

Periurban Parks; Parks for Nature & People



TOOLKIT
Planning and Managing
Periurban Parks

Who is this guidance for?

Periurban Parks are found around and close to our cities. As green lungs, they provide valuable breathing spaces for nature: they also provide spaces for people to exercise and improve their health and well-being. Periurban Parks moderate local climate and act as places for local food production. This toolkit aims to give practical advice on the planning, design and management measures to meet multiple purposes and reconcile conflicting needs.

Who should read this?

This toolkit is aimed at all Protected Areas keen to learn from the experience of Periurban Parks. It is also useful for policy-makers who want to promote the protection of natural greenspaces around and within urban settings.

This toolkit will enable you to learn how to plan and manage your park better through inspiring case studies. It also provides links to webpages and studies useful for further reference.

How can it help you?

This toolkit is structured around 5 topics:

1. Designing the Park
2. Enhancing Biodiversity
3. Hosting People
4. Communicating and learning with People - Awareness Raising & Environmental Education
5. Working with People - Governance & Partnerships

For each topic, a range of tips, tools, information and inspiration are provided.

europarc.org/periurban-parks

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Introduction

Periurban Parks: bringing Nature and all its benefits close to home.



Periurban Parks, located in the fringes of urban areas, host remarkable natural ecosystems and valuable agricultural areas. These ecosystems can be remnants of previously larger natural and agricultural landscapes or the result of many years of ecological restoration.

Periurban parks play a strategic role beyond biodiversity conservation. If balanced and well-managed, periurban ecosystems can deliver many key services for the welfare and quality of life of citizens, **whether they visit the park or not.**

With the climate emergency ever present, Periurban Parks are more relevant than ever. They play an important role in **urban adaptation to climate change** - for example by reducing urban heat island effects and protecting cities from floods. They contribute to climate change mitigation by providing **carbon sequestration**.

In addition, they fulfil very important **social functions**, offering a range of cultural services, including outdoor recreation and environmental education. Periurban Parks attract large numbers of users who use them to practice outdoor sports and to be in contact with nature for wellbeing and health. However, Periurban Parks and other Protected Areas have faced a **dramatically increased influx of visitors**, especially during and the aftermath of the COVID 19 pandemic.

To meet these challenges and derive the best results for people and nature, Periurban Parks need to be planned and managed as **multi-functional spaces** in which social functions are compatible with biodiversity, nature, water and land management needs.

Read more:



[Periurban Parks - Their place in EU Policies](#)



[Nature and Countryside within the Urban Fringe](#)

The Challenge

Periurban Parks are highly visited places: as such, they experience high pressure and increased public use. This can be observed in:

- Visiting seasons now span the whole year
- People visit more often and for longer periods of time, especially to use the parks for outdoor sports and recreation
- The surface area visited has increased
- Visitors open new paths to seek new experiences or to avoid other users
- Increased use of new devices such as electric bikes, electric scooters, segways mean people can go further in the parks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this trend. New users have increased dramatically: they are now discovering and enjoying Periurban Parks, but they are not always familiar with the needs of nature and other users.

This increase in pressures not only endangers the ecosystems and the biodiversity in Periurban Parks, but destroys the benefits people are seeking and that the city environment needs.



Read more:



[The Impact of COVID-19 on the Management of European Protected Areas and Policy Implications](#)

How can we address the challenge?

The challenge is real, but there are also significant opportunities. This toolkit reflects the experience of Periurban Park managers working to reconcile the needs of nature, the quality of management practices and the increased demands faced by Periurban Parks.

This toolkit is organised around 5 topics:



Designing the Park



Enhancing Biodiversity



Hosting People



Communicating and Learning with People - Awareness Raising & Environmental Education



Working with People - Governance & Partnerships

EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing Nature back into our Lives

The new strategy, published in June 2020, states: Nature is as important for our mental and physical wellbeing as it is for our society's ability to cope with global change, health threats and disasters. We need nature in our lives. The Strategy also calls on European cities of at least 20,000 inhabitants to develop ambitious Urban Greening Plans by the end of 2021, including measures to create biodiverse and accessible urban forests, parks and gardens and urban farms.

1

Designing the Park

To get the full benefits of a Periurban Park for nature and for people, a well-thought out park design of the is essential.

Setting the scene

Periurban Parks play a strategic role which goes beyond biodiversity conservation.

They contribute to the welfare of all inhabitants, whether they visit the park or not, by delivering important ecosystem services to the nearby city.

They play a central role in mitigating and adapting to the negative effects of climate change by providing greenhouse gas sequestration, reducing urban heat island effects and protecting cities from floods.

Therefore, maintaining the **largest permeable, ecologically functional, biodiverse area as possible** should be a top priority when planning and managing Periurban Parks.

At the same time, Parks bring nature closer to urban dwellers and they offer beautiful natural settings for people to recreate and experience wellbeing, while also raising awareness and education about environmental-related issues.

