



EUROPARC
F E D E R A T I O N

EUROPARC TransParcNet Meeting Report 2015

České Žleby, Czech Republic, 9th to 12th June

Introduction



The EUROPARC Federation is the largest non-governmental organisation representing protected areas of different kinds across Europe. EUROPARC is built on the principle that Europe's natural heritage can be better conserved and managed through international cooperation. To this end the organisation seeks opportunities for networking, exchange and collaboration in all fields of protected area work. EUROPARC is

committed to the continual improvement in the management of nature conservation and sustainable development, to build a coherent green network across Europe.

Nature knows no boundaries and cooperation between protected areas that adjoin across or lay adjacent to international borders make a significant contribution to the conservation of both natural and cultural heritage and the achievement of sustainable regional development. Such cooperation also promotes international peace and understanding, and supports the work towards a common Europe.

With its Transboundary Parks – Following nature's design initiative, EUROPARC meets the demands for guidance on the promotion of best practice in cross-border cooperation in Europe. The Federation's Transboundary Parks Programme is a special verification and certification system that aims to promote and facilitate cross-border cooperation between European protected areas.

The programme runs in its 12th year now and unites 23 protected areas forming ten EUROPARC Transboundary Areas. Together they manage more than 900.000 ha including over 330.000 ha of N2000 sites co-operatively. Every year they get together at the so called TransParcNet meeting in a different cross-border area to share their experiences and new ideas in managing Europe's natural and cultural heritage across international borders.

7th TransParcNet meeting in Šumava and Bavarian Forest National Parks (CZ/DE) 2015

2015 saw from 9th to 12th June the 7th edition of EUROPARC's TransParcNet meeting, the annual get-together of experts in cross-border cooperation of protected areas. 45 participants joined EUROPARC this year in České Žleby in Šumava National Park (CZ), who together with their transboundary partner Bavarian Forest National Park (DE) hosted the event in their protected areas. During this year's reunion, the participants had the chance to learn about the value of healthy ecosystems for nature and people, looking at natural dynamics of ecosystems as well as at restoration projects in the two parks. Presentations on cooperation initiatives in Estonia and Latvia, cross-border networks like the European Green Belt and current research initiatives on transboundary cooperation have also been on the programme.



Picture 1: Participants TransParcNet meeting 2015 on top of Mount Lusen in National Park Bavarian Forest © Florian Porst

This year again some new participants were in the audience. With EUROPARC fostering its involvement in projects on transboundary cooperation, project partners were invited too, in order for them to learn about the EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme. They could experience the activities and collegueship in the network first hand and establish new contacts. During the three day event 45 participants from 12 different countries attended, amongst them protected area managers and staff, delegates of national and regional authorities as well as NGOs.

The two park directors, Mgr Pavel Hubený (Šumava National Park) and Dr Franz Leibl (Bavarian Forest National Park) opened the meeting in Stožecká skála primeval forest, welcoming the participants to the largest forest region without human intervention in Central Europe. EUROPARC vice-president Kaja Lotman expressed the Federation's gratitude towards the parks for the invitation. She also highlighted the benefits of a network such as TransParcNet of bringing people from all over the continent together to learn and exchange ideas and experiences.

The 7th TransParcNet meeting consisted of two morning sessions with presentations and plenary discussions and two afternoon excursions to the National Parks on the Czech and the German side. This structure proved over the last years to be most successful: learning about the background of parks, projects and activities for half a day and then seeing the implementation of these projects on the ground during the field trip.

Cooperation efforts and networks facilitating exchange

A short presentation from EUROPARC's Project Development Officer Petra Schultheiss started the first morning session. The Federation as such, an [overview of its portfolio of work](#) as well as a more detailed insight into the Transboundary Parks Programme were on the agenda. Ms Schultheiss highlighted the benefits of the programme for participating parks and the TransParcNet itself, bringing expertise and experience from across Europe together to foster transboundary cooperation amongst Europe's protected areas. The current activities of EUROPARC in this field of work, such as a verifier training, Interreg project applications, contacts overseas to Latin America for experience exchange and production of new promotional material for the network were also introduced.



