directly by the local municipal authorities).

Successful Projects

Many sectors and thematic areas are part of the daily life of Italy's Regional Parks: nature conservation, sustainable tourism, local food products, as well as Natura 2000 management, sustainable agriculture and breeding, cultural heritage, traditional handicraft, environmental education, etc. The following few paragraphs expand on just a few of these.



Nature conservation

Nature conservation is the primary mission of Regional Parks. In Italy, good collaborative relationships have been established and several coordinated projects involving both Regional and National Parks have been completed, and there

is cooperation at international level. To cite a few examples:

At the start of 1990, there was just one surviving population of Apennine chamois (*Rupicapra pyrenaica ornata*) in the entire Apennine region, within the area of the Abruzzo National Park. Throughout the decade that followed, they began to be reintroduced in the Gran Sasso Laga, Maiella and Sibillini National Parks and the Sirente Velino Regional Park and today, there are more than 2,000 individual animals in these 5 areas.

The reintroduction of the osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) has been a success for the Maremma Regional Park (Tuscany). The Regional Park of Corsica and Maremma Regional Park have been working together for over 10 years to protect and reintroduce the species to Italy's coastal areas and now the osprey is nesting on the Italian coasts. By the late 1990s, the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) had almost disappeared from the Alps. In 1996, the EU-funded LIFE Ursus Project was launched for the protection and reintroduction of the Alpine brown bear, with the involvement of Adamello Brenta Regional Park, the Autonomous Province of Trento and the Republic of Slovenia.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

Regional Protected Areas endeavour to offer models for sustainability in the tourism sector, via different approaches. The most important of these is the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. Regional Parks play an important role in developing the Charter in Italy. In the late 1990s, Alpi Marittime Regional Park was one of seven pilot areas throughout Europe to test this new instrument and in 2001, it became the first Charter Park in Italy. A few

years later, the Lombardia, Puglia and Marche Regions followed suit, promoting and financing the Charter in their Regional Parks. Nineteen Regional Natural Parks are now Charter Parks and two Regional Parks have certified the first sustainable business partners (Charter Phase II) in Italy. In just a few years, the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas has taken on great importance in Italy, and it is now considered by the National and Regional Parks and Marine Protected Areas, as well as by the Regions and the Ministry of the Environment, to be a very useful tool for the governance of protected areas.

Agriculture and local food products

All Regional Parks direct particular attention to agriculture, old breeds of animals and cultivated plants and local food products that are so closely linked with biodiversity conservation in the Mediterranean countries. An "Atlas of Typical Local Products in Italian Parks" was published by Federparchi, reporting an incredible assortment of agro-biodiversity, e.g. 28 native animal breeds, 475 typical and traditional products and thousands of producers in 19 National Parks and 60 Regional Parks. Partnerships between Regional Parks and farmers are very common, and there are numerous projects to promote local products.

Of these, one best practice programme is "Natura in Campo", in the Regional Parks of Lazio. The programme has three main goals: to increase the value of agricultural food; to promote and market these products; and to create "educational farms".

Outlook

Regional Parks are an essential feature for Italy, especially considering the country's great geological and biological diversity. Despite the economic difficulties, no Italian region has questioned the future of the parks, while all are discussing the outlook for the parks, with the focus on three key factors. First is the connection with National Parks, with the goal of building an extensive and far-reaching ecological network that spans Italy. The second pertains to the interrelation of the three fundamental aspects of planning, ecosystem services and financial resources. Finally, it is crucial to define a deeper relationship with the territories, especially local municipal authorities. Since Regional Parks are all designated by the regions, these three elements should be reflected in the corresponding regional legislation.

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LATVIA

Nature Parks and Protected Landscape Areas

Goals and Statutory Mandate

In Latvia, Nature Parks and Protected Landscape Areas are designated by the state (the Cabinet of Ministers) or local governments based on the state-level nature conservation legislation. According to their statutory mandate, Protected Landscape Areas are territories that are remarkable for their authentic and diverse landscapes. Their purpose is to protect and preserve the character of the landscape and the landscape elements that are essential for the protected species and habitat functions which characterise Latvia's cultural and landscape diversity, as well as providing opportunities for public recreation and tourism appropriate for environmental conservation and nature-friendly management. The main objective of Protected Landscape Areas is to preserve typical elements of Latvia's landscape and cultural heritage.

Nature Parks are territories that represent the natural, cultural and historical values of a particular area, and that are suitable for recreation, education and the instruction of society. The main goal of Nature Parks is to preserve natural diversity and promote human and natural harmony in natural values for the future. Another important role of Nature Parks is to educate the public, especially landowners and economic actors, about nature protection issues and to promote public participation.

Latvia's Nature Parks and nationally designated Protected Landscape Areas have been declared

Facts and Figures

42 Nature Parks (dabas parki) and 9 Protected Landscape Areas (aizsargājamo ainavu apvidi)

Total surface area: 2,853 km²
= 4 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 60 km² (0,7 – 521 km²)

Oldest park: 1957. Most recent park: 2004.



as Natura 2000 sites. Economic activity within these parks must be carried out in accordance with national and European Union legislation on the protection of species and habitats.

Operation

In order to ensure effective performance of the laws and regulations related to nature protection, as well as to promote the implementation of a uniform policy for the protection of nature and the use of natural resources, a national authority, the Nature Conservation Agency, has been created.

The Nature Conservation Agency has a number of main functions. These include the management of all of Latvia's protected areas, the management of nature protection planning and promotion of management plans, state environmental control of protected regions of national significance, monitoring of specially protected species and biotopes, the management and protection of micro-reserves, and scientific research management in protected areas.

It also works in cooperation with local authorities, tourism entrepreneurs, non-governmental organisations and educational institutions to promote nature conservation, and issues licences and permits for activities in protected areas. The Nature Conservation Agency has four territorial structural units that focus their efforts on all protected areas, including Nature Parks. Several non-governmental associations and foundations have been established to implement the necessary economic measures in protected areas. Local governments may finance and perform the management of protected areas within their respective administrative territories.

Associations, foundations and local governments must inform the Nature Conservation Agency of planned management measures.

The Nature Conservation Agency works closely with the State Environmental Service, local governments and NGO's, as well as with other state institutions within the scope of their competence.

Financing

The Nature Conservation Agency is a national authority that receives state funding for its work. As the Nature Conservation Agency manages some state lands, revenue from management activities in these lands is used to fund the management of species and habitats. Additional resources from local governments and different national government and EU funding programmes are used for particular management activities in Protected Landscape Areas.

Successful Projects

People and nature

Nature education has been and still is a very important factor in promoting the sustainable development of society; however, it has suffered from a lack of financial capacity and insufficient societal recognition. In order to improve the situation, it is necessary to offer a well-developed nature education strategy that is appropriate to modern society.

Rapid economic development in recent years has changed and influenced our society. People wish to reach a certain level of wellbeing, but at the same time, they do consider the associated costs to nature and have little awareness of green living. Since 2013, in six nature education



centres in different parts of Latvia, children and adults have been able to experience directly the principles of green living. In an interactive way – through the senses, games and research – everyone can explore coastal nature at different times of the year, species living in rivers and

lakes, find out about slope and ravine forests, and learn about marshlands and about the interaction of humans and nature. Visitors also can experience nature by taking short and long walks along trails running close to the nature education centres.

Electronic accessibility

Simply presented and easily understandable information is the key to making a region accessible for people from the surrounding areas, as well as for national and international tourists. IT technologies, such as wireless access points, QR codes, applications for smartphones and tablets and electronic information points are rapidly replacing stands with written information, paper maps and guide books. The goal of an electronic accessibility project was to use a cross-border approach to further develop the tourism information network in Lithuania's Nature Parks. In cooperation with neighbouring countries, e.g. Latvia, similarly designed information and IT tools have been developed and introduced.

Green routes without obstacles

The Latvian, Lithuanian and Belarusian border regions are rich in natural parks, lakes and forests. While Nature Parks are adapted to the needs of tourists, disabled people tend to be forgotten. The partners are therefore joining forces to make the riches of nature accessible to people with disabilities.

The Nature Concerthall

The Nature Concerthall is a project that combines science and art, with the aim of increasing public awareness of environmental issues and environmentally friendly leisure activities in natural settings. Each year a specific species is selected as the mascot for the year and a natural

area is designated as a playground for science and art. The event is developed and organized as a non-commercial venture with no entrance fee, based on the idea of open access to nature in Latvia. It addresses people of all ages - the audience ranges from families with babies to elderly couples.

The project has increased the inclusion of all groups in society by bringing together people of different nationalities, fostering active involvement from the youngest to the most elderly populations, and engaging people in the protection of recognized or newly discovered local cultural/natural values. An indirect impact of the event is in building the capabilities of young students and schoolchildren, by increasing their knowledge of and interest in natural sciences.

Nature conservation

Nowadays, the management plan for many Nature Parks includes the restoration of abandoned grasslands that are overgrown with bushes. The restoration of open grasslands by removing bushes and trees usually is the first step. To maintain open grasslands for breeding meadow birds, 'Konik Polski' horses and cattle suitable for year round grazing have been introduced in the cleared areas.

Outlook

The main task for the next few years is to strike a balance between economic growth and nature conservation as increasing numbers of conflicts arise between different stakeholders. The total habitat mapping and efficiency mapping of existing sites in the Natura 2000 network is one solution for achieving this balance. The other is to continue providing a unified nature protection policy throughout Latvia.

In order to achieve effective management of natural values and to support protected areas where humans and nature live together in harmony, public awareness of natural values and the role that we all have to play in the preservation and further development of our parks must be raised still more.

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LITHUANIA

Regional Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

Regional Parks in Lithuania are integrated protected areas. They comprise unique landscapes and ecosystems, natural and cultural treasures and regional recreational resources, as well as settlements and villages. The main goals of these territories are to protect natural and cultural heritage and to provide recreational opportunities, primarily for ecotourism.

Some parts of Regional Parks are important because they contain the most endangered habitats and species in Europe. They are therefore included in the Natura 2000 network. Regional Parks occupy 39% of the protected areas of Lithuania. Regional Parks can be grouped according to their main landscape type, e.g. coastal and lagoon, river valley, forested lake regions and hills, plateau and plain Regional Parks. The outstanding characteristics of each of the Regional Parks are recorded.

Regional Parks allow us to revel in the spiritual treasures and the wisdom of humanity. They nurture positive feelings, virtues, and respect for our ancestors and our past, celebrate the culture of the nation and of the individual, and ensure the continuity of traditions.

Operation

Human activities in Regional Parks are regulated by the Law on Protected Areas, as well as individual regulations. Each Regional Park has a

Facts and Figures

30 Regional Parks (Regioniniai parkai)

Total surface area: 4,492 km²
= 7 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 149 km²
(217 – 5,531 km²)

The Supreme Council established all 30 Regional Parks by one decree in 1992



planning scheme. All Regional Parks have directorates which have developed management maps in order to set priorities for their activities and identify specific management needs. This is necessary in order to ensure purposeful activities, to focus on the main goals, and to understand the arrangements and adaptations that are needed to accommodate visitors' needs. In addition to programmes aimed at conservation, management and restoration, educational programmes are also implemented, and the right conditions for developing ecotourism are promoted in Regional Parks.

The State Service for Protected Areas under the Ministry of the Environment is the main body directly responsible for the quality of the activities of the Regional Parks' administrative authorities. The Service implements state policies related to the protection and management of protected areas.

Financing

Management and maintenance, development of ecotourism, and educational, cultural and other activities are funded by national and municipal budgets. Regional Parks can also be funded by special programmes, funds, legal persons or individual contributions. In the last decade, additional resources from European Union funding programmes have also been deployed for projects in Regional Parks.