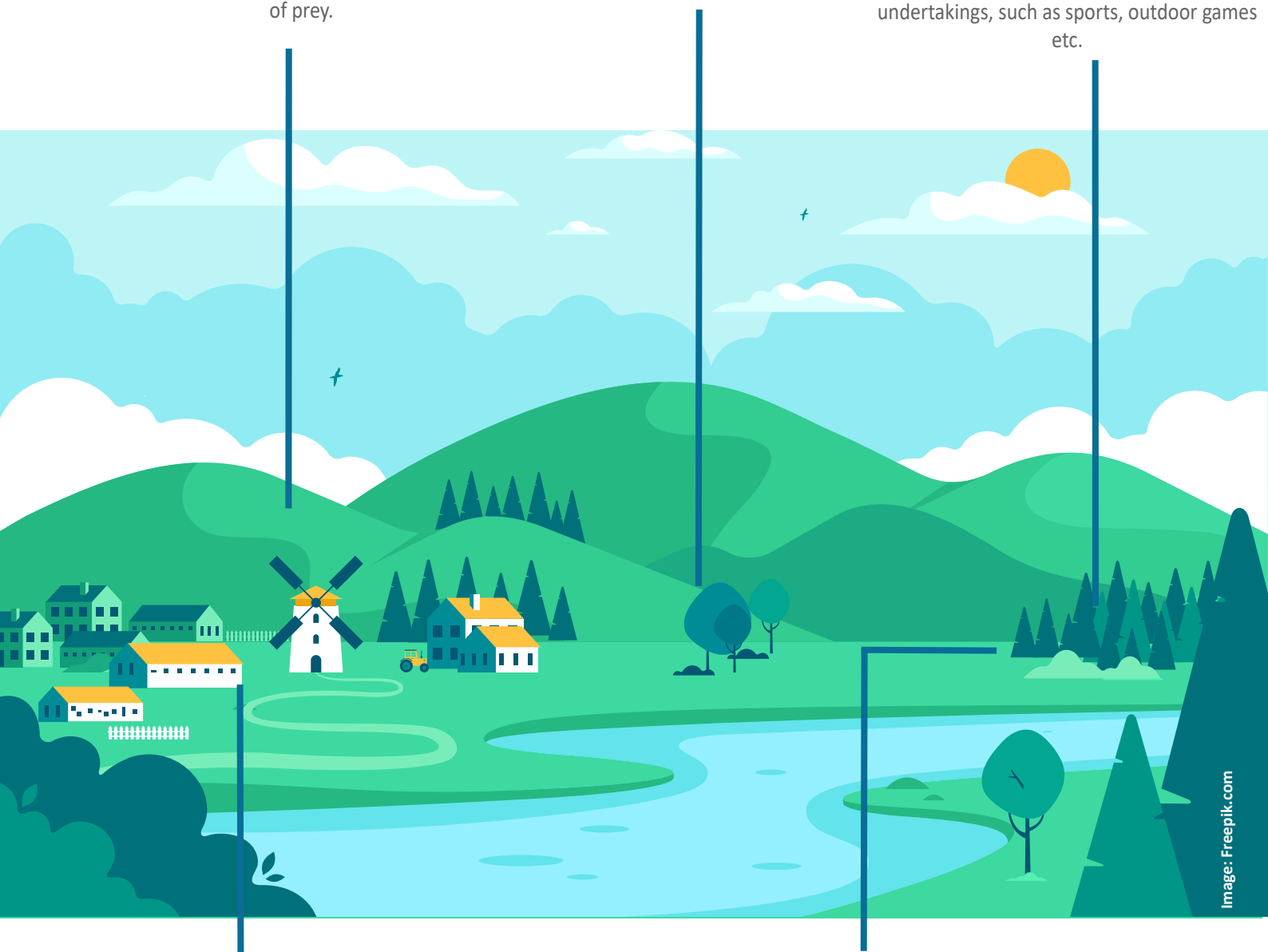
Planners need to seek to guarantee that **all these functions and services can be delivered in their best forms.**

In this sense, the landscape itself will help to define what functions and services should be favoured and where.

Convex landscapes are mainly used for circulation. Generally, they have good belvederes and viewpoints, for example for the observation of birds of prey.

Concave landscapes are mainly used for rest and for tranquility. They are great for relaxation and for activities with younger children.

A **dense forest cover** is home to many species that find refuge in the forest. It is primarily good for adventure-like activities. Conversely, clearings are primarily suited to more active undertakings, such as sports, outdoor games etc.



The flat zone usually contains more urban features than the other zones but it may also host periurban agriculture and river vegetation.

Forest edges are unique in terms of biodiversity because they combine some of the characteristics of the two zones i.e two vegetation types. They are characterized by more diverse and abundant wildlife that uses both zones for different purposes (nesting, foraging, etc.). This increased diversity is known as the “edge effect.” This area is also that preferred by people for all kinds of activities and therefore, when planning, the edge should be stretched as much as possible.

It is also important to take into account that the **beauty of the landscape can be planned** and the best viewpoints identified. For example, combining zones of large evergreen spaces with deciduous hardwood trees contributes to the construction of a **mosaic of colours** that can be used as a diversification of habitats. Agriculture can also be used as a means to diversify habitats and increase biodiversity.

Key Messages

- 🏡 Landscape features help to define favourable functions and services and where they should be located.
- 🏡 The beauty of landscapes should be included in plans.
- 🏡 Agriculture can provide a means to diversify habitats and increase biodiversity.



Did you know?

- **Natural vegetation** predominates in most Periurban Parks? Many Periurban Parks host considerably high levels of biodiversity and most of them are classified as Natura 2000 sites. This natural vegetation is often a remnant of landscapes which once covered a much wider area.
- Some Periurban Parks were **ancient brown-field sites, post-industrial sites, quarries, mining areas or abandoned crop lands** that were re-naturalized and today constitute viable refuges for rare endemic species.

Case studies

Experience from our network & beyond



[CONFLUENCE Project: Creating a Periurban Park in Prague](#)



[Planning for ecosystem services - Incorporation of the ecological values of natural spaces to urban and land planning.](#)



[Recovery of 2 degraded areas of the Collserola Natural Park boundaries: improving nature and the quality of life of citizens](#)



[Footbridge connecting two parts of Parco Nord Milano](#)



[Transport by horse-drawn vehicles inside Arche de la Nature](#)



[Urban planning – Finnish National Urban Parks \(NUP\): Planning tool for promoting biodiversity in urban areas](#)



[Planning for a landscape-scale conservation project that links wildlife and people - Quinta do Pisão Nature Park](#)



[RiconnettiMI: Ecological connections between the municipalities of Milan, Cormano and Novate Milanese](#)



[Moving within the Arche de la Nature periurban park](#)



[Nudging towards sustainable mobility behaviour in urban nature destinations: "Park Hawk" mobile information service in Nuuk National park - Helsinki](#)



Photo: Collserolo Natural Park, Barcelona, Spain.

