

ProPark – Foundation for Protected Areas

Föderation der Natur- und Nationalparke Europas e.V. (EUROPARC Federation)

**„Increasing education opportunities on sustainable development
for protected area managers in Romania“**

Final report on an educational project, supported by
Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt
(Az 31412/01)

by

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Project partners



ProPark – Foundation for Protected Areas and



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Project Goals and Objectives

Protected Areas (PA) in Romania are still quite often places where lack of knowledge and competencies for management, lack of communication and stakeholder involvement lead to conflicts and ultimately to unsustainable resource use and investments. ProPark is pioneering the establishment of comprehensive capacity building programmes. This project will introduce new approaches into the capacity building programme by using modern technology. With developing on-line training, the time of face-to-face training sessions can be reduced, resulting in a more cost and time effective training for PA staff and their employers. EUROPARC supports ProPark with its vast network of PA professionals and will share the innovative approaches across the Federation network.

Description of work stages and used methods

First of all, the curriculum and programme for *Protected Area Specialist* occupation will be adapted in order to allow the combination of on-line lessons and face-to-face sessions of training. Then, a group of trainers will work on specific protected areas topics and prepare the needed materials. They will also participate in a training session about on-line lessons in order to learn how to synthesize materials and make them attractive and useful in an electronic environment. ProPark will create a template for the on-line lessons, as well as a guideline on how to use it. Based on all this, actual training sessions for at least 45 protected area professionals and representatives of relevant institutions will take place and, based on their feedback, methods will be improved. Throughout the entire project steps will be taken towards promoting the advantages of the on-line lessons and also the results of the project. By integrating on-line lessons into the training programmes, training events will be much more efficient and give higher value to the face-to-face sessions. Theoretical knowledge gained in advance, will give time for interactive and practical approaches during face-to-face lessons. This will also open the way to some completely on-line programmes and offer to Romanian trainers a new perspective on training.

Results and Discussion

The project achieved developing, implementing and promoting innovative tools and approaches (on-line learning) to increase knowledge transfer to Protected Area professionals on nature conservation management. The project implementation followed the plan established in the beginning, with minor changes in timetable, and exceeded the planned results. DBU granted a project prolongation of two months in order to incorporate valuable follow-up activities in the project. The prolongation didn't affect the budget and brought visibility and confidence in the quality of the programme.

Due to the lack of experience in creating online trainings, the activities 1.1., 1.2. and 1.3. were extended. To develop the online materials required more time than estimated. For each topic a group of trainers and resource persons (specialists) was established to be consulted during the process.

Each training team worked separately but also together in working groups. This process took a longer period than estimated and involved over 30 trainers through a participatory process. Each online lesson was developed to meet the needs of different types of participants, using interactive methods, new sets of tools, training software (Flash software), and a good communication through the online platform with all the participants.

Furthermore the first online training session for the participants was postponed. This allowed for thorough testing of the online platform to avoid any technical problems. The delay did not have a negative impact on the correlated activities.

Even though the initial project aimed to reduce the time needed for face-to-face sessions to only 3 to 5 days, this was not possible because of the complexity of the curriculum. The actual face to face trainings lasted for 10 days, plus a half day for the final exam. The participants who entered the training programme have different backgrounds and different practical approaches. Whilst the online training covers introductory aspects to protected areas management, the face to face training emphasizes on operational management and management plan implementation. The online platform is an opportunity to research and reflect on the protected area domain. The face to face programme invites the students to put their knowledge into practice.

In total 38 online lessons were developed: 18 lessons using the Flash software and 20 lessons using the Moodle platform resources for the online approach. Initially only 14 online lessons were planned, but once the whole curriculum was reviewed it became evident that it was necessary to elaborate a comprehensive capacity building framework that would provide the proper conditions to become a protected area specialist. The online lessons include texts, images, links to useful information, amongst others, in order to make it easier for the trainees to follow, understand and graduate the training. Feedback from trainees was received both within the e-learning platform during the online training, and in a written form, after the face to face trainings. For the future efforts will be made to include within the e-learning platform introductory modules on "Animation for protected areas", "Nature Interpretation", "Ecotourism and visitor management". These topics are available only in the face to face lessons and will need online lessons too.

The first officially certified *Protected Area Specialists (PAS)* in Romania were trained to become efficient administrators of natural protected areas in the country.