In 2015, a visitor's ticket for Lithuanian Regional Parks was introduced. Eco-oriented people who care about nature and landscape values are able to contribute to the enhancement of the Regional Parks. Profits are used for state improvement of the protected resources, the management of natural sites and recreational areas, the renova-

tion of information stands and waste removal, as well as educational environmental protection activities.

Successful Projects

Regional Park Visitors' Centres

Almost all Regional Parks have visitors' centres containing unique interactive exhibitions. Each of them has a unique main theme. They aim not only to provide knowledge about biodiversity and the importance of its conservation, but also to reveal the uniqueness and individuality of the landscape, the values that are protected, and the way of life of the local people.

In addition, the new National Protected Areas Visitors' Centre in Vilnius opened last year. A gateway to all protected areas, it provides visitors with information about protected areas and especially about the outstanding value of Regional Parks in Lithuania and abroad. Visitors are welcomed to the centre by its theme of "Protected Areas. Journey through the Circle of Life". The exhibition not only captures the attention with its content, but also amazes with its visual design concept. Inside, visitors will feel as though they are surrounded by nature – with grasslands, birds, and grasshoppers around them, and the clouds above their heads. Every visitor becomes an active participant capable of touching, listening, and feeling.

Watch Towers

Many visitors to Regional Parks have probably often wondered how exciting it would be to see the area from above. Now this is possible with the 15 watch towers in Regional Parks, each more than 15 metres high. Climbing up each watch tower gives a different view and feeling, because each of them represents another landscape.



The Treetop Walking Path, which is the only one of its kind in the Baltic States and even in Eastern Europe, was opened in 2015 in Anykščiai Regional Park. It presents a unique opportunity to develop eco-friendly and sustainable tourism in Lithuania's protected areas. It

helps to reveal different colours, sounds, smells and images of the peace of nature throughout the four seasons of the year, and essentially aims to remind the visitors of the meaning of the relationship between man and nature. The Treetop Walking Path was honoured with the highest prize in the UNWTO Awards for Innovation in Enterprises in 2016.

Nature Schools

It is hard to love nature if you do not know it. This was the rationale behind the creation of nature schools in five Regional Parks - a place where students and adults can spend time in nature, observe protected plants and animals, and hear about why and how they should be protected. The aim of Nature Schools is to learn about nature in nature, and to teach young people to respect nature and understand its processes. Here, various educational programmes can be organized, and participants can be accommodated as well.

Thanks to a Norwegian funding programme, 19 methodological publications with educational tasks aimed at improving young people's awareness of nature are available in Regional Parks.

Visitor infrastructure and educational trails

It is very important that each Regional Park is adapted for public access. This includes the creation of visitor infrastructure, educational trails and routes, forest parks, and sightseeing spots to enable visitors to experience the outstanding value of the landscape. Special attention should be devoted to presenting landscapes and objects in a suitable manner. Visitor infrastructure (information panels, benches, bicycle tracks, etc.) and educational trails have been installed in all Regional Parks.

Some of them lead through wetlands and forests, alongside rivers and lakes or pass close to mythological stones and barrows. All hiking trails are provided with signs and information panels so that the visitors can familiarize themselves with the most beautiful regions of Lithuania. Educational trails are adapted to different age groups and address various senses.

Nature conservation

In order to limit the loss of biodiversity and degradation in Regional Parks, areas with a high value for nature conservation receive special care. A wide range of nature conservation measures are carried out in Regional Parks, especially at Natura 2000 sites. A large part of the wetlands have been drained over the course of the 20th century. Over time, due to intensive land reclamation, Lithuania has drained about 75 percent of its wetlands. In order to preserve these unique and valuable natural complexes, it is necessary to restore the natural hydrological regime. Today, 19 projects have been successfully completed in Regional Parks where a natural hydrological regime has been restored.

Outlook

The highest-priority goal for Regional Parks is to preserve the country's unique landscape, biodiversity, and treasures of natural and cultural

heritage, and to ensure their conservation and management, as well as adapting the areas to the needs of visitors.

Lithuania has a great tradition of planning for protected areas – not only for individual Regional Parks, but also for the entire network of protected areas. It is on this basis that the available planning schemes are consistently improved. Lithuania has yet to establish how Regional Parks will be considered in the general plans of the territories and districts of the Republic of Lithuania. It is very important that the citizens of Lithuania are aware of the importance of Regional Parks for the state and society and understand their benefits.

The Regional Parks in Lithuania and the State Service for Protected Areas work together to bring the natural and cultural value of their regions closer to the people, to communicate responsible behaviour in nature and to create opportunities for recreation. The country's inhabitants should have the opportunity to visit its natural treasures and to enjoy nature and the landscape, thus enabling them to experience the value of the protected areas first-hand.

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LUXEMBOURG

Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

There are three Nature Parks in Luxembourg: the Mëllerdall Nature Park, the Upper Sûre Nature Park and the Our Nature Park. The mission statement of the Nature Parks, as laid down by law, encompasses both conservation and development. Their diverse range of duties and their role in regional cooperation means that the Nature Parks come under the joint responsibility of the government (for regional planning) and the municipal authorities in the Nature Parks. Additional government support is provided by the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, Culture and Economic Affairs, as well as the nature and forestry and water management authorities.

The practical work done by the Nature Parks varies greatly, depending on the project: from consulting to project development and financing to project promotion – always working in partnership with the municipal authorities, local actors and the State, of course. In Luxembourg, a Nature Park is therefore an important platform for the sustainable development of a region. The range of roles and projects is set out below.

Operation

The Nature Parks are administered by mixed syndicates of municipal authorities, each consisting of an executive board, an executive bureau and an advisory committee. The Nature Park is managed by its staff, which consists of a

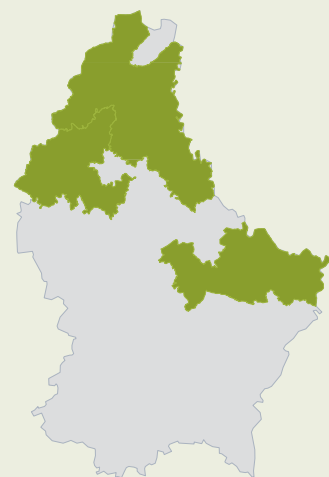
Facts and Figures

3 Nature Parks (Naturparke/parcs naturels)

Total surface area: 877 km²
= 34 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 292 km²
(202 – 419 km²)

Oldest park: 1993. Most recent park: 2016.



full-time team and temporary positions for larger projects. Other services and activities in the regions around the Nature Parks are then provided in cooperation with partners.

Financing

The Nature Parks' income is made up of contributions from member municipal authorities, co-financing by the State, income from services and interest as well as donations and bequests. Larger projects of transnational importance are made possible with support from the European Union (Leader, Interreg, LIFE, etc.).

Successful Projects

Nature conservation and landscape preservation

The high-value cultural landscapes of the three Nature Parks contribute significantly to improving the quality of life of residents in and visitors to the regions. The value of nature should be preserved through environmentally compatible forms of land use and management. A further objective is to preserve and enhance the cultural, tourism and leisure value of the landscape for recreational purposes.

Particular attention is paid to protecting and conserving landscapes, natural resources, lakes and water courses, the climate, habitats and species. It is important to raise environmental awareness and to facilitate close cooperation between land users and other regional actors with a view to modern nature conservation.

The Nature Parks are keen to position themselves as competence centres for nature and the landscape. This is being achieved, for example, by drawing up inventories of species and biotopes, providing special consultations for

actors in the region, preparing scientific fundamentals, managing various landscape, environmental and nature conservation programmes and, last but not least, through awareness-raising and public relations work.

Water

Water conservation is an important area of the Nature Parks' work. The Upper Sûre Nature Park in particular stands out as Luxembourg's water region, as home to the 3.8 km² Upper Sûre reservoir lake which supplies about 70% of the total population of Luxembourg with drinking water. The quality of lake and river water and of water in general depends on many different factors and also on human beings.

This is why it is important to raise awareness amongst the representatives of these factors of direct and indirect influence, to find joint solutions to current problems and take preventive action. Given the well-known fact that water does not stop at borders, many projects are also carried out transnationally. Awareness is also being increased amongst private households, with projects and events at which the value of water and the importance of protecting this resource are made clear to them.

Services and networking

Nature Parks are an important platform for networking and services in their regions, helping to encourage coordinated and sustainable regional planning. The Nature Park is based on a partnership approach involving government and municipal authorities. Working together, they ensure that the specific characteristics of the Nature Park region are preserved and further developed, also with a view to strengthening the region's socio-economic fabric. The Nature Park creates considerable and sustainable synergies between the actors, which is an important



prerequisite for the future development of the region. With its broad-based, well-positioned networking and services, the Nature Park aims to offer enhanced cooperation for all stakeholders and to ensure the sustainable development of the region with the Nature Park's specialized knowledge. In doing so, the Nature Parks perform a wide variety of functions, including supporting events, collecting data, helping as a partner in municipal projects, managing and coordinating regional initiatives, and cooperating with other Nature Parks in Luxembourg and abroad.

Agriculture

Many municipal authorities in the Nature Parks have an agricultural profile and have lived and

managed their activities in harmony with nature for centuries. To take account of this important role, an agricultural consulting service has been established in each of the three Nature Parks.

A key objective in agriculture remains the encouragement of sustainable farming methods and support for agricultural activities that satisfy the need for conservation and improvement of natural resources. The contribution of agriculture to nature and resource conservation and the preservation of manmade landscapes create synergies for both areas.

Moreover, the Nature Parks offer further training and awareness-raising activities, as well as the coordination and promotion of marketing measures.

Cultural heritage & tourism

The Nature Park regions have a wide range of diverse landscapes, with unspoiled natural spaces, townscapes shaped by history, and monuments and traditions of cultural and historical importance.

The major value of these natural spaces and this cultural heritage should be sustainably enhanced and made more accessible to residents and visitors. Similarly, the Nature Park regions are of great value to residents and visitors in terms of leisure and recreation. This aspect is also to be gradually developed in future. The Nature Parks aim to preserve and develop this natural and cultural heritage sustainably, innovatively and in their own specific manner. This aim serves both to enhance residents' quality of life and to encourage tourism and revive the region's cultural traditions.

Environmental education and communication

The aim of environmental education is to develop and encourage responsible environmental behaviour and use of natural resources. Heightened environmental awareness influences behaviour by helping individuals to recognise, avoid or even find solutions to current environmental problems. In the Nature Park, environmental education encompasses the park's own information campaigns and specific projects.

Outlook

The overarching goal of Luxembourg's Nature Parks is to anchor the principles of sustainable and integrated development in the regions. In 2015, the number of people living in the Grand Duchy increased by 13,291, to 576,249 inhabitants. This represents an increase of 2.4%. Migration remains the main driver of population growth in Luxembourg. The downsides of this development are high pressure on the housing market, an increase in urban sprawl, higher demand for different kinds of public infrastructure (transport, schools, wastewater treatment, etc.), and an increase in traffic.

The Nature Parks have to meet these challenges through the conservation of their natural and cultural landscape and the balanced develop-

ment of their land and economic activities. A major goal of the Nature Parks is to develop in accordance with the principle of sustainable development. The attractiveness of these areas must be maintained through the development of a responsible kind of tourism, as well as new housing units built to high ecological standards that are well integrated into rural villages. In order also to guarantee quality of life for people living in Nature Park areas in future, it is important to preserve places of calm where there are no lights to disturb the night sky.

Another important goal for Luxembourg's Nature Parks is the promotion of regional products. Indeed, Nature Parks are often defined on the basis of the regional portfolio of products. In Luxembourg, the main challenge is to define uniform criteria for the production and marketing of products in Nature Park areas. Good cooperation with the agricultural sector is indispensable in achieving this goal.