What did we learn?

- Cities can be much **greener and natural** through the creation and enhancement of Periurban Parks.
- Investing in **good GIS** incorporates the natural values and ecosystem services of the territory, brings sound information for the cities to decide what ecosystem services should be promoted and where they are best located. It also helps them with trade-off decisions to be made to incorporate green infrastructure into urban plans.
- The recovery of **old abandoned agricultural land** becomes an opportunity to increase ecological agriculture offered to urban citizens.
- **Restoration of degraded peripheral areas** improves the marginal areas of Periurban Parks and improves the quality of life of people living nearby.
- Periurban Parks' **proximity to businesses** with the ability to generate funding can provide great opportunities to achieve public and private collaborations to help develop actions which benefit the Parks, nature and people.
- **Technological evolution** requires us to constantly think about the future, about the next needs, and to introduce new ways of doing things and find solutions to different issues – this is particularly relevant to increase access for disabled people and manage crowded parking for example.



What you can do

To make sure that Periurban Parks achieve better results for people and nature, careful planning is needed. At the same time, features of the landscape will influence what functions and services are favoured where. A range of measures can be taken to ensure the most effective design.

Goal

Planning a Park: maintaining different functions

Take action!

Draw two maps and superimpose them to best design areas for different uses. This is best done as a participatory exercise with local stakeholders:

- A map of the **potentials** of the territory for given uses such as for intense active use, for passive use, for circulation.
- A map of the **vulnerabilities** of the territory to specific uses for example those more sensitive ecosystems that need careful or no use.

Plan your park by **zoning**, dividing the park into a set of zones, each with **specific characteristics and regulations**.

Consider size-dependent ecosystem services and plan the size of your zones accordingly.

Establish **restricted natural core areas** – at least one – with restricted public access to guarantee a space of tranquillity. This area will work as a **wildlife refuge**. The size of this restricted natural core area should ideally not be less than 10% of the total Periurban Park size.

The restricted **natural core areas** are vulnerable and therefore must be surrounded by **buffer spaces** to avoid impacts from outside. The greater the sensitivity and vulnerability of the core area, the greater and more efficient the buffer zone should be to ensure its protection.

Establish areas with **high carrying capacity**, to host people and activities to take place. These areas also need a buffer area surrounding them in order to mitigate negative impacts on surrounding areas.

Keep your park planning and management ideas and skills up to date with regular inspirational networking, locally and through EUROPARC.

Planning for mobility inside the Park

Promote **soft mobility**, moving around the Park on foot or by bike.

Enable some **rapid access and escape roads** for safety reasons - fire-fighting vehicles or medical care.

Promote **social inclusion** by removing barriers to facilitate universal accessibility to some zones of the Park.



Goal

Planning the border fringe between the Park and the city

Take action!

Plan a **transition area** between the two different landscapes (urban and natural). This transition area is a place for biodiversity enrichment.

Introduce the Park's **typical furniture and sign posts** already in this interphase zone.

If a smooth transition is not possible, then **clearly mark** where the Park finishes and where the city starts, otherwise the Park risks degradation.

Work with **city authorities** towards a well-planned green infrastructure, connecting the Park with the city through green trails, tree-lined streets, pocket gardens

Work with neighbours to **reduce the impacts of fragmentation** and facilitate connectivity with the city through green roofs, green walls and autochthonous plant gardens.

Planning accessibility to the Park

Work with city authorities to plan a **periurban trails network** - to provide access to the Park and other spaces around cities that may be largely invisible or difficult to see or access otherwise.

Plan with city authorities a **public transport system** that facilitates citizens to access the Park. This can help avoid traffic density, pollution and reduce the size of parking lots. It is also a way to make the park accessible to **those who cannot drive**.

Plan with city authorities soft mobility to the park and **offer places to hire and park bikes**.

Provide parking places, especially for **people with special needs**, who should be the main users of parking facilities. The parking offer should be quite restricted in order to not encourage the use of private cars as a means of access.



2

Enhancing Biodiversity

Periurban Parks are important refuges for nature around cities. Maintaining a high level of biodiversity is beneficial for both humans and nature.

Setting the scene

Periurban Parks play a vital role in supporting biodiversity both locally and globally. They provide large functional natural ecosystems around urban areas, enabling the delivery of multiple ecosystem services.

However, natural habitats and biodiversity in Periurban Parks are often open to threats and pressures arising from their periurban location, fragmentation and overuse.

It is therefore crucial to **monitor biodiversity** in order to detect population declines, identify the causes and adopt appropriate management measures.

In addition, alien species have become a very important and challenging issue in Periurban Parks' management. Good knowledge helps in carrying out effective eradication actions.

The involvement of the public in monitoring through citizen science programs or in enhancing biodiversity through voluntary programmes can help park managers in their daily tasks.

Key Messages



Periurban Parks fulfil a major role ensuring in ensuring that biodiversity is close to urban areas.



Monitoring biodiversity is crucial in order to detect population declines.



Biodiversity can be enhanced through management measures that involve local people.

Did you know?

- Butterflies and other insects inform us of **environmental changes**, especially regarding local changes in land use, but also related to pollution and climate change.
- Pollinator insects have become an **important indicator group** as pollination is a basic process for the conservation of protected natural areas and many species are sensitive to pesticide use.
- Passerine birds are closely related to **changes in the structure of vegetation** and therefore inform us of changes in the landscape.
- Birds of prey provide information on the **effects of visitors** since they are sensitive to disturbance by people during the breeding season.



Photo: Katri Lehtola , Sipoonkorpi National Park, Helsinki Metropolitan Area, Finland.