Over 20 working groups were organised for improving the online materials from *PAS* curriculum, 49 scholarships for 49 *Protected Area Specialists* were offered and 200 participants were registered on www.pro-parktraining.ro. 30 trainers developed 38 on-line lessons spread across 12 modules. Also 12 of the trainers were responsible for mentoring and supporting the trainees during the online courses.

The project included also some follow-up activities: the participants were invited to take part in different workshops and discuss about the main topics from the *PAS* programme, in order to make improvements in the training where need be. The first follow-up meetings took place after 3 months, with more to follow after 9 and 11 months. The next follow-up activities will include: developing a team of mentors for the programme graduates, alumni meetings, promoting and support for the *PA Specialist* in RO and EU countries, coordinating the sharing and exchanging information on the ProPark platform between the graduates.

EUROPARC Federation as a European network assured the visibility of the project in Europe, a very good communication between partners, a robust financial management and advice on different aspects of the project.

Through this project, DBU offered the possibility to have the first *Protected Area Specialists* in Romania and in Europe, a new generation of specialists who would contribute to improving the fate of protected areas in Romania, and the opportunity to develop the training skills of ProPark trainers and to provide an e-learning platform for networking and experience exchange for experts involved in PA management.

Outreach and presentation

EUROPARC Federation assured the visibility of the project in Europe, through its various communication channels (social media, website, newsletter) and events (e.g. annual conference), whilst ProPark promoted it on a national level but also toward EU institutions, such as: *Flora and Fauna International*, *Birdlife International* (ProPark presented the project results to these two organisations during a study visit to Cambridge at David Attenborough Building) and *Sunce Association for Nature, Environment and Sustainable Development from Croatia* (through the “Capacity Building Plans for Efficient Protected Area Management in Eastern Europe” project, funded by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN)).

The communication and dissemination activities of the project and its results include furthermore:

6 paid facebook posts;

3 articles in newsletters, reaching at least 500 contacts;

3 articles and news items in the EUROPARC newsletter, reaching at least 2000 contacts;

2 presentations of the project at EUROPARC conferences (2014 and 2015), addressing ~ 700 staff of protected areas and politicians;

2 press releases.

Project results, and in particular the e-learning platform, have also been presented in two of the biggest university centres in Romania: Braşov and Bucharest. Teachers, students and decision makers of relevant universities have attended the presentations and joined the team during field trips in protected areas nearby.

A partnership with the Faculty of Geology and Geophysics at the University in Bucharest has been signed for a Master programme. Online modules developed within the project will be made available to the respective students, who will then receive at their graduation also the *Protected Area Specialist* certificate. ProPark will continue to deliver the *PAS* programme (online and face to face combination) in order to establish the capacity building framework for PA management. Beneficiaries will be employees of protected areas but also freelancers working in the field of nature conservation. The programme and developed guidelines of such e-learning approach will be translated into English and adapted to different countries. Thus it can be made available to and benefit a wider European network. Further promotion of the e-learning platform at events and through different communication activities (see above), as well as providing the guidelines developed in the project and reports on the EUROPARC website, will take place.

Conclusion

The project was a huge success and exceeded the planned results. The first officially certified *Protected Area Specialists* in Romania were trained and can act now as efficient managers for protected areas. They build the foundation of a new generation of specialists who would contribute to improving the fate of protected areas in Romania. Lack of management and communication skills as well as lack of knowledge in stakeholder involvement have been addressed through the developed training. Follow-up activities within the project showed that the trainees make good use of this acquired knowledge. They also showed that the approach of combined online and face to face training lessons work and allow for a time and cost sensible training. It is expected that in the mid to long term, a more sustainable use and investment in natural resources will occur through the implementation of this project.

Furthermore the project supported ProPark itself to develop its capacity in providing online training. ProPark trainers boosted their knowledge in how to develop and conduct online trainings. It also has provided an e-learning platform being used after the project's lifetime, for networking and experience exchange for experts involved in PA management.

ProPark will continue to deliver the *PAS* programme (online and face to face combination) in order to establish the capacity building framework for PA management. Based on EUROPARC's network and communication, ProPark will register the new occupation at European level in the next years.