Picture 2: EUROPARC Project Officer Petra Schultheiss introducing the Federation and its Transboundary Parks Programme © Florian Porst

EUROPARC always tries to involve other networks engaged in cross-border cooperation of European protected areas in its TransParcNet meeting. This year, Ms Melanie Kreutz from BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany), responsible for the Central European Green Belt activities, joined in and spoke about the [European Green Belt initiative](#). This 12.500 km long ecological network reaches from the far north of Europe to Greece, bordering 24 countries. It developed from first cooperation efforts between Finland and Russia and monitoring activities along the inner German border in the 1970s, to be a symbol for European transboundary cooperation today. Success stories are abundant, including multinational and cross-border projects, the establishment of new protected areas and the European Commission named it a good example for EU-level Green Infrastructure. Most recently an association was founded, representing the initiative and ensuring coordination as well as information exchange among the European Green Belt community.



Picture 3: Melanie Kreutz from BUND presenting the European Green Belt Initiative © Florian Porst



Picture 4: Jakub Kašpar introducing the work of EUROPARC Central and Eastern Europe © EUROPARC Federation

Jakub Kašpar, President of the [EUROPARC Central and Eastern Europe section](#), gave an introduction to EUROPARC's youngest regional network. It developed from the former Czech section of EUROPARC that felt it was necessary to open up to other central and eastern European countries in order to broaden the membership and become a stronger arm for the Federation (currently 25 members from 6 countries). One of the section's main fields of work is transboundary cooperation. Many of the section members are committed to developing this further, support the work of the transboundary specialist group of WCPA and are certified EUROPARC Transboundary Parks. The section is

well engaged in international events, such as Little Sydney in Austria, running a workshop on transboundary cooperation at the EUROPARC Conference 2015 and their members are and will be hosts of the TransParcNet meeting 2015 and 2016.

Fostering biodiversity: From “Let nature be nature” to giving nature a helping hand

The second half of the first morning was dedicated to presentations on practical nature conservation measures.

Dr Ivana Bufková from the Department of Nature Conservation in Šumava National Park presented the results of [conservation measures on mire restoration](#) in the park. A total of 31 % of the National Park area is covered by wetlands, 10 % of which are mires. In an altitude between 700 and 1200 m a.s.l. more than 6000 ha of mires can be found (2% bogs and 8 % minerotrophic mires). Anthropogenic influences (e.g. peat extraction, agricultural use, construction of water reservoirs and stream regulation) impacted strongly on the natural processes. Two examples were presented: peat bog Sumarský Most and the stream Hucina and related mires. Industrialised peat cutting damaged Sumarský Most heavily from 1962 onwards. When the National Park stopped the peat cutting (1998-2000) it left a deeply drained peat bog, with a dense net of open and subsurface ditches, covered by large areas of abandoned bare peat. High temperature extremes near the soil surface and high fluctuation of the water table were consequences. Šumava National Park started a mire restoration programme in 1999, primarily focused on the re-establishment of natural hydrology through natural water flow and the enhancement of peat-forming processes in order to mitigate or stop biodiversity loss. The highly fluctuating water table was stabilized by blocking drainage ditches with board dams and the restoration of streams according to their original course. Already in 2005 the park started to involve local people, visitors, NGOs or students in restoration measures, organizing weeks and days for mires. Up to today around 590 ha of mires were restored, more than 62 km of drainage ditches were blocked and over 2,3 km of streams restored at a cost of 850.000 €. The project showed that the used target water table concept is appropriate for restoring sloping mountain mires and that different mire types respond similarly well to the positive effect of restored hydrology. In Šumava National Park, around 82 % of mire restoration measures can be considered successful. Participants of the meeting were particularly impressed by the outcomes of the project considering the limited financial resources available.



Picture 5: On excursion with Dr Ivana Bufková to restored stream Hucina and related mires © Silke Weich

Learning from experience: Transboundary cooperation in practice

EUROPARC's Transboundary Parks have a lot of knowledge to share when it comes to cross-border collaboration. Therefore the Federation always gives floor to its members to showcase efforts in their cooperation, successes but also challenges.