Case studies

Experience from our network and beyond



[Promoting open spaces in a forest park as a means of increasing biodiversity and fire protection in Collserola Natural Park – Barcelona](#)



[The Vitoria-Gasteiz Green Belt: actions for the conservation of biodiversity](#)



[Promoting Biodiversity in Arche de la Nature Periurban Park \(Le Mans\) - Conservation and monitoring of snake populations](#)



[Pond management for the conservation of amphibians in Collserola Natural Park – Barcelona](#)



[Enhanced controlled grazing as a cost-effective and ecological tool for fire prevention in Collserola Natural Park](#)

Controlled grazing at Collserola Natural Park



What did we learn?

- A noticeable increase in biodiversity can be achieved by **introducing agriculture** in Periurban Parks.
- Periurban parks can help in **changing attitudes** towards species not always liked by the public such as snakes or spiders, through recovery actions and education.

What you can do



Goal

Planning to enhance Biodiversity

Take action!

Maintain **large, ecologically functional ecosystems** with the highest native biodiversity possible.

Create **islands of tranquility**, which provide sufficiently large areas that guarantee a lack of disturbance for wildlife.

Maintain as much **permeable soil** as possible in order to absorb rainwater and host natural ecosystems.

Connect your park with other green areas, both with the inner part of the city and with the larger countryside, through a well-planned Green Infrastructure. Ideally, the park should penetrate the urban fabric through green trails, tree-lined avenues, pocket parks, etc.

Maintain **open spaces** and clearances in forests to increase the diversity of habitats.

Create **water ponds** to foster biodiversity in dry habitats.

Introduce **agriculture** as a means to increase biodiversity.

Combine zones of **evergreen trees** with zones of deciduous hardwood trees to diversify habitats.

Keep your biodiversity management ideas and skills up to date by means of **regular inspirational networking** locally and through EUROPARC.

Managing Biodiversity

Manage forest areas by paying special attention to:

- The required efficiency of the **buffer effect**,
- To minimise the impacts of forest fires, it is important to create both **horizontal and vertical breaks** in the forest and vegetation cover.
- To maintain high biodiversity standards, create differing **ecological niches** with a variety of habits and species.

Manage agriculture in an **ecological & sustainable** way.

What you can do



Goal

Monitoring Biodiversity

Take action!

Regular monitoring of ecosystems. This will indicate what to do to promote biodiversity in the long term - monitoring will help to identify:

- Limiting factors to be compensated.
- Imbalances in the food chain.
- Nature-based solutions needed to enhance biodiversity.
- Possible need of forestry interventions (e.g. planting seeds).
- Possible restrictions of access to sensitive zones.

Long-term monitoring of **indicator species**. This will help to assess the effectiveness of management actions.

Monitor **alien species** – plants & animals - to help implement effective eradication actions.

Such monitoring actions can be undertaken by park staff, external experts and through citizen science.

Partnerships for Biodiversity

Promote **citizen science** programmes to monitor species in the park.

Involve **companies** located in the area in biodiversity management and restoration actions through **Corporate Social Responsibility** programmes.

Involve **volunteers** in management and restoration actions e.g. clean days or surveying.

3

Hosting People

The character of Periurban Parks typically stems from and reflects their proximity to large concentrations of built-up areas and, consequently, the pressure that this exerts on them. This requires special attention.

Setting the scene

Periurban Parks receive large numbers of users from different social groups with diverse interests, ages and needs.

Management of Periurban Parks must seek, as with planning, to guarantee that biodiversity is preserved and, at the same time, that cultural services, such as outdoor recreation, can be delivered in their most sustainable and **least impactful forms**.

This can be challenging: not only are some uses incompatible with biodiversity conservation, but some uses can also be in themselves **incompatible**. Thus, conflicts amongst different types of users often arise, which adds extra pressure on the management of the site.

At the same time, the number of social groups pursuing specific activities, such as downhill bikers, airsoft paintball players, night hikers or beekeepers, is growing. These groups place demands on resources, which are more specific and less negotiable, which in turn can also hinder visitors' management even more.

This is why it is essential to develop good knowledge about visitors, including their profiles, their distribution in the park, their needs and preferences, so that public uses can be appropriately managed.

Also, each Park needs to decide what activities to promote in order to trigger a change from adrenaline-driven behaviour towards a **lower impact visit**. In addition, Parks can promote less impactful 'emotional experiences', which leave a more positive footprint.

To exert effective control of the territory, it is highly desirable to have forest wardens or rangers with sufficient powers of authority. When this is not possible, the involvement of the local police or other police forces may be required.

Key Messages




-  In order to ensure the preservation of the natural resource as well as visitors' satisfaction and safety, we need to establish general and specific regulations.
-  Legal regulatory regimes, backed up with sanction frameworks, may be required to deal with conflicting activities. This should also be underpinned with conciliatory and participatory platforms so that stakeholders can be engaged in the regulatory processes.
-  There is a need to undertake extensive creative communication campaigns to raise awareness among Park users and find consensus building ways to address problematic users.



Photo: Katri Lehtola, Nuuksio National Park, Espoo Metropolitan Area, Finland.

Did you know?

Even if visitors remain in a specific place or in a small area, their activities affect a larger space.

A very large collective activity can detract from the experiences of other users and risk creating a sense of being overwhelmed. This feeling is unlikely to sit well with the values of a natural space.

Conflicts between hikers and cyclists are quite common since the former can feel threatened by cyclists who tend to travel at high speed.

Case studies

Experience from our network and beyond



[Co-existence of hiking and biking trails in a Periurban Park](#)



[Implementation of ordinances with sanctioning framework to regulate the use of bicycles in a Periurban Park](#)



[Carrying capacity assessment: an overview](#)



[Study of influx, frequency and characterization of visitors to the Collserola Natural Park \(8,200 ha\)](#)



[Improved sustainability in Urban National parks in Nordic and Baltic countries](#)



Visitor surveying at Collserola Natural Park

What did we learn?