The combination of online and face to face learning received very good feedback from the participants. The online platform is a “one-stop-shop” for high quality information about protected areas, and it could be considered a virtual communication platform for all specialists in this domain. The online training platform helps reduce costs for face to face trainings, offers the possibility for students to participate on weekends and from home during the first part of the learning process and herewith reduce accommodation and food costs. A new section on the platform has been created, with the purpose to reunite graduates, discuss issues and share knowledge, as well as keep in contact with their trainers for help once in a while. A partnership with the Faculty of Geology and Geophysics at the University in Bucharest has been signed for a Master programme where online and face to face modules developed within the project will be used

and students will also receive at the graduation the Protected Area Specialist certificate. ProPark will receive additional income through this Master programme which will help support the sustainability of ProParks in the future.

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Index of terms and definitions

PMT- Project Management Team
PPK – ProPark Foundation for Protected Areas
PAS- Protected Area Specialist
PA- Protected Area

Summary

The project “Increasing education opportunities on sustainable development for Protected Area managers in Romania” aimed at developing, implementing and promoting innovative tools and approaches (on-line learning) to increase knowledge transfer to Protected Area professionals on nature conservation management. The first officially certified Protected Area Specialists (PAS) in Romania were trained to become efficient administrators of natural protected areas in the country. It also gave the opportunity to develop the training skills of ProPark trainers and to provide an e-learning platform for networking and experience exchange for experts involved in PA management.

Over 20 working groups were organised for improving the online materials from PAS curriculum, 49 scholarships for 49 PAS were offered and 200 participants were registered on www.proparktraining.ro. 30 trainers were involved in developing about 38 on-line lessons. The project included also follow-up activities: participants were invited to different workshops and discuss about the main topics from the PAS programme, after 10, 9 and 3 months. The next follow-up activities will include: developing a team of mentors for the programme graduates, Alumni meetings, promoting and support for the PAS in RO and EU countries, coordinating the sharing and exchange of information on the ProPark platform between the graduates.

As a result of the follow up sessions, a new section on the e-learning platform has been created, with the purpose to reunite the graduates, discuss issues and share knowledge, as well as continuous support by the trainers. Also, an interactive map with their contacts is available on the platform, in order to promote these Specialists and make them well known across the country. ProPark will manage the community of PAS, will promote the graduates in the future, and will initiate, develop and promote a competence based system for performance review and professional advancement for the Protected Area System in Romania.

The PAS Programme is already famous in Romania, due to the wide communication that was conducted and the graduates who already spread the idea of the programme and its quality.

A partnership with the University in Bucharest has been signed for a Master programme to incorporate the developed training. This is a unique collaboration between a University and an NGO of teaching protected area management.

The project is an important contribution to setting up a framework for capacity building efforts aimed at achieving efficient PA management. All the results will be used actively after the end of the project and will actually constitute the basis for new approaches in professionalising protected area management in Romania. It is a model project, as it will lay the basis for this approach of online and face to face training to be considered not only for the PAS programme, as planned in the beginning, but also for other training programmes of ProPark.

EUROPARC Federation assured the visibility of the project in Europe, a very good communication between partners, a robust financial management and advice on different aspects on the project.

This project was realised in cooperation between EUROPARC Federation and ProPark with financial support from DBU (Az 31412-43/0).

Introduction

Together with ProPark Foundation (RO), EUROPARC was successful in applying for a project with the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU) on „Increasing education opportunities on sustainable development for Protected Area managers in Romania“. The project aimed at developing, implementing and promoting innovative tools and approaches (on-line learning) to increase knowledge transfer to Protected Area professionals on nature conservation management. ProPark received the support and the great network of the EUROPARC Federation both for the management of the project and for the communication activities.

In Romania there are very limited opportunities for capacity building in the domain of protected area management, a domain that is fairly new in the country, with the first national park administration established in 1999. Efforts to develop the protected area system are still ongoing, with quite limited governmental support. Capacity building for protected area professionals and responsible agencies hasn't been a priority yet. Furthermore, there are generally quite limited opportunities for professional development, mainly due to budgetary and time constraints.