Last but not least, the work of the Nature Parks needs to be monitored to guarantee that goals are implemented efficiently and effectively and to ensure that public money is spent in the right place, at the right time.

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NORWAY

Regional Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

The Regional Parks represent a selection of Norway's varied landscapes, such as high alpine mountains, fjords, canals and deep forests. The mission of Regional Parks in Norway is to increase cooperation in respect of the caretaking and further enhancement of natural and cultural values in regions of defined landscape and identity.

The work of the Regional Parks is focused in the areas of rural development, landscape management, sustainable tourism and heritage interpretation.

As yet, there is no separate legal basis for Regional Parks in national law and they are founded under the planning and building act. The Regional Parks are established as associations formed by municipal and regional authorities and private partners.

The designation criteria are inspired by the Swiss Parks and have been developed by the Norwegian Parks Association in cooperation with national governmental bodies. The criteria are also founded on the articles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC).

The designation process is not yet the responsibility of a particular governmental entity, but is managed by the Regional Parks themselves through the Norwegian Parks Association.

Facts and Figures

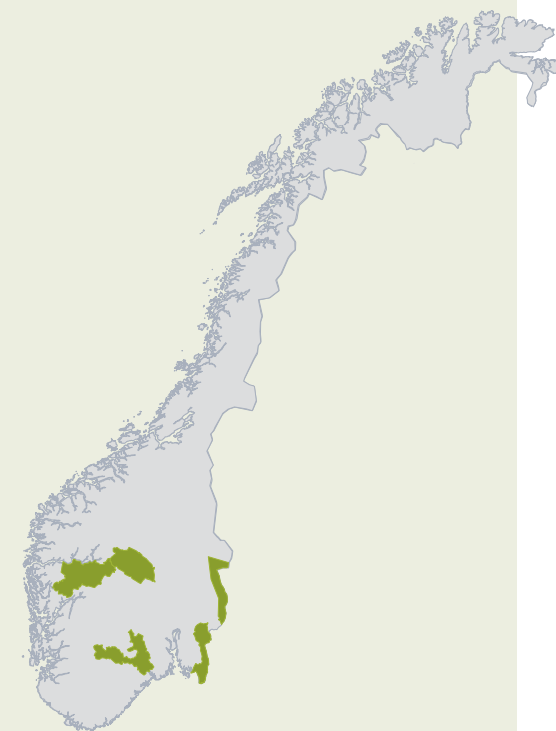
5 Regional Parks (regionalparker)

Total surface area: 19,358 km²
= 5 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 3,871 km²
(2,544 – 5,798 km²)

Oldest park: 2006. Most recent park: 2014.

Umbrella organisation: Norwegian Parks Association (Norske Parker), founded in 2011



Operation

The work of the Regional Parks in Norway is inspired by the work of parks in continental Europe, especially the French and Swiss regional Nature Parks. However, natural factors, climate and population density are very different in Norway. The Regional Parks are established on the basis of voluntary agreements, primarily between municipal and regional authorities.

The development of the park does not include any additional demands for protection of the area. There are partnership agreements in the parks that contribute to participation by private partners and the involvement of local and regional players. These private partners are elected to the board and contribute to the definition of annual objectives and plans.

Financing

Regional parks in Norway are primarily funded through contributions from municipal and regional authorities. Projects are largely financed through government programmes and European cooperation programmes. There is not yet a national funding scheme for Regional Parks in Norway.

Successful Projects

Landscape Resource Analysis

In the early phases of the development of Regional Parks in Norway, the projects use Landscape Resource Analysis as a tool. This is a method of participatory landscape mapping which includes the landscape views of local people and experts. It is inspired by Landscape Character Assessments and Sense of Place projects in the UK. The process of conducting





such an analysis has proven to be a good way to record natural and cultural values, as well as calibrating expert views with those of local people. Conducting a Landscape Resource Analysis is one of the criteria for becoming a Regional Park in Norway.

This work also fulfils the intentions of the European Landscape Conventions with regard to landscape planning and participation.

Local food

The Regional Parks in Norway represent some of the most attractive regions for local food production in Norway. The fjord valleys of the Nærøfjord World Heritage Park are home to farmers making white and brown goat cheese. The mountain farmers in the Valdres Nature and Culture Park produce a typical fermented fish called rakfisk. Both areas have received national awards for their work with local food.

Regional branding

The Regional Parks in Norway are actively building long-term attachment to their regions through regional branding. The main aim is to increase attractiveness for further settlement and for promoting regional products. The Valdres region and the Valdres Nature and Culture Park have been especially successful in regional branding, creating one of Norway's best known regional brands.

Outlook

The establishment of Regional Parks in Norway is still at an early stage. However, the first Regional Parks are now 10 years old and can demonstrate positive results. The main objective for Regional Parks in Norway in the next few years is incorporation into the national legal framework and

allocation of base funding for operating costs. An overhaul of natural and cultural heritage laws, to incorporate a more integrated park policy, similar to that of Switzerland, would be a good model for Norway and other Nordic countries.

The Nordic countries have been generally slow to adopt more dynamic parks, such as Regional Parks, Biosphere Reserves and Geoparks.

However, this is changing rapidly with the development of several parks in Norway and the Nordic countries. Sweden also has its first Regional Park, in the form of the transboundary Regional Park in the Finnskogen area.

This should be supported at the regional and national level with a pilot program and seed funding.

The same is true in Iceland, where local municipal authorities recently established the country's first Regional Park, in the Snæfellsnes region.

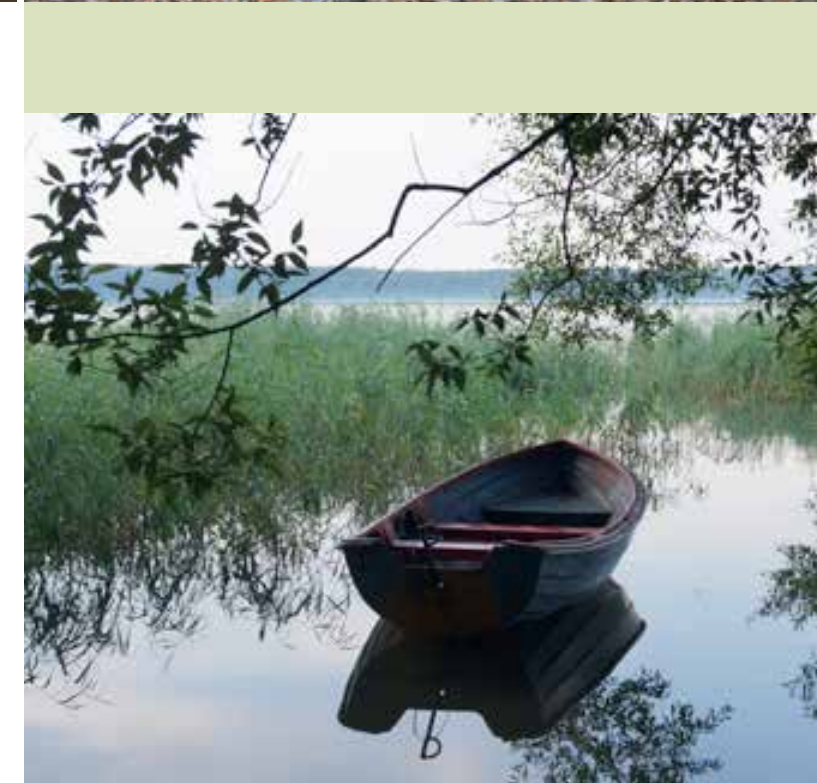
The experience from many Nordic countries is that in the presence of bottom-up approaches, national governments slow to support and assimilate these new initiatives. European cooperation is therefore very important for the growing Regional Park movement in the Nordic countries.

The national government in Norway and other Nordic countries will have to pay closer attention to these dynamic types of parks in the years ahead, at the same time as increasing funding for existing parks and protected areas.

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POLAND

Landscape Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

Landscape Parks in Poland derive from the rich tradition of nature conservation. They are one of many forms of protection areas established under the Nature Conservation Act in the 1980's and 1990's.

The need for their creation has its origins in the requirement to preserve the characteristics of landscape forms, history, culture and the functioning of ecosystems with valuable and protected species and habitats. It is important that there is economic and agricultural activity in all Landscape Park areas, and the role of restriction in the parks is to ensure sustainable development.

In Poland, Landscape Parks are designated by resolution of the Regional Parliaments of the Provinces. As National Parks, Polish Landscape Parks have their own administrative authority, in the form of the Park Service and its Director. All parks within a province are managed by a regional Landscape Park association, which is part of the administrative authority of the province (e.g. the "Western Pomerania Regional Landscape Parks" association in the province of West Pomerania).

Landscape Parks are distinctive for their wealth of wildlife. As places where people coexist with animals and plants, they are home to large mammals, birds of prey and bats, as well as material culture. Most of the parks consist of large forests and natural rivers and lakes.

Facts and Figures

121 Landscape Parks (Parki krajobrazowe)

Total surface area: 25,290 km²
= 8% of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 215 km²
(20 – 870 km²)

Oldest park: 1976. Most recent park: 2001.

Umbrella organisations: 16 umbrella organisations on province level



Landscape Parks are attractive to people, as they are areas where the economy and tourism are growing. Landscape Parks are often the last areas in Poland where protected species of plants and animals can be found. One of the most important aims of the parks is to protect natural, historical, cultural and ethnic diversity.

In Poland, the Landscape Parks together with the National Parks, nature reserves and Natura 2000 sites are part of a specific system of protected areas which, combined with ecological corridors, enables organisms to migrate. As part of the European network of protected areas, Landscape Parks support the preservation of biological diversity in Europe.

Operation

The work of the Landscape Park is based on the activity of the park service. A fully trained team with extensive experience in the protection of protection is responsible for an inventory of natural habitats, protected plants, animals and fungi, as well as inanimate features. The parks have a significant role in identifying and assessing existing and potential internal and external threats to the parks and requesting action to eliminate or reduce these risks and their consequences, as well as other measures to improve the function and protection of these areas.

Day-to-day work is based on cooperation with a wide range of institutions and individuals, including all levels of local government, scientists, local society, and non- governmental organizations with an interest in nature and tourism.

There are some prohibitions in Landscape Parks that apply to these areas. Park services have a

responsibility to inform the public of the rules of conduct in protected areas.

Financing

Landscape Parks are financed in large part by the state, with additional budget coming from the province. In addition, the province provides co-financing for specific projects, including EU-funded projects. The parks' statutory activities, and administrative and technical support, are funded entirely from the budget of individual provinces. Meagre state subsidies encourage exploration of additional sources of financing for nature conservation and education from external funds, both domestic and European, such as Provincial Funds for Environmental Protection, Interreg and Life.

Landscape Parks in Poland operate as non-profit organisations.



Successful Projects

Please note: as the chapter on the Polish Landscape Parks was written by the “Western Pomerania Regional Landscape Parks” association, the following examples are drawn primarily from Landscape Parks in the province of West Pomerania.

Education and public relations activities

The most important element of a Landscape Park’s work is education and the promotion of protected areas. Education is directed at a broad public audience and various individual groups, including children and students in the form of school visits, “green lessons”, excursions and knowledge competitions, park residents in the form of promotional campaigns, park festivals and picnics, and politicians and all other interested groups in the form of meetings, press conferences and newspaper articles.

Scientific and popular publications, area maps, leaflets and brochures are prepared to promote the parks. An important aspect of promotion is to provide parks with official information and educational display boards to guide tourists.

Nationwide knowledge competition for children

An annual contest for children has been held for the last 17 years, with the aim of helping them to learn about or improve their knowledge of Landscape Parks in Poland.

The competition consists of five stages, starting with school games and ending with young people from all over the country coming together in one of the parks.