- It is very important to act quickly when a problem with users is identified and involve them in finding a solution.
- The construction of a segregated mountain bike trail with the help of volunteer cyclists allows for a better coexistence between cyclists and other users of the park, avoiding rivalries between them.
- Regulations on conflicting practices backed with a legal sanction framework is also necessary
- All administrations need to be involved with the ability and the conviction to apply sanctions and fine
- In Parks in which rangers do not have any authority to sanction, the greatest challenge is to effectively involve municipal police and other police forces - this can be necessary in order to quantify visitors' numbers to raise awareness and agree a visitors' management plan with all parties that need to be involved.
- Monitoring mobility, using real-time tools, is an essential part of a proactive and innovative visitors' management plan.
- It is necessary to develop new methods in visitors' management combining different types of data , visitors, habitats and species from multiple sources, including spatial, digital, technical and social media-based data.
- Carrying capacity can be defined as: "Maximum visitor level that an area can hold with no impact, or the least environmental impact level, and the best nature experience quality for visitors". This will vary per habitat and location.
- Several types of carrying capacity need to be assessed to get the global carrying capacity:
 - o **Physical carrying capacity:** maximum visitor level that an area can physically hold, related to their public use facilities and services, visitor centres, parking, trails, recreational areas, beaches.
 - o **Ecological carrying capacity:** maximum visitor level without detrimental or irreversible environmental impacts.
 - o **Social /Psychological carrying capacity:** amount of visitor use that individual visitor can endure before the number of visitors begins to intrude upon individual quality of the experiences.

What you can do



Goal

Planning for receiving people

Take action!

Engage Rangers staff, supplemented by Volunteer Rangers, Junior Rangers etc. as the **eyes and ears of the Park**.

Plan **access and entrance points** to the Park as the most important infrastructure: they determine users' understanding of the site. Provide positive messaging.

Provide **basic facilities** – visitors' centers, public toilets and car parks – although public and other means of transport should be the most preferred and encouraged means of arrival.

Set-up a **Visitor Centre** that should act as the '**front-office**' of the Park and provide high-quality, professionally-produced communication to support the Park's mission, vision, goals and objectives.

Establish an **official network of trails, paths, roads, walks**, etc., designed to channel the flow of users.

Establish **sub-networks with pre-defined remits**, especially when useful for authorisation of group activities.

According to existing contexts and levels of any existing conflicts, develop **trail segregation measures** - whether physical or temporal - as solutions.

Involve stakeholders in as much of the planning of the park infrastructure as possible. They will be your best allies and advocates.

Keep your visitor management ideas and skills up to date by means of **regular inspirational networking** locally and through EUROPARC.

Planning for recreation and leisure

Generally, the **preferred landscape for recreation is forest** (or equivalent), with smooth or concave contours, as well as a long border between the forest and surrounding open spaces.

Evaluate and plan well what **types of infrastructure** to offer: picnic areas, barbecues, sports facilities.

Give particular attention to **waste management and collection**.

Create **buffer zones around recreational infrastructures** to mitigate the possible impacts of noise, soil erosion, etc.

What you can do



Goal

Take action!

Managing visitors	<p>Deliver clear and positive messages at access and entrance points. Explain the consequences of actions on the Park and for the individual.</p> <p>Train Park staff to provide good guidance and create well-designed information system about the trails and zones of the park to be visited.</p> <p>Use participatory approaches to develop visitor strategies with the aim of reaching consensus about acceptable and agreed public uses of the Park.</p> <p>Set up a medium – long term strategy to be implemented in order to tackle the permanent and constant challenge of public use.</p> <p>Establish a maximum number per year of different types of formally organised activities and also a maximum number of participants for each activity. A very large group activity can have negative effects on other users and overwhelm them. Such types of activity will not fit well with the values of a natural space.</p> <p>Make a request of authorization to organisers of a collective activity above a pre-established number of participants mandatory.</p>
Managing recreational areas	<p>Maintain a conservation approach.</p> <p>Put in place and enforce regulations on the use of barbecues as part of fire protection and safety policies.</p>
Monitoring visitors	<p>Count visitors to estimate their total number and identify the Park's main hotspots. It is very helpful to collect data using automated visitor counting systems, such as eco-counters.</p> <p>Ascertain visitor profiles through inventories, surveys on the ground and other sources. Detect conflict among different type of users.</p> <p>Track visitor dispersal in the park: when, where and duration of stay.</p> <p>Monitor visitor perception of Park resources and the impact of their activities, their expectations, motivations, desired activities and levels of satisfaction</p> <p>Determine the carrying capacity of different areas of the Park, especially those with the highest ecological value in order to assess whether the Periurban Park, or certain areas of it, are crowded and by how much.</p>
Setting up regulations	<p>Exert effective control of the territory. It is highly desirable to have forest wardens / rangers with sufficient powers of authority. When this is not the case, you'll need to involve the local police or other police forces.</p> <p>All conflicting activities must have a legal regulatory regime that has a sanctioning framework.</p>



4

Communicating and Learning with People

Periurban Parks are well positioned to reconnect people with nature. To do so effectively, communications and events need to be well-planned and thought out.

Setting the scene

Periurban Parks **bring nature closer to people**. Experiencing nature directly is important for all humans, especially children and young people: for those who live in large urban spaces it is particularly rewarding as they generally have fewer opportunities for direct contact with natural spaces.

Periurban Parks are perfect places to help people connect with local **biodiversity** and to learn about **sustainability** and other environmental issues that affect and impact on us all.

Positive, inclusive communication is key, including the need to ensure that **rules, regulations, safety & risks** are made clear. Communication strategies are essential as they help to define important messages and identify the best tools to reach the public.