These difficult conditions and the complexity of protected area management require very solid competencies from the staff of protected areas, but also for those involved in protected area issues from the various institutions: protected area agencies, environmental control institutions (environmental guard), and decision makers at the local, regional and national level. The people for the administration teams have very different backgrounds, mainly due to the fact that Romanian legislation allows for different actors to take over responsibility for protected area management: public authorities, universities, foresters, NGO's or businesses can set up management teams or custodianships based on a contractual agreement with the central environmental authority. The staff of these management teams has to deal with very complex management issues, without having the possibility to learn about techniques and best practices for management and communication and even without the possibility to communicate with other managers to use best practices and learn from successes and failures across the system.

ProPark started and is developing a comprehensive long term capacity building programme. The Protected Area Specialist occupation is now registered in the Romanian Register of Occupations and occupational standards were developed. Training events, mentoring, study tours, technical support for management planning and management operations are being provided by ProPark.

ProPark is looking for innovative techniques that can shorten the face-to-face training sessions and thus contribute to reducing costs for the participants by reducing the costs for accommodation and food, as well as by reducing the costs for the organisations of the trainees by reducing the number of days when trainees have to be away from the office. Availability of new technology allow for a “marriage” of capacity building methods without losing the personal interaction which is vital in advancing knowledge.

Furthermore, once the on-line lessons will become a method that starts to be accepted, it would provide opportunities in the future for sharing information and knowledge on a wide range of topics.

The on-line training is totally new for Romania in the field of protected areas and nature conservation and is quite new also generally on the capacity building market. There are very few offers for on-line training

in the country and there is not yet an official acceptance from the national authorities responsible for building professional capacity in various fields in Romania (National Authority for Qualifications – NAQ).

On-line training does not have a big awareness and acceptance yet on the Romanian capacity building market. However, it is worth exploring the advantages of combining on-line lessons with the programmes that ProPark is delivering now for protected area staff and for key stakeholders who are influencing protected area management.

The project supported ProPark to integrate on-line lessons into the training programmes. This approach helped to make the training events much more efficient and give a higher value to the time spent in the face-to-face sessions and the opportunity to the trainers to be more creative and interactive in developing the content.

The overall goal of the project was:

Develop, implement and promote innovative mechanisms/tools and approaches to increase information and knowledge transfer to protected area professionals on nature conservation management and its importance and integration into sustainable development processes.

Objectives of the project:

1. Improve the level of understanding of protected area professionals on the role of protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites, in sustainable development by combining on-line lessons with face-to-face sessions organised according to the national occupational standards developed by ProPark for the “Protected Areas Specialist” occupation.

2. Increase the capacity of ProPark to offer innovative and alternative learning and competence evaluation tools for PA professionals using modern electronic information systems.

3. Efficient implementation of project activities and dissemination of the results by overseeing the management of the project and providing a European context and by widely disseminating the results.

4. Target groups

Protected area professionals, i.e. staff of the protected area management teams, staff from the institutions that have responsibilities related to protected areas, i.e. environmental protection agencies, environmental guard (with the role to control protected area management bodies, as well as any activities that have to be conducted according to the environmental legislation), staff of local and regional institutions responsible for strategic planning and development, i.e. local councils, county councils, agencies responsible for sectoral strategic planning and ministries, resource managers: foresters, water management staff and game managers.

The first task in the project was to adapt the curricula and programme for the Protected Area Specialist occupation to allow for a combination of on-line lessons and face-to-face sessions and to develop full training materials on 8 topics through 14 on-line lessons.

Within the project the first officially certified Protected Area Specialists in Romania were trained to become efficient administrators of natural protected areas in the country. In total 145 people have been following the 6 weeks online course on the www.proparktraining.ro learning platform, that was developed and opened in June 2015. This platform was created by ProPark with the help of 30 trainers involved in developing 38 on-line lessons divided in 12 modules. 12 of the trainers were then responsible for mentoring and supporting the trainees during the online courses. A guideline (available in Romanian;

the first part also in English) was also developed on how to conduct an on-line course. In addition to the virtual learning modules, during the 12 days of intense professional training the trainees acquired specific skills for the efficient administration of natural protected areas, for promoting them as model areas for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources as well as for increasing the level of acceptance of protected areas among communities and the public.