The competition ends with a few day trips around the park. It gives participants the opportunity to visit and learn about different places in Poland, and the experience of an unforgettable adventure.

Cross-border cooperation

Western Pomerania in Poland directly borders the valued natural areas of Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Germany. These are the National Park Unteres Odertal and the Nature Park Am Stettiner Haff.

Long-term cooperation brings enormous benefits in the form of sharing experience, joint activities and projects to protect valuable transnational species. An example of such activity is Polish-German Crane week in the Lower Oder Valley.

Outlook

One of the most important goals for Polish Landscape Parks is to prepare a strategy for Landscape Park conservation, a document for proper management of the parks. The plan clearly indicates the areas available for scientific, educational, tourism, recreational and other forms of management and identifies ways in which these areas can be used.

It also sets out conditions and guidance for the spatial development of municipalities and provinces. Only 34% of Poland’s parks have this type of plan. Important factors for further development of Poland’s Landscape Parks include increased financial and human resources for management of the parks, and tighter legislative controls, to increase the parks’ powers in respect of nature conservation and ensure better enforcement of existing restrictions.

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conservation plans implemented in order to protect endangered or critically endangered species such as the Iberian lynx, the *Anaecypris hispanica*, the Iberian imperial eagle and the Iberian wolf. The measures taken range from habitat management to compensation for cattle farmers who lose livestock to wolf predation, with overall positive results, especially in the case of the Iberian lynx reintroduction programme. Most Nature Parks also carry out management, monitoring and public relations work for

PORTUGAL

Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

In mainland Portugal, any public or private entity may propose the creation of a Nature Park, based on the National Nature Conservation and Biodiversity Act. The proposal is reviewed by the national nature conservation and forest authority (ICNF, I.P.) and, in case of approval, designation by the government follows. There are Nature Parks of national, regional and local designation.

According to their statutory mandate, the parks' main goal is the protection of existing natural values and the implementation of actions compatible with this, thus contributing to regional and national development. Nature Parks should promote management practices that ensure the conservation of biodiversity. Other important tasks are the creation of leisure opportunities that respect the character and qualities of each area, and the promotion of activities promoting sustainable development.

Operation and Financing

Mainland Portugal

ICNF, I.P. is made up of a central office and five regional departments, each of which has a director who supervises and coordinates affairs relating to nature conservation and forest issues, including the region's Nature Parks management. Nature Parks' staff reports directly to the regional director. Each park has an advisory board that includes representatives of several

Facts and Figures

15 Nature Parks (parques naturais)

Total surface area: 6,656 km²
= 7 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 444 km² (72 – 860 km²)

Oldest park: 1976. Most recent park: 2013.



institutions related to nature conservation, agriculture, planning and tourism, the municipal councils, as well as environmental, agriculture, hunting and fishing NGOs and universities. The parks work in cooperation with local institutions, businesses, schools, farmers and other stakeholders.

Nature Parks of regional designation are managed by associations of municipalities and are subject to periodic assessment by the national authority to ascertain that the criteria for designation are being maintained.

The national government provides the basic funding for the protected areas' regular activities. Specific projects are also funded through partnerships with municipal authorities and resources from national and European grant schemes.

Madeira

Being located on the main island of the Autonomous Region of Madeira, the Nature Park of Madeira works independently from the national nature conservation and forestry authority of mainland Portugal. Its basic funding comes from the regional government of Madeira and, as part of the European Union, it also benefits from EU project funding, e.g. through the LIFE programme.

Successful Projects

Nature conservation

Portuguese Nature Parks are actively involved in the protection of nature and landscape in the form of various projects. By fighting against invasive species, especially plants, biodiversity and the landscape features associated with it are preserved. There are also several special species



NATURA 2000 sites (22% of Portugal's mainland territory).

Sustainable tourism and regional development

The Portuguese parks have their own national brand - "Natural.PT" - owned by ICNF, I.P. One of the goals of the brand initiative is to promote the parks, and protected areas in general, as destinations for leisure and tourism and to increase visitor numbers. Other objectives include close cooperation with businesses operating in these areas, the creation of a network of sustainable products and services that mirror the biological and geological diversity of the parks, and the communication of the park's main goals.

Products and services from the parks and surrounding areas sign up to the brand voluntarily and formally agree to promote the park and other brand partners. In return, ICNF, I.P. promotes and recommends these products and services in association with the parks.

The brand was created in 2014 and has been granted to nearly 500 products and services including accommodation, tour operators, restaurants, and local produce and specialities. The project is intended to help Nature Parks achieve their nature conservation and sustainable development goals.

Successful projects in the Madeira Nature Park

The Madeira Nature Park covers approximately 67% of the island and includes the largest surviving area of primary laurel forest worldwide, which is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Laurisilva contains a unique array of plants and animals, including many

endemic species, such as the Madeira long-toed pigeon. Several projects have been put in place to manage and preserve this area, ranging from habitat recovery and species monitoring to the promotion of the Park's natural heritage.

Besides its conservation and monitoring activities, the Nature Park plays a vital role in the field of sustainable tourism and cultural heritage preservation. It defines recreational and leisure zones and works for the preservation of ancient traditions and built heritage.

Outlook

ICNF I.P., the national agency responsible for the management of Portugal's mainland protected areas, was created in 2012 as a result of the fusion of the national nature conservation and forest agencies. The main goal of this fusion was to achieve synergies, improving the organization, efficiency and coherence of the state's work in these two relevant areas. Therefore, one of the

parks administration's main challenges is to strengthen the integration of these two areas and to build networks that allow for the integrity of ecosystems while also contributing to the economic and societal development of the parks' surrounding regions.

Another high-priority goal for Nature Park development in Portugal is the sufficient provision of personnel and funding for Nature Park management in all Nature Parks. This is a necessary condition for the further development of nature conservation and monitoring, in addition to educational and leisure initiatives in order to protect the park resources for future generations.

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ROMANIA

Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

In Romania, Nature Parks are defined in the Protected Areas Law (OUG57/2007) and correspond to IUCN category V (protected landscapes). They are designated by governmental decision, preceded by a scientific study, mapping and identification and consultation with local authorities and landowners. Once created, the Nature Parks have their own special administrative body, created through an agreement between the Ministry of Environment and the managing organisation.

Nature Parks are expected to preserve the landscape, including the cultural landscape that results from traditional human activities. Nature Parks include also protected areas, where important ecosystems, species or habitats are preserved.

Another important aim is the sustainable development of the Nature Parks and the surrounding areas, the promotion of tourism (especially ecotourism), and environmental education. Each Nature Park has its own management plan, approved by ministerial order, which guides and regulates all activities within the park's boundaries.

Operation

The administrative bodies for Nature Parks are created on the basis of an agreement between the managing organisation (National Forest

Facts and Figures

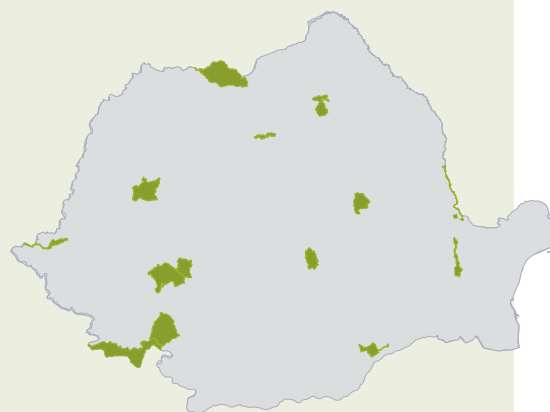
16 Nature Parks (parcuri naturale)

Total surface area: 7,633 km²
= 3 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 477 km² (2 – 1,488 km²)

Oldest park: 1974. Most recent park: 2016.

Umbrella organisation: Association of Natural Protected Areas Administrations (Asociatia Administratiilor Ariilor Naturale Protejate), founded in 2013



Administration, County Councils, NGOs, universities, Local Action Groups) and the Ministry of the Environment. The agreement covers the number of staff in the administrative body, the infrastructure required and the annual budget. Each park has two councils, one scientific and one consultative.

The scientific council analyses and assists the Nature Park's administrative body in all relevant activities – management planning and regulations, approval of activities within the park and scientific studies – and includes renowned researchers in the fields that are relevant for the park. The consultative council includes the stakeholders' representatives and its main role is to debate all the aspects of the Nature Park which might affect them.

Currently, the Romanian Government is developing a framework for a Governmental Decision through which a Protected Area Agency will be created. The Agency will take over the role of the Ministry for the coordination of protected area management.

Financing

Romania's Nature Parks are financed by their managing organisations, based on the budget stipulated in the agreement with the Ministry of the Environment. This budget usually covers ongoing activities – staff costs, administration and day-to-day infrastructure operation, and monitoring – as well as activities dedicated to education, tourism or public awareness.

Infrastructure development and most education and awareness activities are financed through projects, most of them through EU programmes, SEE/Norwegian or Swiss funds.



The parks have the opportunity to generate their own funding from activities, either from entrance fees, the services they provide or the analysis of plans, programmes or projects for approval.

Successful Projects

Several projects involving efforts from the Romanian Nature Parks have achieved significant results.



Carpathian

Ten of the Romanian Nature Parks are located in the Carpathian Mountains and are home to important areas of virgin forests and significant populations of large carnivores. These parks are part of the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA), developed under the Carpathian Convention.

Wetlands

Another four Nature Parks are Internationally Important Wetlands, declared through the Ramsar Convention. One Nature Park is part of the European Geoparks Network.

Species reintroduction

One Nature Park was the first area of certified forest in Romania and also the area where the European bison began to be reintroduced in the wild.

Ecotourism and sustainable development

Romania's Nature Parks are developing visitor centres and information points, management plans and species and habitat monitoring programs. There are also programmes for the preservation of traditional architecture, agriculture, traditional fishing, the certification of ecological products and organic farming. The Nature Parks' activities also include ecotourism, promotion of their respective areas and the improvement of tourist infrastructure.

International cooperation

The Romanian Nature Parks are also involved in international projects with neighbouring countries – Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Ukraine and Moldova – as well as in various other cooperation projects in the Danube and Carpathian region.

Outlook

One main goal, not just for the Nature Parks but for all of Romania's protected areas, is to provide the requisite number of staff and especially the budget, not only for park administration activities but also to compensate land owners for losses due to conservation activities. Creating or renewing management plans, regulation and monitoring protocols are also priorities for Romania's Nature Parks.

The development of cooperation with local stakeholders will be an important phase and will include the development of regional products and brands, also using the Nature Park logo and name.

Education is another important aspect that will have to be further developed, using different methods such as going into schools and nurseries or delivering activities in the field or in visitor centres.

Tourism and ecotourism will be developed through the maintenance and improvement of infrastructure and programmes to improve cooperation with tour operators. Other Nature Park areas will become ecotourism destinations, designated in accordance with the Romanian Ecotourism Strategy.

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SLOVAKIA

Protected Landscape Areas

Goals and Statutory Mandate

The State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic (SNC SR) ensures the professional protection of nature and protected areas in Slovakia. Protected Landscape Area (PLA) administrative authorities are organisational units with no legal personality. SNC SR is the central expert organisation for nature and landscape conservation in Slovakia, established by the Ministry of the Environment as a contributory organisation.

The State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic does not own the land in protected areas, nor does it act as their management body. The areas are managed by non-state owners and other state organizations. The State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic provides scientific opinions and statements to the authorities.

