

Workshop 12 Making and impact - measuring the impact of visitors in periurban parks

23 participants from 9 countries

1. Main successes and Challenges raised by the participants during the workshop

Main successes:

- Periodic surveys (interviews, questionnaires, automated visitor counters, GPS-based information) have proved to be essential to understand the impact of users in parks and to detect changes in their behaviours;
- This type of analysis allows managers to have objective elements to set limits (number of users, type of activities...), and define strategies to minimize impacts;

Challenges:

- The carrying capacity concept needs to be adapted to each reality;
- Park managers need capacity building on this topic;
- Prices of technology (eco-counters) is too high for many parks and software necessary for analysis is not open-source;
- Define how much is too much (impacts, visitor numbers, etc...) is necessary for the proper balance between Parks main purpose (nature conservation) and tourism development.
- How to react to the problem of excess of visitors and their impact. Main concern is what measures to apply to try to solve the problem of visitor's impact.

2. What new voices, new visions are needed to be brought in and heard on this topic?

Although the assessment of the Carrying Capacity concept is an old issue among Park managers, it seems to have become a new trendy voice because the current mass tourism development and local visitors increase in certain European cities and parks has put the focus on what vision do we want for protected areas, and what values do we want to preserve/leave for future generations.

Park managers need to have references on carrying capacities assessments from other parks, to estimate their own and to show decision-makers what happens in other areas. And most important, park managers need to share successful measures to revert impact of visitors / tourists in parks.

3. How can EUROPARC enable this "new voices" to be included?

- Providing capacity building opportunities (webinars , case studies, workshops);
- Giving Technical support using expertise from the members network;
- Intermediating to get low-cost technology for visitor monitoring (f. ex. Reaching an agreement with the Eco-counter company in order that members of EUROPARC get discounts/preparing a project to work on free software to analyse data);
- Collect case studies on this topic, and related issues (visitor monitoring, recreation ecology, etc.) to be placed in the toolbox;
- Helping to set up a project to get "standard" agreed carrying capacity numbers depending on habitats so that park managers can have references.