Management programmes and actions to be implemented must be **well communicated**. It may seem obvious, but if not properly developed and applied, they will not reach your intended audiences and risk failing to deliver the clear messages you want to share. Effective communication requires capacity and resources: developing a communication strategy and plan is central to this process.

Organising events

For all activities and events offered by your Park, it is necessary to ensure that communication actions reflect the **quantity and seasonality** of what you plan to offer and provide. Even well-conceived events risk becoming the victim of bad or adverse weather for example – therefore, thinking about your audience and types of Park users, it is essential to plan ahead and cover all eventualities.

Depending on the type of event or activities you plan, it may become necessary to think about the **location** and how these can be distributed across the Park: often, it is very useful to pre-think each event and how it is communicated together with partner associations of users or sports federations. As well as ensuring that everyone is clear about what the event is and how it is clearly communicated, such partners can be powerful intermediaries and information disseminators.



Especially for larger events, it is useful to consider all **appropriate dissemination options**, in the Park, amongst the community of users you plan to attract or engage and use online communication channels to reach your intended audiences. Here too, partners can be useful to relay information, especially if they are also involved in the event.

Large events, bringing together several thousand people, are powerful ways to familiarise the public with the Park and to disseminate basic information on biodiversity conservation and climate issues and why these matter to people and the Park.

Communicating your actions

It is important to develop communication materials adapted to your target audiences in order to **reach key sectors**. Messages must be adapted to the needs and interests of each type of recipient and must be disseminated through the communication channels that each of them regularly consult and use.

At the same time, it is important to work with **local media** so that they too can support and disseminate information.

A **dedicated website and communication on social networks** within the same integrated strategy will allow the Park to establish its identity and reach its target audiences more effectively. The role and importance of social networks should not be underestimated. They must not be seen as mere channels where contents and information are disseminated: their role goes further as they allow interaction with citizens. They become a space for dialogue where users can comment on the measures and send complaints, suggestions or inquiries. It is useful to prepare social network campaigns to engage users.

It is good to prepare an integrated communication plan to organise different topics to disseminate consistently and with regular frequency. The plan should be designed to coordinate all communication channels used by the Park – as such, the plan will help to:

- Avoid missing communication opportunities.
- Avoid overlapping news items and let each news items to have its 'own space'.
- Create awareness across a wide range of communication channels, including working with the press, information content on websites and messaging disseminated through social networks.



Any significant **management measures** must be accompanied by an informative and educational programme that allows citizens to understand and know the reasons for the measures to be (or are being) adopted and why. This increases transparency.

- Environmental education and interpretation require **specific competencies** and are a core part of an integrated communication plan. Educational programmes should be supported by a network of good quality interpretation facilities (e.g. visitor centres, display boards, signage etc.) where possible and these should be developed to meet the information needs of schools and universities, as well as associations, families and general visitors.
- Adapting communication according to the **information needs of different audiences** requires careful consideration and attention. For example, messaging for educational audiences (such as schools) is likely to require specific customisation according to the needs and expectations of the visiting scholars and their teachers; messaging intended to reach the general public should aim to describe the character and features of the protected natural space. In all cases, communication approaches and tools must be designed so that they go beyond the classic transmission of content and information and aim to be inclusive, informative and inspiring – well thought-out and designed communication can be a powerful means to increase knowledge and empower people.
- In this sense, **action-oriented proposals**, such as environmental volunteering, are an especially valuable means to achieve this core communication goal and empower people to become actively engaged in the Park and its management.
- Interpretation of the Park's natural and cultural assets can **illuminate, inspire and provoke** new positive understanding and behaviours in users. Interpretation is interesting for visitors to the Park, but when planned and delivered with thought it can be a useful tools to engage regular, local users.

Key Messages



It is good practice to appoint a member of the Park staff to **take the lead in communication** and, where possible, it is desirable to have a dedicated office dealing with different aspects about communication issues - institutional and brand communication, graphics, online communication, off-line products, visitor centres. If not, then ensure good external expertise is brought in.



It is important to have a **communication infrastructure** and to use the maximum of available channels to get key messages about the Park across to different audiences.



Signage inside the Park will allow visitors to find their way around, but also to **clearly identify** the Park as a unit or an identifiable territory.



People are more likely to be stimulated, interested and involved in a Park's activities when **cultural and emotional experiences** are integral components of the communication actions.



Contact with nature plays a crucial role in the **physical, spiritual, mental, psychological and social and healthy** development of children. It is also necessary throughout life and can be itself an antidote for vulnerable, unwell and socially isolated people. Nature is a powerful healer and a key way for people to develop skills, to learn, to share experiences and to be healthy.

Photo: Anne Huger, Arche de la Nature, Le Mans, France



Did you know?

Periurban Parks usually have a territorial range which goes **far beyond the single local administrative area** where they are located - typically, they cater for the entire population of an urban conglomeration or a group of nearby towns.

Park's Ambassadors can be identified among **influencers and public figures** who have a connection or link with the territory.

Park's employees, consultants or civil volunteers can be of great help to create **video clips, short interviews or little snippets** to disseminate best practices through digital channels about how to enjoy the Park.

Through **play, movement and contact with natural materials**, in an outdoor environment, children can reconnect with nature physically, emotionally and mentally, developing their ecological awareness in a pleasurable way.

Experiential learning, such as "for the forest - in the forest", can contribute in tangible and practical ways to environmental education in schools – this can be important to kick-start lifelong interest in nature and environmental protection.

Case studies

Experience from our network



[Pedagogical workshops for preschool & school age children, teachers and parents in nature in Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest](#)



[Experiential actions in the Mount Hymettus Aesthetic Forest: an innovative project](#)



[The “Casa del Parco”: an interactive multimedia facility, located inside the Cascina Centro Parco Nord Milano](#)



[Creation of an educational botanical garden in the Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest](#)



[Education and interpretation in the Medvednica Nature Park in Zagreb](#)

What did we learn?