Operation

PLAs are large areas, usually larger than 1,000 ha, with small-structured ecosystems which are important for the conservation of biological diversity and ecological stability and which have a characteristic landscape and/or specific forms of historical settlements. Unless otherwise stated, PLAs are protected by the second level of protection (national levels of protection range from 1 (not protected) to 5 (any kind of human activity is prohibited)). There may be small-scale protected areas inside the PLAs, in the form of nature reserves and natural landmarks. In this

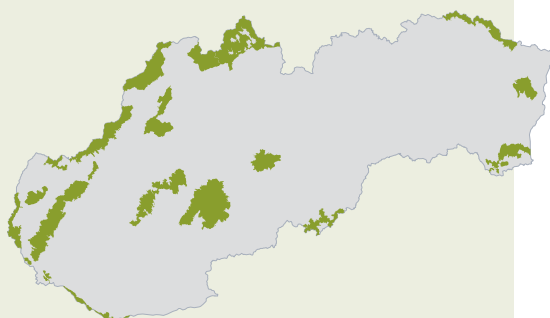
Facts and Figures

14 Protected Landscape Areas (Chranené krajinné oblasti, CHKO)

Total surface area: 5,226 km²
= 11 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 373 km²
(123 – 776 km²)

Oldest park: 1973. Most recent park: 1998.



case, the level of protection provided increases with the level of threat.

PLAs' administrative authorities oversee the activities in the area. They are involved in administrative proceedings, which lay down binding conditions for decision-making and the use of individual territories. In this way, construction, forestry, agriculture, recreation and other activities in the area are managed, taking into account the state of nature and the requirements for its protection.

PLAs also propose principles for the activities of individual sectors within their areas, assess the impacts of intervening in ecosystems and suggest ways to protect them.

PLAs determine the rarity of and level of threat to different species and ensure their protection according to international conventions. PLAs' administrative authorities carry out cultural and educational, promotional and editorial work in the field of nature and landscape protection, provide environmental education and services to visitors to protected areas and also take care of areas of international importance.

Financing

As mentioned above, PLAs' administrative authorities are organisational units of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic. They have their own directorates; however, they have no legal personality which means that they are reliant on the State Nature Conservancy for funding. Some activities are supported by other sources such as EU Structural Funds, LIFE + and foreign funding programmes.

Successful Projects

The 14 Slovakian Protected Landscape Areas are located in different geographical regions and differ in their natural conditions and levels of territorial and species protection. Every area requires a specific approach. The projects that are implemented take these specific features into account and also focus on small-scale protected areas and Natura 2000 sites. These projects are aimed at protecting biodiversity, the ecological optimization of spatial arrangement and functional land use, building up the Natura 2000 network, cross-border cooperation within the framework of international conventions on nature, and landscape protection. A part of the financial support from successful projects is aimed at rounding out and strengthening the capabilities and infrastructure within the PLAs' administrative authorities, and promoting them.

LIFE+ projects

The Life Project for the "Restoration of endemic pannonic saline soils and sand dunes in southern Slovakia" is being implemented in cooperation with DAPHNE (the Institute of Applied Ecology) and BROZ (the Regional Association for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development). The project aims to protect endemic pannonic halophytic and psamphytic Sites of Community Importance (SCI), through applying restoration management, and by improving and maintaining their favourable conservation status. The most important activities include monitoring underground water in the locality of the Bokrošské slanisko SCI and publishing information materials for the public, aimed at protecting the sand and salt-marsh habitats of the Danube (brochures in Slovak, English and Hungarian and posters in Slovak).



LIFE ENERGY - Energy in the land - power lines and the conservation of priority bird species in Natura 2000 sites

The “Life Energy” project is being implemented in cooperation with the coordinating beneficiary, “Raptor Protection of Slovakia”, and other

partners (Východoslovenská distribučná spoločnosť, Západoslovenská distribučná, and the University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy in Košice).

The priority aim is to identify the most dangerous electrical power lines with the highest incidence of bird collisions within the project area. Once these are identified, bird flight diverters will be installed with the aim of reducing the number of collisions. The restoration of windbreaks will have a similar effect. A secondary aim is to increase the number of roosting sites by installing nest boxes.

Integrated Protection of rare butterfly species of non-forest habitats in the Czech Republic and Slovakia

This project aims to contribute to halting the loss of biodiversity and strengthening the Natura 2000 network in the target area, by actively protecting non-forest Sites and species of Community Importance (in accordance with the Birds and Habitats Directive) and of national importance, applying suitable management practices, and preserving species and restoring habitats to a favourable conservation status. The project is being implemented in cooperation with the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic, the Czech Union for Nature and BROZ.

Restoration of NATURA 2000 sites in cross-border Bratislava capital region

The goal of this project is to establish a functional network of Natura 2000 sites in the trilateral border region close to Bratislava (Slovakia) and to secure a favourable conservation status for the habitats of European interest found there. The project is being implemented in cooperation with DAPHNE (Institute of Applied Ecology) and BROZ.

White Carpathian’s Fruit Treasure

The “White Carpathian’s Fruit Treasure” project was funded by Swiss financial mechanism and implemented in cooperation with ProSpecieRara (Switzerland), the Faculty of Ecology and Environmental Science at the Technical University in Zvolen, and the National Agricultural and Food Centre. The goal of the project was to preserve traditional fruit varieties of the White Carpathian region by mapping, collection and distributing them, leveraging and ensuring the effective transfer of best practice, by way of a contribution to conserving cultural and natural heritage.

As part of the project, the Stará Turá Súš orchard was established, with traditional and regional varieties of fruit trees. Old cultivars were mapped and rescued, and various public events were held which focused on raising public awareness and providing training in tree care.

Outlook

The main factor influencing the future activities of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic and its organisational units is the transposition of the principles of EU nature conservation legislation into the national system of nature protection in Slovakia.

In addition to implementation of the legislation, the main focus of SNC SR activity encompasses the creation of a Natura 2000 network and the optimization of territorial protection through the zoning of protected areas. It also extends to the application of the system of habitat protection with preferential involvement from landowners and land users in the management of protected areas. The State Nature Conservancy aims to increase cooperation with state and non-state bodies and to carry out joint activities with non-governmental organisations, scientific institutions, schools and museums. A further aim is to set up coordination councils for PLAs, involving relevant stakeholders who can influence the management of these areas.

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SLOVENIA

Landscape/Nature Parks and Regional Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

In Slovenia, Regional, Nature and Landscape Parks of national importance, established since 1999, are defined by the state law of nature protection and designated by Government decree or by a specific law (two Regional and five Nature/Landscape Parks). Some parks have also been established by municipal decree (one Regional and two Nature/Landscape Parks). Slovenia is a very diverse country with many valuable habitats for various species in different biogeographical regions, from the Pannonian Flats to the Adriatic Sea and from the Alps to the Dinaric Mountains via the Karst limestone region with its many caves.

In the past, different patterns of land use have developed, creating many smaller nature protected areas in the cultural landscape which are protected as nature reserves, nature monuments or small-scale nature parks with no management. Slovenia has only one National Park in the Alps, which is the largest protected area.

The primary goals of all Regional and Nature/Landscape Parks are the protection of nature and cultural landscape characteristics and the implementation of nature protection measures, but they also include cultural heritage protection. Nature protection comprises the protection of endangered species and habitats, especially on Natura 2000 sites, biosphere diversity and also the revitalisation of abandoned habitats in small, dispersed cultural landscapes (such as

Facts and Figures

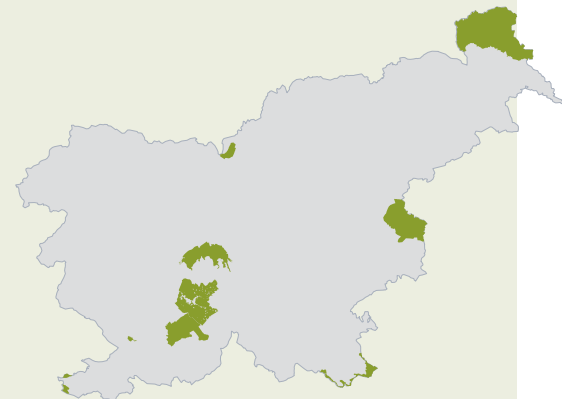
7 Landscape/Nature Parks (Krajinski parki) and 3 Regional Parks (Regijski parki)

Total surface area: 1,246 km²
= 6 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 125 km² (4 – 462 km²)

Oldest park: 1981. Most recent park: 2014.

Umbrella organisation: Nature Park Association of Slovenia (Skupnost naravnih parkov Slovenije), founded in 2011.



Goričko and Ljubljansko barje). Another of the parks' goals is to strengthen sustainable development in an environmentally friendly way with traditional land use, e.g. salt-making, fruits from high-stem meadow orchards, or the extensive use of grassland and meadows. The parks are developing their own trademarks for such agricultural products and offer holidays, nature experiences and recreational activities in parks by way of green or sustainable tourism.

Park authority employees interpret nature and cultural heritage for visitors and provide educational input for primary and secondary school pupils. They are also responsible for raising public awareness and appreciation of nature values and nature protection. Parks have employed park rangers to facilitate communication with visitors and also to monitor the implementation of park regimes.

Operation

State-designated parks with their own administrative authorities work in close collaboration with the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning. Because the State of Slovenia has no regional-level administrative bodies, the park authorities collaborate with local municipalities and play an active role in the local network of all other stakeholders, including accommodation and tourism businesses, handicrafts, farmers and NGO's in their park region.

Under the nature conservation law, Regional and Landscape parks are obliged to prepare long-term (for a period of 5 or 10 years) and annual management plans. These plans are ratified by the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning and in some cases, even by the government.

Financing

Those parks with a managing organisation which have been established by the State government (two Regional and five Nature/Landscape Parks) are financed partly or wholly by the state budget. Parks established by local municipal decree are financed from the local municipal budget (one Regional and one Nature/Landscape Park). Sečovelje Salina Nature Park is run by a company, Soline d.o.o. (gmbh), which provides one-third of the annual budget. Another third is financed by project funding and the remaining third of the Park's annual budget is covered by the state budget.



All other Parks co-finance their work and activities through EU-funded projects under various programmes such as LIFE-Nature, LIFE-environment, Central Europe, the Danube Programme, the Leonardo da Vinci programme and Interreg programmes with neighbouring countries such as Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia. There are also other funding possibilities, e.g. through LEADER programmes.

Successful Projects

The Nature Park Association of Slovenia is not yet structured as a legal body with its own staff or its own budget. The Association is not able to participate in public tenders advertised at national or European level to fund its activities. Some

highly successful projects have been carried out in Slovenia separately by individual parks, with contributions from regional partners and other EU and non-EU member states.

In order to give some examples of the work of Slovenia's Nature, Landscape and Regional Parks, the following paragraphs describe some of the projects undertaken in the Goričko and Sečovelje Salina Nature Parks.

Joint development of the Goričko-Örség-Raab Trilateral Nature Park

The overall objective of this project was to establish the Goričko-Örség-Raab Trilateral Nature Park which spans Slovenia, Hungary and Austria, and to enable the development of business infrastructure in the park, with the aim of providing a better quality of life whilst preserving the current advantages of the natural environment. The project was funded by the EU as a Service Contract for European Community External Aid and was led by the international consortium of AHT International GmbH and ATC Austrian Tourism Consultants.

Landscape in harmony

Extensive grazing of grassland for making goats' and sheep's cheese can secure the habitat of endangered butterfly species. The project established the first small cheese factory and purchased equipment for maintaining of grassland by mowing, for use by the Goričko Nature Park authority (Interreg SI-HU, 2009-2012).

Pearls in orchards

The aim of the project was the recreation of old private high-stem orchards and new planting of old varieties of fruit trees for the long-term protection of cavity-nesting bird species. The

Nature Park authority purchased mobile press equipment for all owners for making apple juice from high-stem orchards. (Interreg SI-HU, 2011-2014).