Four face-to-face sessions of 12 days each were organised by ProPark between 2015 and 2016 and 12 trainers were involved in leading the different workshops during these face-to-face sessions. In the end of this training course, successful trainees were awarded graduation certificates issued by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly and the Ministry of National Education, and thus became the first Protected Area Specialists. After each online and face to face programme ProPark trainers improved the training materials and made changes to the lessons, in order to respond to the needs of participants. Due to the project ProPark developed its capacity to provide online training, the trainer team learned how to develop and conduct on-line lessons and protected area professionals and staff of relevant institutions had benefit from the first online lessons.

Main part

Objective 1

“Improve the level of understanding of protected area professionals on the role of protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites, in sustainable development by combining on-line lessons with face-to-face sessions organised according to the national occupational standards developed by ProPark for the 'Protected Areas Specialist' occupation.”

Figure 1 - The Project Action and Monitoring Plan - Activities within Objective 1

Activity 1.1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Activity 1.2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Activity 1.3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Activity 1.4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Activity 1.5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
*green cells correspond to the initial monitoring plan, without delays																														
*yellow cells correspond to delayed or longer activities																														
*grey cells correspond to postponed activities, not happend according to the initial plan																														

1.1 Adapt the curricula and programme for the Protected Area Specialist occupation to allow for a combination of on-line lessons and face-to-face sessions

Starting with October 2014, groups of trainers (working groups) were created for each of the main topics included in the curricula for the Protected Area Specialist. The groups met regularly to adapt and develop materials for the expected programme. A total of 30 experts in various fields had a valuable contribution during the decision process regarding information that would be included in the on-line lessons.

Those working groups decided what can be put in the on-line lessons on each topic in a way to allow trainees to learn basic concepts that will later on be useful for the face-to-face training and will reduce the presentations and the theoretical part of these sessions. Trainers and the ProPark team analysed the existing curricula for Protected Area Specialist, as well as the content of the existing training materials. From there derived the content for the new training materials. This activity was considered finalised when all the topics for the on-line lessons and for the face-to-face sessions were in place. The output was available only before starting the actual training events. The curricula were appreciated by the participants, various target groups who want to attend the training programme, as well as teachers from the University of Brasov and Bucharest. The curricula is already being used beyond the project within the partnership agreed with the University from Bucharest (see also 3.2).

The results of this activity were also used in shaping the national capacity building plan that had been developed within another project implemented by ProPark: Capacity Building Plans for Efficient Protected Areas Management in Eastern Europe, funded by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN).

Within the working groups the trainers and the ProPark team decided the final content of the training materials.

Output: Revised curricula and programme for the Protected Area Specialist occupation

1.2 Develop full training materials on 8 topics

This activity was closely related to the activities 1.1 and 1.3.

The working groups of trainers mentioned in activity 1.1 have developed the training curricula and programme, as well as the training materials for the face-to-face training events. The working groups have been in general, 2 days events, in order to make possible the fulfilment of the proposed activities.

The trainers collaborated in working groups but also worked individually on topics exchanging ideas and opinions online (emails and skype meetings). Several drafts of the materials were developed by each working group. Each draft was carefully revised after each working group meeting, in order to include exercises, case studies and examples. Full training materials were developed for 8 topics by ProPark with the support of other several projects implemented by ProPark and EUROPARC. Even though the initial project aimed to reduce the time needed for face-to-face sessions to only 3 to 5 days, this was not possible because of the complexity of the curricula.

The 8 topics developed are:

- ✓ Protected Areas – basics
- ✓ Sustainable use of natural resources
- ✓ Non-intervention management and wilderness
- ✓ Sustainable development
- ✓ Communicating the role of protected areas
- ✓ Environmental impact assessments
- ✓ Funding opportunities
- ✓ Law enforcement

Due to the lack of experience in creating online trainings, the activities 1.1., 1.2. and 1.3. were extended. To develop the online materials required more time than estimated. The face to face materials required special attention and a different structure. This process took a longer period than estimated and didn't involve other delays.

Output: Training curricula, programme and materials for each of the 8 topics indicated as well as for face-to-face training events of 12 days

1.3 Develop materials for 14 on-line lessons

The main objective of this activity was to plan on-line lessons that would help all the trainees get the basics and have a common level of knowledge for the face to face sessions.

Based on the conclusions from activity 1.1., using the information from the ToT sessions organised under activity 2.1., and with support from IT experts, the trainers developed the final materials for all 14 on-line lessons.