- Botanical gardens within a Park give visitors, and especially schoolchildren, the possibility to know about the important flora of their country. This knowledge and awareness can be important for the protection of rare and threatened species.
- A Periurban Park is useful as a place to train primary and secondary teachers, to improve their knowledge of specific topics, for example related to forest ecosystems and climate change.

What you can do



Goal

Communicating with visitors

Take action!

Create **extensive, educative communication campaigns** to raise awareness among Park users and find ways to reach users causing problems.

Provide clear information on **regulations about a stay** in or visit to your Periurban Park (e.g. time limits, seasonal restrictions, relevant legislation for health and safety).

Provide information about **authorised activities**.

Place **exhibits at strategic points** where visitors can immediately connect with significant features of the Park's natural or cultural history.

Design, implement and monitor **communication plans**, including:

- Highly visible and effective signage providing information about how usage and activities are regulated within the territory of the Park (e.g. authorised and non-authorised paths, spaces temporarily or permanently closed to the public, authorised activities depending on the site or the path, etc.
- Information about the Park and its values.
- General restrictions to protect nature, care for fauna and flora, avoid littering etc.
- Specific restrictions about obligatory use of paths, precautions when using fire, prohibited activities, no-go zones, etc.
- Principles of good behaviour: respect for other visitors, avoidance of annoying activities.

Work with **communication professionals** in media and in interpretation.

Use **different communication tools**: websites, social networks, electronic newsletters, billboards and information panels in visitor facilities, leaflets about the territory, published materials and advertisements etc.

Keep your communication practices up to date and ideas inspirational – skill-up with regular networking locally and through EUROPARC.

Planning a visitor centre

Visitors centres contribute to the **appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment** of the Park's resources by:

- Offering a variety of interpretive exhibits and programmes featuring the Park's cultural, natural, scenic and recreational resources.
- Inspiring visitors and enhancing their experiences, encouraging them to recognise, be aware of and preserve the Park and its resources.
- Providing a place for people to meet and socialise within the Park.

Visitor centres reach **diverse visitors and audiences** by:

- Providing meaningful interpretation that incorporates multiple perspectives – e.g. by offering exhibits and activities that cater for people with diverse learning, visual, hearing or mobility abilities.
- Offering frequent – daily, weekly and yearly – activities to engage visitors.
- Using discovery techniques to connect with visitors and meet their diverse information needs.

Visitors centres may provide up-to-date resources to support the Park's interpretation by:

- Produce and offer for sale printed materials to stimulate interest in the park's natural and cultural history
- The sale of services and merchandising, which may eventually be managed through an agreement with an external partner, can contribute to Park income.



Goal

Planning for Environmental Education

Take action!

Consider that the preferred landscape in which to plan an educational facility or action is an area with **high natural values**, diverse landscapes and with interesting geological features nearby. Consider these locations as places to set-up educational facilities - nature classrooms, educational farms, guided educational paths, visitors' centres, etc.

Environmental education centres are an essential element in the strategy of involving the public in the Park's management and activities.

Take into account the **audiences targeted** within specific programmes and projects – for example, those aimed at children, primary or secondary schools and universities require to be engaging and educational content; those aimed at the general public are more likely to merit non-formal educational messages; other user groups, such as those interested in leisure, recreation, art or biology, will benefit from different types of environmental education provision and content.

Due to their location, environmental education facilities in Periurban Parks are key to bring nature closer to people – **experiential learning** for children and young people who live in large conurbations can have real added-value, especially when there are few opportunities to be in direct contact with natural spaces.

When providing environmental education, it is important to:

- Commit to programmes and projects that include **continuous work** with students and stimulate exploration, learning, appreciation, enjoyment, dialogue and participation with the Park's natural values and features.
- **Design specific programmes** aimed at educational providers and establishments within local municipalities – think in particular about ways to directly engage education professionals in the co-creation of educational content and collaborate in reciprocal ways to take the values of the Park into their educational spaces and bring the educators (and their students) in to the Park.
- **Diversify the activities to be offered** – for example, consider the range of curricular, extracurricular, leisure activities, as well as how these will be offered and to whom – they can be: as work experiences, opportunities specifically for projects, community services and/ or in-service learning; different themes can be addressed, for example, biodiversity, agroecology, heritage, sustainability, natural cycles, climate change. Another important consideration relates to the space where activities will take place – for example, in an in-Park environmental education centre or in the immediate environment of schools. Environmental education in a Periurban Park can ensure that global issues are relatable to a well-known location and to peoples' lives.
- **Offer a wide range of educational resources** to help teachers to incorporate the values of the protected natural space within the curriculum, including the importance of participating in its conservation. In this sense, it will be necessary to diversify provision to be both physical and virtual: matching the themes and the methodologies is important. Do not be afraid to incorporate online learning opportunities.
- Of particular importance should be the **programmes aimed at the local population and communities**, developing specific activities for this group, especially those related to volunteering and community action.
- Ensure access to **up-to-date documentation and pedagogical advice services**. It can be helpful to establish links with the scientific and research experts – think about how spaces within the Park could be made available for dialogue and the transfer of knowledge, linked to natural spaces or environmental education, to the public.



5

Involving People- Governance & Partnerships

Due to the many different roles and users a Periurban Park has, it is important to involve a range of stakeholders in the management of the Park.

Setting the scene

Governance of Periurban Parks can be looked at from two different levels. The first level concerns the **management of the Park** and the second concerns the **involvement of stakeholders**.

Regarding management, there are different governance models found in Periurban Parks, each with different degrees of co-governance. The most common are:

- Direct management by a local government body.
- Direct management by other higher-level governments (especially regional).
- Consortia between different administrations.
- Consortia between public and private entities.
- Management delegated to a public body.
- Management delegated to a private body (usually an NGO).

Stakeholders are numerous and diverse in Periurban Parks. They include associations, cultural entities, ecologists, land-owners, public and private companies, universities, unions, neighbours.