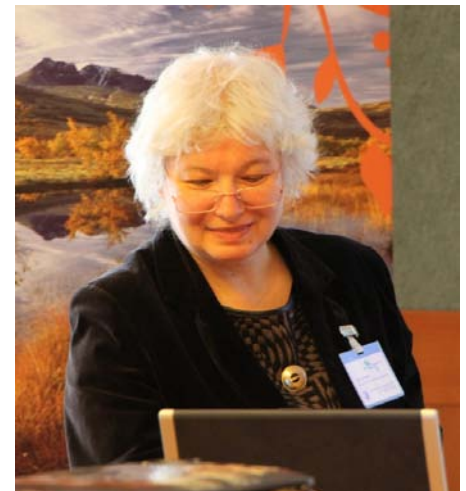
Kaja Lotman from the Estonian Environmental Board (Keskkonnaamet) and EUROPARC Vice-President gave insight into [nature conservation cooperation between Latvia and Estonia](#). When looking at flora and especially fauna, it becomes evident, that nature doesn't care about state borders. Research showed that large carnivores in both countries, like lynx, wolf and bear, roam the area regardless of the country. Therefore it made sense to start cooperation and coordinate conservation measures in Latvia and Estonia. First agreements were already put in place in 1995, with common projects following in the early 2000s and the designation of a transboundary RAMSAR site in 2007. Further milestones in the cooperation have been so far:

- 2008-2011: Reforms of protected areas' governance. Ongoing cooperation in information exchange. Active rural municipality cooperation developing different transborder contacts (i.e. Festival of North Livonia).
- 2011-2013: Tuned Nature Management in transboundary area of Estonia and Latvia - Green Corridor Interreg EST-LAT, cooperation in nature education etc.
- 2014 Agreement between Latvian Nature Conservation Agency and Estonian Environmental Board, one of the aims is also to achieve certification of protected areas under EUROPARC's "Transboundary Parks - Following Nature's Design" programme.

As in many other cross-border regions in Europe, the cooperation between Latvia and Estonia faces challenges such as different management structures, differences in national legislations, language and cultural differences, challenges in funding cooperation activities and dependency from the commitment of individuals.

However a range of opportunities has been identified, which are well worth undertaking the effort of adjusting cooperation measures across the border and establish a closer cooperation:

- Better planning (avoiding overlapping activities, harmonisation, reduce risks) and sharing resources (joint fieldworks, use of specific knowledge). Defining joint conservation goals for protection rules & management plans of protected areas.
- Complementarity (combining different traditions and skills of partners), establishment of joint infrastructure.
- "Forced innovation" (lack of maps stimulated GIS development, remote sensing, lack of manpower forced to use automatic equipment).
- Strengthening cooperation with local stakeholders (municipalities, entrepreneurs, local people). Advertising the area internationally (transboundary agreements, commission, steering group) .
- Application of community based adaptive management and ecosystem/landscape based approach in conservation.



Picture 6: Kaja Lotman during her presentation on the cooperation efforts between Latvia and Estonia © EUROPARC Federation



Picture 7: Park Superintendent Matti Hovi explains results of Oulanka-Paanajärvi (FI/RU) cooperation © EUROPARC Federation

Another example of how cooperation across borders works in practice from EUROPARC's Transboundary network is the case of Oulanka and Paanajärvi National Parks (FI/RU), dating back to the early 90's. Matti Hovi, Park Superintendent of Oulanka National Park, presented [Recent and Future Transboundary collaboration of the two National Parks](#). The cooperation has been very successful in developing through common projects, making use of EU and national funds over the course of more than 20 years.

In 2014 three projects came to an end: "Quality CET", a project to increase cooperation, develop and promote sustainable nature and cultural oriented tourism in the Nature Reserve areas on both sides of the Finnish and Russian national border;

“Fennoscandian Green Belt”, to promote the preservation of the unique natural and cultural values in the protected areas of the Karelia region (along the Finnish-Russian border) and raise the nature-based tourism services provided by the region’s parks to an international standard; and “Protection and sustainable trout fisheries”, aiming at creating a sustainable use and healthy status of the migratory brown trout populations in the Oulanka River system (on both sides of the border), safeguarding the natural reproduction and maintaining the unique genetic properties of the population.