Each of the on-line lessons created has several subtopics, to make it easier to understand. At the moment, they are available only in Romanian, since they reflect the local reality in terms of legislation, situation of stakeholders and governance, as well as examples and case studies. Yet, they can be adapted to other national contexts and translated if needed.

The topics for the on-line lessons created are:

- ✓ Protected Areas – basics, divided in two sections with the following content:
 - a) Nature, threats and conservation
 - b) About protected areas, values, PA management
- ✓ Sustainable use of natural resources, with following four sections:
 - c) Water
 - d) Forests
 - e) Agriculture
 - f) Game
- ✓ Non-intervention management and wilderness
 - g) Non-intervention management and wilderness in protected areas and Natura 2000 sites
- ✓ Sustainable development, divided in two sections as follows:
 - h) Strategic planning and sustainable development
 - i) Actors and steps of sustainable development
- ✓ Communicating the role of protected areas, with two sections:
 - j) Communication – basics
 - k) Local communities
- ✓ Environmental impact assessments
 - l) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Impact Assessment (SIA)
- ✓ Funding opportunities
 - m) Funding opportunities for stakeholders, especially landowners and local communities
- ✓ Law enforcement
 - n) Law enforcement - tool for preventing and stopping unsustainable development in protected areas

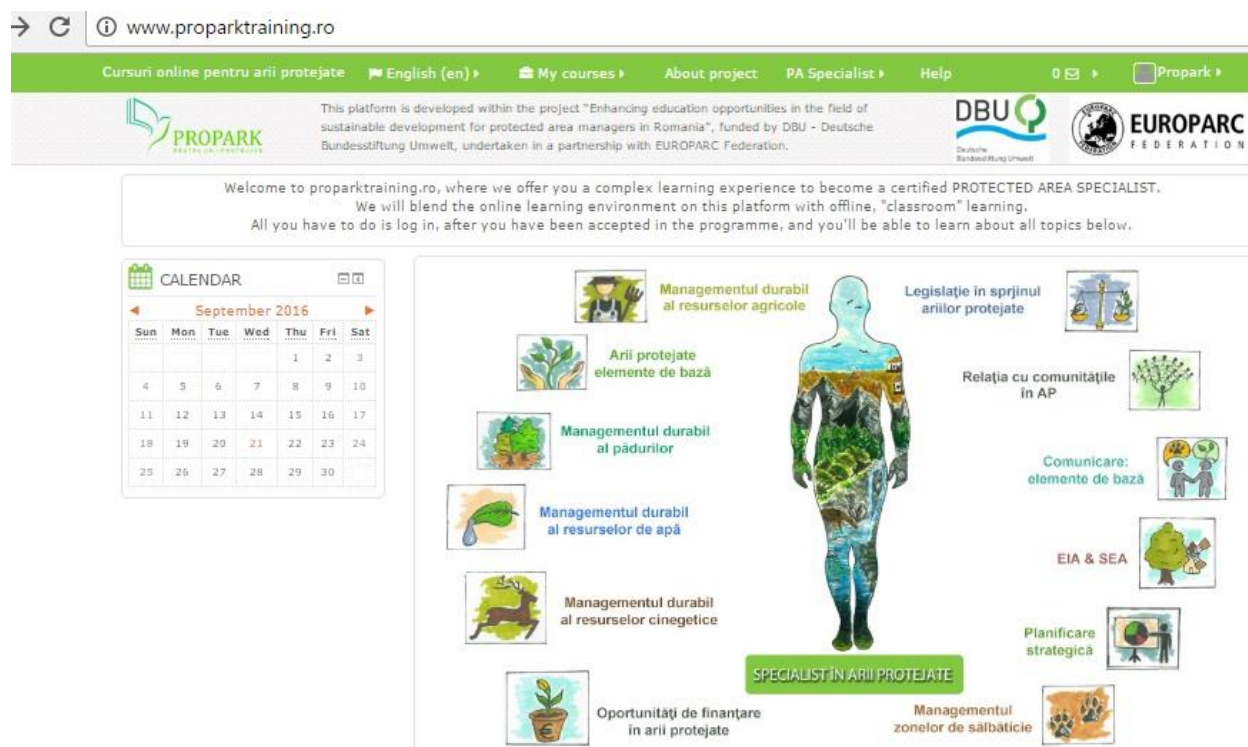
Each online lesson was developed to meet the needs of different types of participants, using interactive methods, new set of tools, training software (Flash software), and a good communication through the online platform with all the participants. The on-line lessons include texts, images, links to useful

information, etc. in order to make it easier for the trainees to follow, understand and graduate the programme.