Conservation of saline habitats and species in the Sečovelje Salina Nature Park

The most successful project in the Sečovelje Salina Nature Park was the EU LIFE-funded MANSALT project (approx. € 7 million), which aimed to establish control over water regimes to secure a favourable conservation status for saline target habitats and species. Several tens of kilometres of dykes and embankments were restored, all with the involvement of the local population, in the main, thereby creating jobs.

Outlook

The highest priority goal for Nature, Landscape, and Regional Park development in Slovenia is the provision of sufficient personnel and funding for management of the park and nature conservation activities. This is the foundation for developing public service quality in implementing nature protection measures jointly with landowners in parks, thereby raising the expectations of park residents, which could help nature by encouraging voluntary work and support for park projects, especial in Natura 2000 areas.

A further priority goal is to increase the involvement of park residents to obtain high-quality park products and offer facilities for green tourism, handicrafts and agricultural products. It is important to convince the public that living in a nature protected area means opportunities for a better quality of life which can create improved conditions for social and health equality, thanks to the provision of high quality park products and services for guests and visitors.

An additional goal relates to education on and public awareness of a sustainable experience of nature, starting with children, school pupils, students and adults from all target groups, in partnership with tourism partners. Slovenia's Nature-, Landscape-, and Regional Park are important levers for sustainable development and the green/circular economy and look after ecosystem services, cultural heritage, and cultural landscape protection. They implement national strategies for nature and landscape protection, as well as EU strategies with the management of Natura 2000 sites.

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SPAIN

Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

In Spain, there are up to 40 different legal forms that have been developed by the regional legislative bodies (17 regions). Common, basic legislation includes six categories of park: National Parks, Nature Parks, nature reserves, natural monuments, and protected landscapes. In addition, there are Natura 2000 sites and other international areas (biosphere reserves, among others).

In total, 27.2% of the national territory is protected under the Natura 2000 network, which comprises all national protected areas. Each autonomous community (region) has the legal capacity to designate Nature Parks. Although there are different denominations (Nature Park, Regional Park, Rural Park etc.), all are equivalent to IUCN category V (protected landscape).

Nature parks are defined in the basic law as “natural areas that, due to the beauty of their landscapes, the representativeness of their ecosystems or the uniqueness of their flora, fauna or geological diversity, including its geomorphological formations, have ecological, aesthetic, educational and scientific value whose conservation deserves preferential treatment. This may limit the utilization of natural resources, which is prohibited in any case where it is incompatible with the purposes which justified its creation. Precise limitations on the entry of visitors will be provided in order to ensure the

Facts and Figures

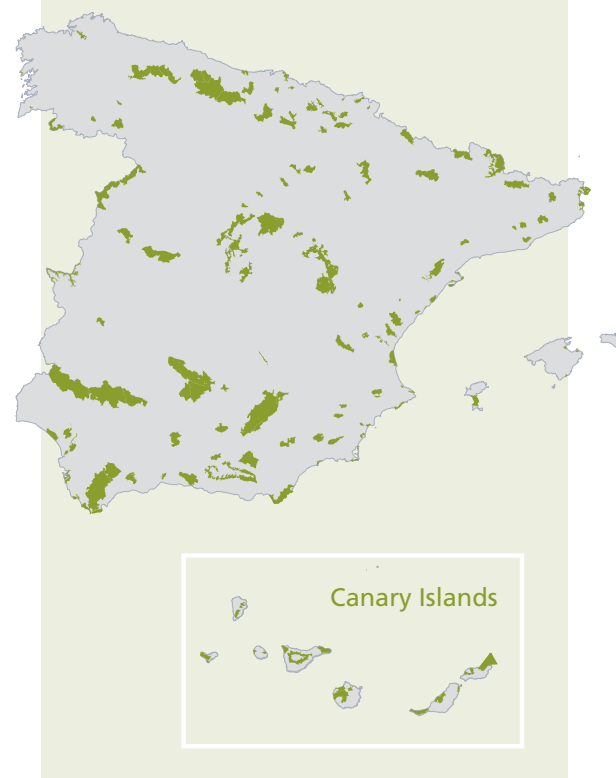
149 Nature Parks (parques naturales, parques regionales, parques rurales)

Total surface area: 3,937 km² = 8 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 267 km² (0.5 – 2,143 km²)

Oldest park: 1975. Most recent park: 2015.

Umbrella organisation: Europarc Spain



protection of those resources. Management plans are compulsory.”

Operation

Nature parks are special areas aimed at conserving biodiversity and providing ecosystem services, such as sociocultural services (aesthetic, spiritual, educational and recreational), provisioning services (water, fertile soil) and regulating services (control of erosion, flood control). The main areas of management are conservation (species, habitats and ecological processes), tourism (visitor reception and management) and socioeconomic development (support of the local population), in addition to field monitoring and maintenance of infrastructure. Furthermore, administrative tasks (records management, reporting, etc.) make up much of the work of managing the protected area.

Normally, the management of Nature Parks is organised within broader administrative structures. It is estimated that at least 2,600 people are directly employed in Spain's Nature Parks. The average number of staff within a Nature Park is about 23 people, although 77% of Nature Parks do not have that many. More than 50% of workers are employed in surveillance and maintenance. Between 20 and 24% of the area is devoted to tourism, while the conservation area accounts for 13%.

Financing

The management of protected areas requires adequate resources in terms of personnel and financial and material resources. The management costs of Nature Parks, as public services, are largely funded by public authorities. In some

cases, contributions of funds from the European Union and contributions made by private entities have some relevance. There is still little experience with the use of innovative financial mechanisms, but these are expected to be developed in the short term in order to meet the growing need for management, particularly in association with the development of the Natura 2000 network.

Successful Projects

This section describes some of the most innovative recent projects coordinated by the Technical Office Europarc-Spain, in which numerous Nature Parks are participating.

Protected areas and climate change

The project entitled “The integration of adaptation to climate change in planning and management of protected areas in Spain,” funded by the Spanish Office for Climate Change, was launched in 2015 and will be completed in 2017. Its main objective is to incorporate adaptation criteria into climate change management plans.

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism

Spanish Parks receive at least 26 million visitors per year. Hence the enormous importance of initiatives such as the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism led by the Europarc Federation.

Throughout Europe, 75 protected areas have been awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, and 28 of these areas are in Spain. Twelve of these parks work with tourism businesses. By the end of 2009, 95 companies had joined, which shows the project's real potential to involve local people and promote development.



Outlook

Spain's experience in the management of protected areas spans more than 100 years (the first National Parks Act in Spain was passed in 1916). Currently, Spain is the country where the largest surface area in absolute terms is given over to the Natura 2000 network, the main European conservation policy. Considering the policies of all modern countries, the fact that more than 27% of the land area of Spain (and soon nearly 8% of the sea area) is explicitly dedicated to the conservation of biodiversity is a highly noteworthy asset.

However, the current system of protected areas in Spain, in which Nature Parks play a crucial role, is facing multiple challenges related to both global change (such as the consequences of climate change and changing land use) as well as to the proper governance of a complex country from an institutional point of view. How can the system of protected areas more effectively meet the competing needs of nature conservation and of the welfare of society? "Society and Protected Areas" is the strategy proposed by Europarc Spain to involve society at different levels in enhancing the role of protected areas as part of the solution to these challenges. This strategic programme identifies eight priorities:

1. Integration of protected areas in the territory: The system of protected areas must be effectively integrated into the territorial matrix, protecting key areas linked to ecosystem services, improving connectivity, and developing planning tools and resilient and adaptive management.
2. Promotion of ecosystem services: Protected areas are key to society as providers of many services. We need to improve the training related

to ecosystem services, provide data that demonstrate the benefits of these areas, develop projects supporting the local production that is so beneficial for the conservation of biodiversity, promote awareness and preservation of intangible heritage and promote actions related to health.

3. Transfer of scientific knowledge into management: Management in a complex and changing context requires the full integration of scientific knowledge. Key aspects include the development of research programmes and monitoring aimed at solving management problems, as well as fostering popular enthusiasm for science and scientific commitment in line with the broad objectives of protected areas.

4. Strategic Communication to increase social and political support: All technical efforts fall short if the key messages do not reach the strategic actors. We must improve vocational training in communication, develop materials to target key sectors and increase interaction with political institutions to increase the importance of protected areas on the political agenda.

5. Diversification of governance models: Public authorities are the guarantors of protected areas, and their role will only be reinforced with the support and participation of organised civil

society, diversifying governance models, promoting land stewardship, and improving transparency to bring the government and society closer together.

6. Diversification of financing models: The socio-economic benefits of protected areas will more than outweigh the costs of effective management. We must encourage economic and financing concepts that go beyond a monetary value, drawing on diversified funding models, the momentum of patronage, and mixed taxation and funding models.

7. Greening of sector policies: Protected areas are influenced by many other policies that should be more coordinated. We must improve the training of managers of protected areas in cross-cutting issues, promote partnerships across sectors and policies, and increase mainstreaming.

8. Overall responsibility and international cooperation: Decisions and actions in our country are influenced by other countries, and in turn affect others. In the context of this global responsibility, conservation efforts should be visible internationally and promote international cooperation.

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Cultural heritage Web Portal

The overall objective of this project is to promote the cultural heritage of protected areas. The Web Portal allows searches of cultural resources to be made either by their geographical location on the map or through a database.

Agriculture and Natura 2000

This project, entitled "The Contribution of sustainable farming practices to the management of Natura 2000," is aimed at promoting the potential of existing socio-economic development in areas of Natura 2000 in two regions (Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha), working directly with farmers to discuss the management measures proposed by the authorities responsible for the Natura 2000 network.



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SWITZERLAND

Regional Nature Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

Regional Nature Parks in Switzerland are rural areas that are characterised by their diverse landscapes, rich biodiversity and unique cultural possessions. These regions set an example for sustainable development and generate surplus value for nature and the countryside, people and the economy. Switzerland currently has 14 Regional Nature Parks and one candidate for Nature Park status.

They have all emerged in just seven years - since 2008 - but there has been a series of failed projects, along with the successful ones. This exceptionally dynamic development has boosted sustainable, regional development in Switzerland. Nature Parks have three objectives: to preserve and enhance the status of natural values and the countryside, to strengthen the sustainable regional economy and to promote environmental education and awareness-raising about the special ecological, cultural, historical and economic features of the Parks.

For almost 100 years there was only one park in Switzerland - the Swiss National Park, also known as Parc Naziunal Svizzer, which was founded in 1914. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has designated it a Strict Nature Reserve (category 1a), so it meets the strictest international standards for protected areas. Creation of other parks only became possible when the Federal Act on the Protection of Nature and Cultural Heritage was revised in

Facts and Figures

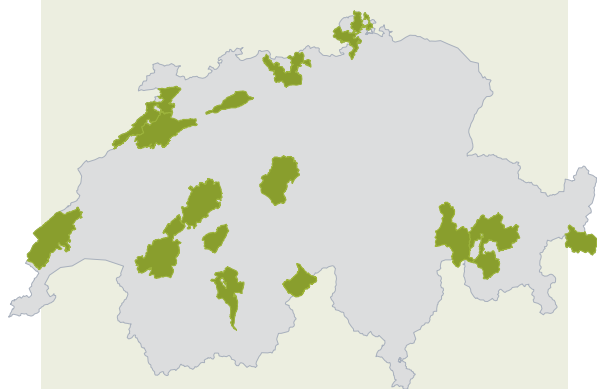
15 Regional Nature Parks (Regionale Naturpärke/parcs naturels régionaux/parchi naturali regionali)

Total surface area: 4,834 km²
= 12 % of the national territory

Park sizes: Average of 322 km²
(136 – 550 km²)

Oldest park: 2008. Most recent park: 2016.

Umbrella organisation: Swiss Parks Network (Netzwerk Schweizer Pärke/, Réseau des parcs suisses/ Rete dei parchi svizzeri), founded in 2007.