Matti Hovi pointed out that such large scale cross-border conservation projects need careful planning and steering. Hence regular meetings between park directors and staff are a cornerstone of the cooperation. New projects and activities for the future are already to be seen at the horizon, from ambitious plans of applying with Oulanka and Paanajärvi National Parks for UNESCO World Heritage to smaller scale goals like renewing the shared vision up to 2025 including a work programme.

Both parks decided to stand up to scrutiny in 2016 by having their parks assessed again in the framework of EUROPARC’s Transboundary Parks Programme.

Transboundary approaches to visitor management

Protected areas are very often magnets for visitors and there are parks in Europe that attract several million people per year. Knowing about the number and structure of people visiting a park, helps protected areas to change from a often used reactive visitor management to an active one. This eventually will avoid conflicts through foresightful planning of conservation measures in regards to visitor management instead of costly repairing damages afterwards. The National Park Bavarian Forest decided that valid statements about the number of visitors and their movement and distribution in the park are necessary for a sound management of the protected area.



Picture 8: Maria Husslein from Bavarian Forest National Park © EUROPARC Federation

Therefore in 2013 and 2014 Bavarian Forest National Park was running the study [Socio-economic monitoring as basis for the development of a transboundary visitor management concept and fostering of regional economic activities](#). Researchers under the lead of Arne Arnberger from the Institute for Landscape Development, Recreation and Conservation Planning at BOKU Vienna, were commissioned to undertake this work. Him, his colleague Hemma Konnu and Maria Husslein from Bavarian Forest National Park presented the study to the participants of the TransParcNet.

Visitor counting took place from April 2013 to April 2014 with technical devices that allowed for a long-term registration of visitor numbers and structures, by using different counters: passive infrared sensors, pressure mats (for walkers), pneumatic tubes and inductive loops (for cyclists). Furthermore over 1000 visitor surveys were done in winter and summer, with tourists and locals. They helped to identify the structure of visitors in more detail, their activities and routes taken as well as their satisfaction with the visit in the park. The data collected was being projected with statistical methods for each year, in order to get a full picture of the total number of visits, which reached 1.3 million. First results on the preferences and patterns of visitors can be found [here](#).

Having valuable data on visitors and usage of the protected area by them also on the other side in Šumava National Park is highly desirable in order to create a cross-border visitor management strategy, as it has been agreed in 2014 by the Bavarian and Czech Ministry for the Environment. The Czech park is aware of the importance and benefits of such survey being started as well in their protected area and first steps are being undertaken in that direction. Furthermore, the Czech Ministry for the Environment is even looking into having such data available for all four National Parks in the Czech Republic (the others being Podyjí, Bohemian Switzerland and Krkonoše), all of them certified under EUROPARC’s Transboundary Parks Programme.

Emerging topics

EUROPARC is always looking into new fields of work in transboundary cooperation and provides, where possible information to researchers and practitioners in order to foster cross-border collaboration in protected areas in the long run. In early 2015 the Federation was approached by Brady Mattson, a post-doc researcher and Marie-Curie fellow, currently working at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Vienna (AU). EUROPARC is now supporting Brady Mattson in the [project ForAdapt](#), with providing expertise in cross-border collaboration and contacts to the TransParcNet.

During the meeting in Šumava, Brady Mattson presented his project, which goal is to support management and conservation of forests and wildlife across protected area borders to sustain ecosystem services in Europe. In order to gain insight into the work of protected areas in general and transboundary protected areas in particular, a “Cross-border Management Survey” has been developed and sent to all EUROPARC members. It looks at the particular opportunities and challenges that protected area managers are anticipating within the next 10 years when coordinating the management of forests and/or wildlife with stakeholder groups working along the outer border of their parks.



Picture 9: Illustration from ForAdapt project © Brady Mattson

The research results will be reflected in an online decision-support toolkit for overcoming hurdles in planning and decision making about forest management across borders. In particular, an interactive web mapping tool will allow user-friendly evaluations of management strategies and their outcomes for ecosystem services under multiple climate and budget scenarios for selected cases. The enhanced database of decision-support tools with guided search facilities along with interactive visualisations of decision frameworks will make the toolkit extensible across Europe, and as such will be useful to foresters, policy makers, analysts and stakeholders.

Participants of the TransParcNet meeting were very interested in the project, anticipating that such an interactive decision making tool, would be beneficial for them to intensify but also make easier their cooperation. They are willing to contribute with their experience and case studies to the successful implementation of ForAdapt.