Guidelines developed within Activity 2.2 have been used as a common road map for all groups of trainers and group coordinators.

Each lesson is available at www.proparktraining.ro, through a Moodle interface, after log-in with username and password. Below, the first page of the platform – print screen:

Figure 2 - Print screen of the first page at www.proparktraining.ro



A demo online lesson was developed for the trainees. The online programme started on 20th June with this demo lesson, in order to accustom the participants with the Moodle platform and their future activities.

In total, **18 online lessons** were developed using the Flash software and **20 lessons** using the Moodle platform resources. As an on-going activity, best structure, images, study cases, and innovative techniques were researched for the online lessons.

The trainers designed the online activities very rigorously. They worked hard on developing these lessons, selecting the resources and activities. They learned that facilitating an online course requires a lot of enthusiasm, tact, a good professional background and experience in e-learning (which some trainers already had, while the others had the opportunity to develop it through this project). The online lessons

were aimed at the future Protected Area Specialists. The goal of the online lessons was to bring online all basic information for the main study fields within protected area management, and spend the face to face time for practical aspects, analysing case studies, site visits and searching practical solutions to the questions/situations raised by participants.

Each working group designed the detailed content of the online lesson and prepared a course plan (scenario), with specific objectives and the skills to be acquired by participants by the end of the lesson. They used a template developed by the project team and the designer for the online lessons. Exercises were incorporated into the lessons, as well as case studies and examples. Also short movies with case studies, in order to improve the level of understanding of protected area professionals on the role of protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites, were included. Questions and on-line tests were developed to see if the trainees have understood the information.

Output: At least 14 on-line lessons on the topics presented under Activity 1.1

1.4 Organise and provide training sessions

The training sessions had a double component, the online lessons and the face to face training, and were delivered as follows:

Table 1 - Timetable of training sessions delivered during the project implementation

Type of training	Period	Location	No. of participants
Online	22 nd June – 31 st July 2015	-	85 selected from 200 applicants
Face to face	7 th -11 th September, 21 st -25 th September 2015	Rugănești, Harghita county	16
Face to face	28 th September – 2 nd October, 12 th - 16 th October 2015	Rugănești, Harghita county	14
Online	October 2015	-	13
Face to face	9 th -13 th November, 16 th -21 st November 2015	Satu Mare, Satu Mare county	13
Online	1 st February – 11 th March 2016	-	47 selected from 100 applicants
Face to face	4 th – 9 th April, 18 th – 23 rd April 2016	Saschiz, Mureș county	19

The training programme was conducted in three stages:

- Registration and selection of participants based on the announced criteria;
- Going through the 33 hour long online lessons on the online platform www.proparktraining.ro and completing the programme;
- Going through the face-to-face sessions, which have a 60 hour duration, passing the examination and obtaining the graduation certificate issued by the Ministry of Labour,

Family, Social Protection and the Elderly and the Ministry of National Education, for the Protected Area Specialist profession, COR code 213306.

The selection criteria were:

- Intention letter motivating the participation in the training programme
- CV indicating the involvement/experience in managing a protected area, studies and publications on protected areas.

Even though the initial project aimed to reduce the face-to-face time needed to sessions of only 3 to 5 days, this was not possible because of the complexity of the curricula. The actual face to face trainings lasted for 12 days. Every trainee has successfully passed the final exam and received an official Certificate. The participants who entered the training programme had different backgrounds and different practical approaches: protected area staff, public authority's representatives, and teachers from different universities, foresters, or NGO's members. The face to face programme was very intense; the trainees acquired specific skills for the efficient administration of natural protected areas, learned to deal with very complex management issues, applied techniques and best practices for management and communication, used best practices and learned from successes and failures across the system.

Picture 1 – Photos from the face to face Programme



The online training assured the introductory aspects in the protected areas management, the face to face training put emphasis on operational management and management plan implementation.