In order to best manage public use, it is necessary to undertake development of a **strategy based on and with the involvement of stakeholders**. This is particularly important in order to reach consensus to establish the basis for an acceptable public use of the Park.

Creating a **discussion table** involving public administrations and associations, entities and citizenship, can be very beneficial in promoting and establishing rules shared and accepted by all. This can be done both on and offline.

The focus should be on:

- **Building relationships** – in order to involve stakeholders, it is necessary to create a close relationship and develop trust between the Park and the people who use it. This relationship should be based not only on the needs of stakeholders but also on those of the Park.
- **Problem-solving** – each group of stakeholders is likely to be accustomed to focusing only on their own problems and issues, which they may ask the Park to address and resolve. To find workable solutions, it is imperative that all the problems are solved together.
- **Dialogue Table** – in order to reach this goal, it is essential to have regular meetings at which all the participants can confront and express their opinions about each issue and contribute to the final decisions. Developing and accepting a clear understanding of the decision-making processes needs to be agreed by all.
- **Trust building** – it is fundamental that information flows transparently and honestly between all parties.
- **Involvement** – each group of stakeholders has to be an active part of the Park and promote the Park's policies. Stakeholders can become very good ambassadors of Parks when they feel part of them and work together, with their Park. Community-based conservation is an effective means of involving and collaborating with the local community – this can often empower them to take-up a much greater role in the Park's governance and management processes.
- In addition to creating round tables on specific topics with affected stakeholders, it is advisable create a **permanent participatory council** (or equivalent) that integrates stakeholders from all sectors, to debate and channel discussions on different topics and reach agreements.





Photo: Bruno Bosilo, Scarpe Escaut, France.

Did you
know?

Business Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a good opportunity to involve citizens in the knowledge and management of the Park and spread its values. The proximity of Periurban Parks to cities makes it easier for private companies to develop their CSR policies in these Parks: in turn, such involvement can be a practical way of contributing to the social and environmental improvement of the community in which they are located.

Key Messages

 Creating a **discussion table** involving public administrations and associations, entities and citizens, can be very beneficial in promoting and establishing rules shared and accepted by all. This can be done on and offline.

 In order to involve stakeholders, it is necessary to create trust and build **close relationships** with them. These relationships should be based not only on the needs of stakeholders, but also on those of the park.

Case studies

Experience from our network and beyond



[Communal garden in Parco Nord Milano](#)



[Corporate Social Responsibility Activities in Collserola Nature Park](#)



[Apprenticeship opportunity for migrants and asylum seekers in Parco Nord Milano](#)



What did we learn?

- Urban social agriculture is a tool for aggregation, participation and social cohesion. Aimed at people of all ages and backgrounds, it provides a common means to organise work and cultivate the land, promoting shared working. Everyone can learn the importance of manual work and mutual assistance, getting closer to the land and nature, in a beautiful space, peripheral to the city.
- A Periurban Park can be a suitable place to promote training and job opportunities through apprenticeships. It has also been shown that developing projects that focus on creating green jobs and training opportunities can also provide working skills for migrants and asylum seekers.

What you can do



Goal

Take action!

Involving visitors

Develop a **public use strategy based** on participation with stakeholders with the intention of reaching consensus – this will establish the basis of acceptable public uses of the Park.

Create **discussion tables** on or offline that involve public administrations and associations, entities and citizens in order to promote and establish shared rules, accepted by all.

Develop **voluntary programmes**, such as for citizen science, cleaning days or Friends of Parks.

Keep your community involvement ideas, inspiration and skills up to date with **regular networking locally and through EUROPARC**.

Involving business

Contact businesses in the area to offer them in-Park activities as part of their **Corporate Social Responsibility** programmes.

Involving educational facilities

Building and maintaining a **reference library** accessible to staff and education providers.

Creating opportunities for ongoing **research**, capturing new information about the area's resources and historic events or traditions.

Develop programmes and partnerships with **local schools, youth groups, colleges and universities, community organisations and volunteers**.

Useful References

- [Periurban Parks, their place in EU policies](#) *EUROPARC Federation, 2019.*
- [Nature and the countryside within the Urban Fringe](#) *Junta de Andalucia, 2012*
- [The Impact of COVID-19 on the Management of European Protected Areas and Policy Implications](#) *Forests, 2020*
- [Creation of Shapes & Environment. Assessing capacity, the interaction between sensitivity and pressure](#) *Prof Simon Bell*
- [Biodiversity challenges in Periurban Parks](#) *Fedenatur, 2006*
- [Water management in Periurban Parks how to promote and preserve this valuable good](#) – *Fedenatur, 2014*
- [Management of new usages and massive events in Periurban Parks](#) *Fedenatur, 2013*



This toolkit has been prepared by:

Marià Martí, Parc de Collserola, Barcelona
Teresa Pastor EUROPARC Federation Directorate
Carol Ritchie, EUROPARC Federation Directorate
Fernando Alves, Parque Florestal Monsanto, Lisbon
Riccardo Gini & Silvia Argentiero, Parco Nord Milano, Milan
Anne Huger, Arche de la Nature, Le Mans
Alberto Girani, Parco Portofino, Santa Margarita Ligure
Annukka Rasinmäki, Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland
Nikos Pangas, Philodassiki, Greece

More information on Periurban Parks can be found under

europarc.org/periurban-parks



EUROPARC
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EUROPARC Federation is the largest and most representative Protected Area network in Europe. EUROPARC members comprise almost 40% of the Natura 2000 network. Our members are made up of National Parks, Nature & Regional Parks, Marine Protected Areas and Periurban Parks. More information at: europarc.org.





EUROPARC
F E D E R A T I O N

EUROPARC Federation
Waffnergasse 6
93047 Regensburg, Germany
europarc@europarc.org

europarc.org