Political support for cooperation



Picture 10: Organisers and guests of honour at the closing ceremony of TransParcNet 2015: Dr. Christian Barth (Head official state ministry of environment and consumer), Mgr Pavel Hubeny (Director NP Šumava), Dr Franz Leibl (Director NP Bavarian Forest), Renate Cerny (Deputy District Administrator), Alexander Muthmann (Member of Landtag), Dr. Martin Ortmeier (Director Museum Finsterau), Kaja Lotman (EUROPARC Vice President), Ernst Kandlbinder (1st mayor Mauth); left to right

Cooperation of protected areas across international borders sees many challenges and is always a matter of politics too, with different national legislation considering nature conservation in sovereign states.

During the TransParcNet meeting in Šumava and Bavarian Forest National Parks participants heard about past challenges between the two parks, caused by national decision making processes. However, as recent as 2014 and 2015 the political climate changed for the better and the relationship between the two partners picked up pace again. Common approaches, e.g. in visitor management through socio-economic monitoring, are to be seen on the horizon.

The importance of the cooperation between the two protected areas forming the largest forest region without human intervention in Central Europe was underlined by the presence of high political representatives from both sides of the border at the closing ceremony and gala dinner in the open-air museum in Finsterau.

Director Franz Leibl (National Park Bavarian Forest) called the attendance of Dr Christian Barth, head official of the Bavarian State Ministry for the Environment and Consumer Protection, proof of the high estimation of this cooperation and international meeting. He thanked all conference participants and Mgr Pavel Hubený, head of Šumava National Park, for their hard work and commitment.

Renate Cerny, deputy district administrator in the rural district Freyung-Grafenau, highlighted that both parks together form one habitat and provide a huge potential for people and nature on both sides of the border. She considers the vivid “national park idea” a sustainable basis for economic development, not only for tourism. Good transboundary cooperation is therefore essential.

Director Pavel Hubený (National Park Šumava) said how pleased he was about the good collaboration between the two teams in Bavaria and the Czech Republic and assumes that the friendship between the two parks will continue. Furthermore he asked to excuse the absence of Richard Brabec, Czech Minister for the Environment, who originally intended to attend. The Minister let know that he is very satisfied with the existing cooperation between the two parks and also with the staff making it happen. Pavel Hubený agreed that the cooperation is a driver for the development of both regions. The significance of biodiversity is coming alive in the region, and it's not just because of the beauty of nature but also for the experience of life's diversity for men.

Greetings from Ulrike Scharf, the Bavarian Minister for the Environment and Consumer Protection, were delivered by Dr Christian Barth, head official in the ministry. He pointed out that the common effort for nature and protected areas helps building bridges across borders. This idea was also the thought when founding the TransParcNet. He considered partnership in general a key to the sustainable development of protected areas. A vision for 2020 will be to develop a common national park region together with the bohemian region on the Czech side. First steps in that direction have already been undertaken with creating posts for bilingual staff.

Summary

Once again the TransParcNet meeting delivered an interesting and comprehensive portfolio and showed its value of a platform for experience exchange and networking. New connections between “old-timers” and “first timers” were established.

Learning from each other, from personal experiences, engaging in debate and discussion is the way EUROPARC believes to drive up standards, to develop new ways to meet the challenges that affect the management of protected areas. This is no more important when protected areas need to manage effectively, nature, visitors, and stimulate sustainable economic development across a political international border. Even in today's “open bordered” EU, there remain cultural, administration and statutory differences that can sometime be “barriers” to good management of nature.

EUROPARC's Transboundary Parks Programme is one of the worlds most developed, working Transboundary certification programmes that gives protected areas an effective tool and “3rd party neutral” agreement to provide a structure that builds on the personal contacts and cooperation seen at a park level.

EUROPARC is most thankful to the hosting parks for their sterling work and to the participants for their very valuable contributions to this meeting and new inspirations for the Transboundary Parks Programme. All presentations available of the plenary sessions and workshops can be downloaded on the [EUROPARC website](#).

Pictures of the 7th TransParcNet meeting are available on the [EUROPARC website](#) and on [flickr](#).