2007, stipulating conditions and processes for setting up Nature Parks. In addition to Nature Parks, the legislator created two further categories: National Parks in the new sense and Nature Experience Parks (Naturerlebnispärke), small parks near centres of population. The law closely follows the French model, where a charter that sets down the Park's objectives for ten years is the central strategic element for managing the Parks.

Operation

True to Switzerland's tradition of democracy, impetus for a new Nature Park comes from local initiatives. A feasibility study tests whether the region is suitable for a Park. If it is, an association is set up to work out the strategy for the Park, step by step, during the development phase and to set it down in a charter. Once this is complete, the population of all affected communities vote on it. If they vote in favour of the Park and the charter is approved, the association submits an application for the 'Park' label to the Federal Office for the Environment (Bundesamt für Umwelt). The Federal Office for the Environment checks whether the natural and cultural values are of national importance and whether the charter corresponds to the prescribed criteria. If the decision is affirmative, the Park enters the operating phase and is labelled a 'Park of National Importance'. The charter is renewed every ten years and the communities agree on how it should continue. This grass-roots democracy approach to setting up and running Nature Parks is unique across the world.

Nature Parks promote regional cooperation in a unique way by bringing together communities with shared objectives that are formulated in the charter. One characteristic feature is collabora-

tion across all sectors. Nature Parks in Switzerland get representatives from tourism, agriculture, nature conservation and forestry round the table and develop solutions for the future with them, in a way that hardly any other institutions can.

Financing

The Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) finances up to 50% of the costs of Regional Nature Parks, under programme agreements. The remaining funds come from the cantons, local government and other sources. Nature Parks can also apply for project financing from other federal offices.

Successful Projects

Preserving and enhancing the status of nature, countryside and culture

With their cultivated areas and natural landscape, which amount to around 11.7% of the land area, Regional Nature Parks make up a considerable part of the network of valuable biotopes. They have an above-average wealth of endangered species and actively work to conserve them. Examples include creating new habitats for Midwife Toads (*Alytes obstetricans*) with volunteer assignments and helping various reptile species by building drystone walls. Forests and protected landscapes, such as moorland landscapes, are more common than average in the Parks. However, cultural landscapes are central to Regional Nature Parks. The Parks aim to preserve and foster them using an integrated approach that combines use and protection.

Strengthening a sustainable economy

More than a third of the area of Regional Nature Parks is used for agricultural purposes and



organic farming is more common in the Parks than in the rest of Switzerland. Furthermore, sustainable agriculture and the traditional culinary heritage of the Regional Nature Parks is specifically encouraged with product certification. By producing regional products with the 'Swiss Parks' label, producers make a contribution to achieving the Park's objective, often in the sphere of ecology, but also in awareness-raising. The Parks help producers to market their products. There are now more than 1,000 certified products from eleven Regional Nature Parks.

As well as regional delicacies, Regional Nature Parks also offer unique experiences in and around their diverse cultural landscapes. The emphasis is on natural tourism. Visitors have access to a wide variety of hiking, cycling and e-bike routes, as well as interactive natural, cultural and educational offers. The environment is also used to bring employees of large firms closer to nature. Parks make a major contribution to added value for tourism.

Based on studies in the UNESCO Biosphere and Regional Nature Park Entlebuch and Val Müstair Biosphere, it is estimated that every franc of

public money invested generates six times the added value.

When it comes to tourism, Regional Nature Parks emphasise sustainable mobility, for example, by only advertising journeys by public transport and making sure that every tourist offer can be reached by public transport. Local transport links provided by Bus alpin and Alpentaxi help with this. It is thanks to these initiatives that Swiss Parks were 2016 finalist in the 'Tourism for Tomorrow Award', the international prize for sustainable tourism.

Awareness-raising and education

Parks are located in regions of high natural and cultural value, which makes them especially well-suited to teaching people about sustainable development. One of their key responsibilities is to develop relevant offers for residents, school classes and visitors, in order to raise people's awareness. All Parks have exhibitions, excursions, evenings of talks and discussion groups or entire project weeks, on a wide variety of topics, in their annual programme. Many of the offers are directly linked to the park's landscape, history and culture.

National and international cooperation

The lively and open exchange among the Regional Nature Parks and other Swiss parks was an important factor in the rapid development of Switzerland's park landscape. The Swiss Parks Network (Netzwerk Schweizer Pärke) played a key role in this. It is the umbrella organisation of all park categories in Switzerland and its responsibilities also include networking between the parks, as well as public relations.

By working together in a network, parks have boosted their negotiating power and been able

to set up important national cooperations with private firms (e.g. Raiffeisenbank, PostAuto or Coop). Finally, joint communication – including the campaign by the Federal Office for the Environment – makes the Parks more visible. According to a representative national survey, public awareness of Swiss parks rose from 3% in 2011 to 17% in 2015.

Outlook

The law of 2007 set in motion a wave of initiatives for creation of Parks. This set-up phase is now complete and the aim is now to establish the existing Parks. A crucial test will be renewal of the charter after ten years, on which the population of each Park will vote.

As part of the evaluation of the charter, the Parks have to produce proof of their effectiveness, which is a question of measurability, especially with regard to their economic performance. With regard to ecological performance, a pilot project is currently underway, in which all Regional Nature Parks define their objectives and future roles in preserving and supporting habitats (ecological infrastructure).

As they are model regions for sustainable development, Regional Nature Parks are increasingly being used to test out new energy concepts and regional economic cycles that are geared up to the challenges of the future (e.g. climate change, loss of natural habitat, etc.).

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UNITED KINGDOM ENGLAND/WALES/NORTHERN IRELAND

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Goals and Statutory Mandate

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a uniquely British designation and it is devolved; in England, responsibility for designation lies with Natural England (NE); in Wales, Natural Resources Wales (NRW); and in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). AONBs in England and Wales originally designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 received further protection with the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, under which new designations are now made. AONBs in Northern Ireland originally designated under the Amenity Lands (NI) Act 1965 are now designated using the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985.

The primary purpose of the AONB designation is the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. In pursuing the primary purpose of the designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment. Recreation is not an objective of the designation, but the demand for recreation should be met insofar as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

Facts and Figures

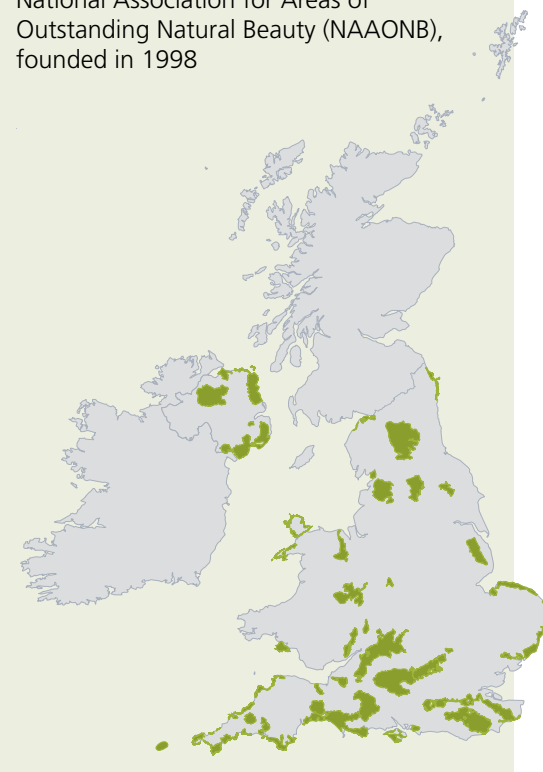
46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)

Total surface area: 29,700 km²,
= 18% of the total territory of England,
Wales and Northern-Ireland

Park sizes: Average of 645 km²
(16 – 2,038 km²)

Oldest park: 1956. Most recent park: 1995.

Umbrella organisation:
National Association for Areas of
Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB),
founded in 1998



Operation

AONBs are, in the main, the responsibility of Local Authorities (LAs). The most common governance model is an AONB Partnership of LA-appointed members supplemented by specialist staff from the national agencies and local representatives of environmental, cultural, amenity, land management and business organisations. England also has two Conservation Boards. The AONB Partnership or Conservation Board (AONB Family) decides how to deliver the statutory purpose through a Management Plan. The AONB Family is actively involved in a range of delivery projects, often taking responsibility for leading projects. This is seen as a key strength of the AONB Family approach and is increasingly relevant to the way most Local Authorities are operating: as commissioning bodies, placing delivery of work with organisations who can be most effective.

Financing

AONB sponsorship is delivered by Defra (England), NRW (Wales) and NIEA (Northern Ireland) and Local Authorities contributions. Project sponsorship also forms part of the key sponsors' remit. Additional resources from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), EU programmes and business are also deployed for projects.

Successful Projects

The AONB Family prides itself in its ability to convene. Using this ability, it is able to deliver a wide range of activities and projects. It works with local communities and by doing so translates national vision and national policy into local action. Valuing and utilizing everyone's skills, knowledge and energy, the AONB Family

provides value for money by securing additional funding resources and project partners. It then develops innovative approaches to achieve beneficial results through collaboration, resulting in a sustainable rural economy that conserves and enhances the natural environment for the benefit of society.

Landscape-scale environmental conservation and restoration

The provision of landscape-related advice to planning authorities and input to the development of Local Plans and policies is a core function of the AONB Family. Many partnerships also run projects giving landscape-related advice to farmers and landowners. The landscape approach to ecological restoration, signalled in England's Natural Environment White Paper 2011, and given practical application with the launch of Nature Improvement Areas in England in 2013, has been adopted by many of the AONB Family. Early advocates have used the Heritage Lottery Fund's Landscape Partnership programme to effect significant investment in land management.

Example 1: Kent Downs AONB Partnership's Valley of Visions Project landscape-scale project working with communities, landowners and local organisations used £2.5 million from HLF to enable chalk grassland restoration, an extensive events programme, new community trails, conservation of important heritage sites, and engagement with schools.

Example 2: Arnside & Silverdale AONB Partnership led on the Morecambe Bay Limestones & Wetlands NIA working with five key partners to deliver projects across the AONB and surrounding areas.



The AONB Family is ideally placed to take on this area of work because of the well-developed relationships it has with landowners, farmers and third sector environmental bodies.

Economic recovery and growth

The AONB Family has a role in fostering the economic and social needs of local communities and businesses. Recently the practical manifestation of this role has become more evident due to the increasing acceptance of the principle of sustainable development and the Family's growing track record in supporting rural enterprise.

Most of the Family has used successive Rural Development Programmes (RDP). Many were influential in shaping their local Leader Pro-

gramme in the current RDP and are represented on their Local Action Groups. This has enabled them to support key sectors of the rural economy and many have managed RDP-funded projects encouraging high quality tourism and recreation.

Other European funding programmes have also allowed the AONB Family to support their tourism sectors.

Example 3: Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership's EU transnational (Interreg) project helps the tourism sector grow in ways that strengthen the environmental quality – a key draw for visitors. Investment in broadband speed to assist rural businesses has also been identified as a priority.

Example 4: Cranborne Chase AONB Partnership led or strongly supported local initiatives to improve IT infrastructure without the erection of intrusive masts.

The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) has also allowed the Family to engage proactively in support of key business sectors such as tourism, food and rural crafts. Many were successful in forging strong connections between local businesses and the AONB designation.

Example 5: Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership's Sustainable Tourism Network of 120 members led to the formation of Bowland Experience Ltd. providing business-to-business support for tourism development.

Community development and social health and well-being

The AONB Family has direct engagement with communities on a range of initiatives.

Reliance of rural communities on car transport and promotion of more sustainable modes of travel for residents and visitors is a common theme in AONB Management Plans.

Example 6: Gower AONB Partnership's BayTrans Gower Explorer Bus provides a year round service benefiting locals and visitors - use has grown by 40% since its 2004 inception. Training and skills opportunities arising from countryside and recreation management are being addressed by the AONB Family.

Example 7: High Weald AONB Partnership works with forestry skills training providers to network and share woodworking skills and has used – the Sustainable Development Fund to offer short term apprenticeships in the coppice industry.

The AONB Family is keen to emphasise improved health outcomes that have arisen from access to a high quality natural environment, with some promoting themselves as the 'Natural Health Service'.

Example 8: Lincolnshire Wolds AONB Partnership's many years' experience of supporting the Lincolnshire Wolds Walking Festival, has resulted in a dialogue with their local National Health Service about opportunities in the AONB to improve health outcomes.

Example 9: Wye Valley AONB Partnership's Sustainable Development Fund Mindscape Project connects people with mental health issues with the creative outdoors environment.

Outlook

The AONB Family has four common objectives: Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's AONBs, ensuring they can meet the challenges of the future.

Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.

Promote public understanding and enjoyment of the nature and culture of AONBs and encourage people to take action for their conservation.

Value, sustain and promote the benefits that the UK's AONBs provide for society, including clean air and water, food, carbon storage and other services vital to the nation's health and well-being.

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UNITED KINGDOM SCOTLAND

Regional Parks

Goals and Statutory Mandate

Scotland's Regional Parks are large areas of attractive countryside which are close to larger towns and cities, and include landscapes and wildlife of regional or wider importance. They are popular for outdoor recreation and provide the oversight and resources needed to integrate this activity with other land uses. They also make growing contributions to wider national and local agendas including health improvement, active lifestyles, climate change, environmental management, stronger communities and sustainable development.

The three Scottish Regional Parks were designated by regional councils, with support from the Countryside Commission for Scotland, under the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 (as amended). The designations were confirmed by the Secretary of State for Scotland. Following administrative reorganisations, the lead role in designating and managing Regional Parks has now passed to local authorities, with support from Scottish Natural Heritage.

Operation

The two largest Regional Parks, at Clyde Muirshiel and the Pentland Hills, both span more than one local authority area. These parks are managed in partnership by committees which bring together all of the relevant authorities, with input from consultative forums composed of recreational users, land managers and public bodies. Since

Facts and Figures

3 Regional Parks

Total surface area: 422 km²
= 0.5 % of the Scottish territory

Park sizes: Average of 140 km²
(40 – 282 km²)

Oldest park: 1986. Most recent park: 1990.



1996, Clyde Muirshiel has been established as a Park Authority. The Lomond Hills Regional Park is entirely within a single local authority area and was previously managed in partnership between users, land managers and public bodies.

Since 2013, the Lomond Hills Regional Park has been managed as part of a wider landscape partnership project which extends into a neighbouring local authority area but maintains similar principles of joint working.

Financing

The three Regional Parks are supported by various combinations of local authority funding, income generation and wider funding (which is usually project-based) from UK public bodies, the Heritage Lottery Fund and other charitable organisations.

Successful Projects

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park

This extensive park west of Glasgow consists largely of heather moorland and grassland, and includes two smaller Country Parks and four visitor centres – two in upland areas, a coastal site and a watersports/recreational centre. The park provides for a wide range of recreational activities.

Recent projects have enhanced both recreational opportunities and the natural and cultural heritage. These have included the Semple Trail Heritage Project and work undertaken at the Greenock Cut and Muirshiel Centre, which have combined conservation, access provision and interpretation, including wildlife viewing with camera systems. Various wider initiatives



promote greater engagement with the outdoors, including Scotland's first Sailability Centre of Excellence which provides for special needs groups, and Branching Out, a ten week course to involve adults in outdoor activities to improve mental health.

Pentland Hills Regional Park

The Pentland Hills provide an impressive skyline to the south of Edinburgh. The park is a living and working landscape and is 100 km² in size, with two visitor centres and a 100km network of paths. Recent projects have included planting schemes to expand woodland cover and a joint project to enhance juniper scrub, which has been carried out with the voluntary organisation Friends of the Pentlands. The park also promotes



access, for example through its volunteer ranger service, which allows people to get involved with caring for the hills and assisting with visitor management. The park's sheep worrying initiative aims to raise awareness of responsible access to the hills for dog walkers and prevent dog attacks on livestock.

Lomond Hills Regional Park

The Lomond Hills are prominent landmarks in Fife (to the north of Edinburgh) and the centre of 40 km² of moorland, lochs and farmland. The area has numerous access points, a large network of paths and various features of interest. The Living Lomonds Landscape Partnership programme has run a number of successful recent projects which have included restoring habitats and tackling invasive species, path creation, maintenance and signage, community archaeology and developing rural skills.

Outlook

Future challenges for Regional Parks include pressure for development and land use change such as renewable energy, afforestation and urbanisation. There can also be an ongoing need to manage potential tensions between recreational users and land managers in popular locations. More generally, declining funding from local government has placed greater emphasis on income generation from recreational activity and applications for grant funding.

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Conclusion and Outlook

The study 'Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks' shows that Regional Nature Parks are already supporting the European Union and its Member States in achieving their political objectives in the sphere of sustainable development, conservation and education.

In many of the countries involved in the study, the idea of Regional Nature Parks has already undergone positive developments in recent years. If we look at the results of the study and the work of Regional Nature Parks in individual countries, the extent of their potential benefits for society, today and in the future, become clear. The need to use this potential is more pressing today than ever before.

Regional Nature Parks – Living Landscapes

Regional Nature Parks are important partners of the European Union and its Member States and a valuable addition to their regions. They are model regions for sustainable development in rural areas and for preserving biological diversity.

Regional Nature Parks integrate conservation with economic and social development, give a boost to regional economic cycles, regional products, high-quality food and support local income and jobs. In doing so, they work together closely with a network of partners from the regional economy, whose businesses

contribute to sustainable development of the regions and support the Regional Nature Parks.

These principles of inclusion, integrated nature conservation, and sustainable development enable Regional Nature Parks to keep developing as innovative and dynamic regions. With their high-quality offers and dedicated people, Regional Nature Parks are attractive as places to live, as locations for companies and as an experiential and recreational space for visitors.

With their intensive education work for all demographic groups and especially as a partner for schools, kindergartens and other educational establishments, Regional Nature Parks translate



the concept of Education for Sustainable Development into reality in their regions. They make a region's nature and culture accessible to people and motivate them to actively support their region.

Regional Nature Parks support the quality of life and health of the population and include people from all demographic groups in their work, with many and varied opportunities to get involved. In this way, they help to make regions lively places where people want to live. They are Living Landscapes.

Regional Nature Parks help to achieve both European and national government objectives in rural areas. They also ensure that public money

is used purposefully, efficiently and effectively, in agreement with local people. Such funds are a good investment in Regional Nature Parks given they can achieve corresponding regional economic effects, in addition to environmental and social results. Regional Nature Parks are important partners for local authorities and can be entrusted with solving current problems as part of their range of responsibilities.

Regional Nature Parks Need Support

To make full use of the enormous potential that Regional Nature Parks have for their respective regions, for European countries and for the European Union, appropriate structural condi-

tions for their work are required. It is crucially important that the management bodies of Regional Nature Parks have sufficient staff to perform the responsibilities in their respective countries. Adequate and reliable funding must also be guaranteed for the specialist tasks undertaken by Regional Nature Parks, enabling them to deliver the full range of benefits for society. Without greater recognition and further investment, it would not be possible to advance the work of Regional Nature Parks for the benefit of nature, society and future generations.

For Regional Nature Parks to be successful, it is crucial that policies at local authority, regional, national and European level adequately support the work of Regional Nature Parks.

The aim of the 'Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks' project and this book is to contribute to delivering on the promise locked in European Regional Nature Parks, to realise this potential for the benefit of Europe's nature, Europe's cultures and landscapes, Europe's rural economy and Europe's people.





The Association of German Nature Parks (Verband Deutscher Naturparke)

The project 'Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks' was carried out by the Association of German Nature Parks (Verband Deutscher Naturparke, VDN). It was supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with funding from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety.

Since 1963, the VDN has been the umbrella organisation for Nature Parks in Germany, in which Nature Park administrative bodies have joined together. It is these experts who, with their competence and dedication, shape the VDN's work for nature protection and environmental education, sustainable travel, recreation

and development of rural areas. Every Nature Park administration can apply to be a member of VDN. The VDN provides numerous services for the individual Nature Parks and for development of Nature Parks in Germany as a whole. It supports its members in setting up and organising Nature Parks to create exemplary landscapes for sustainable development. The VDN is adviser, technical forum and catalyst for Nature Parks. It communicates the responsibilities and benefits of Nature Parks to the public and represents the interests of Nature Parks on a political level.

The 'Nature Park Quality Campaign' (Qualitäts-offensive Naturparke) is an example of its work. It was developed in close agreement with the

Nature Parks and supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with funding from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety. Its central objective is to give Nature Parks a tool for self-assessment and continuous improvement of the quality of their work and their offers. Nature Parks are awarded the title of 'Quality Nature Park' or 'Nature Park Quality Campaign Partner'. These titles must be renewed every five years in a repeated evaluation.

In other projects, the VDN has published a guide for Nature Parks for drawing up management plans, established the benefits of Nature Parks for preserving biological diversity and laid the foundations for designating 'Nature Park Schools' and 'Nature Park Kindergartens'. There are also numerous other projects, e.g. in the areas of sustainable tourism, accessible nature experiences and communication.

The Nature Park movement in Germany has always been closely linked to the European idea. Nature Parks that cross the border into Luxembourg, Belgium and France were created early on. The first president of the VDN, Dr. Alfred Toepfer played a crucial role in the creation of Nature Parks. He was furthermore a founding member and the first president of the European umbrella association, the EUROPARC Federation. These experiences also resulted in the VDN's responsibility, which is enshrined in the statute, for supporting exchange of experiences, and collaboration of Nature Parks in Germany with other European Regional Nature Parks. The project 'Europe's Nature-, Regional, and Landscape Parks' has made an important contribution to this.

www.naturparke.de





Europarc Federation

The EUROPARC Federation was a partner in the project “Europe’s Nature-, Regional-, and Landscape Parks” bringing its wide European network and experience to support and assist the work of this important and seminal project.

The EUROPARC Federation works to improve the management of Protected Areas in Europe through international cooperation, exchange of ideas and experience, and by influencing policy. The Federation has significantly contributed to enhance public awareness about Protected Areas and influenced European nature conservation policies. EUROPARC is recognised around the world as a professional network of European Protected Areas.

As the representative body of Europe’s Protected Areas, EUROPARC is the collective voice for all nature and landscape areas and seeks to build a stronger, unifying, European network organisation that is better placed to support our members and to respond to current and future challenges Europe’s nature is facing.

The EUROPARC Federation is dedicated to practical nature conservation and sustainable development of Europe’s biodiversity, fostering holistic landscape approaches in its management.

Our vision is a Sustainable Nature: Valued by People. To realise this EUROPARC members come

together with a shared passion for nature and landscapes to look beyond our parks and highlight their importance to the environmental, social and economic development of our regions, countries and European society.

Europe’s natural heritage is a myriad of habitats, landscapes and ecosystems, sculpted by nature, shaped by man. It knows no boundaries: therefore, in order to sustainably and effectively manage these natural resources, EUROPARC believes that the future protection and conservation of nature and landscapes is best achieved through networking and cooperation bringing mutual understanding, shared experiences, knowledge and

innovation in policy and practice of Protected Area management.

EUROPARC recognises the value of Europe’s Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks as living learning landscapes. Covering large areas across Europe, these parks play an important role in protecting Europe’s biodiversity and safeguard our cultural heritage.



www.europarc.org

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