The Protected Area Specialist is a highly qualified individual, in order to be recognized in the future on national and European level. ProPark will extend the programme to over 400 hours in the next years, in the same combination-online and face to face training. The Protected Area Specialist is able to raise awareness, change the minds and attitudes of decision makers and demonstrate the benefits of protected areas beyond their boundaries, so he must have very high knowledge, skills and attitudes, proved by a strong and complete certification.

ProPark believe that PA staff need the understanding, recognition and support of people working in the many other economic and social sectors. It is anticipated that the rich learning environment developed in

this project and the promotion of a shared goal will reach beyond purely the professional performance of the participants and change their attitudes and relationships and build links to people who share similar values. In this way, this programme will build networks of professionals who can advance the cause of nature conservation.

The online activity was managed by the external project assistant. A technical assistant was also hired for managing the online activity, to solve technical issues and to support trainers using the platform resources.

The two assistants were very important for the management of the online activity. They monitored the participants' activity carefully, their needs and they were an indispensable support for the trainers.

The work of the technical assistant was done in close cooperation with the project manager and the project assistant. After the project end, the work of this on-line training assistant will be continued supported by incomes generated through training events and other projects. ProPark has a continuous preoccupation to raise funds for the training events; therefore there are perspectives to provide work for the assistant in the long term.

NOTE: The first training session was delayed in order to have the time to test the online platform and avoid any technical problem. The delay did not have a negative impact on the correlated activities.

Output: Four face to face training sessions for at least 45 protected area professionals and representatives of relevant institutions

1.5 Improve on-line training materials

This activity was closely related to the activity 1.4.

Based on the feedback received from trainees about the on-line sessions and on the analysis of the face-to-face training sessions, i.e. on how the trainees were using the knowledge from the on-line lessons, the trainers have improved the on-line materials, by adding or changing parts of the content. Meetings with the modules coordinators, project team and project assistants were held as follows:

Table 2 - Timetable of meetings designed to improve training materials

	Location	Overall changes decided
13th – 14th January 2016	Poiana Braşov, Braşov county	More interaction needed with each trainer through short sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- “About the coordinator”- Direct Q/A- Feedback for homework More connectivity between the modules Only one, max 2 topics as homework Need for training on evaluation and evaluation instruments
28th -30th March 2016	Bucharest, Bucharest county	Evaluation system and development of evaluation instruments (training)
29th -30th July 2016	Băile Tuşnad, Harghita county	More connectivity between the modules Creating practice communities for the key subjects related to protected area management. (follow-up and evaluation of the online and face to face programme)

During the meetings, the trainers worked in working groups or in plenary sessions, they analysed each feedback received from the participants, made changes and improvements to the online lessons and to the face to face structure. They also improved their own skills regarding the evaluation system and raised their involvement in the platform, through interactive sessions with the participants during the whole period of the online programme.

Feedback from trainees was received both within the learning platform, during the online training, and in a written form, after the face to face trainings. Trainees suggested to shorten some of the modules, include more explanations in others, and take off some of the individual tasks. Yet, the overall feedback was positive and the trainees appreciated the complexity of the programme, the variety of topics under discussion and the access to the big picture that explains the Protected Area Specialist competencies. All the feedback and experience received in 2015 and 2016 were put together; all the materials were improved, in order to create a dynamic and “fresh” way of learning, respecting accurately the ProPark mission. It was a real challenge for all trainers who worked on the platform to find solutions, exchange experience – especially after the training events – to improve the content and offer a better experience of learning through the online platform. The main facts that encouraged participants to enrol in the programme were: the flexible schedule, an interactive learning process and, most important, a pertinent content, with high relevance for protected area domain (topics & practice). See Annex 1 for testimonials of the participants.

NOTE: For the future it would be useful to include within the e-learning platform modules on “Animation for protected areas”, “Nature Interpretation”, “Ecotourism and visitor management”. These topics are included only in the face to face programme and the graduates said that would be useful to include these topics within the online programme.

Output: Improved materials for the 14 on-line lessons

Objective 2

“Increase the capacity of ProPark to offer innovative and alternative learning and competence evaluation tools for PA professionals using modern electronic information systems.”

Figure 3 - The Project Action and Monitoring Plan - Activities within Objective 2

Activity 2.1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Activity 2.2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Activity 2.3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
* green cells correspond to the initial monitoring plan, without delays																														
*yellow cells correspond to delayed or longer activities																														

2.1 Organise Train of Trainer session for on-line lessons

Before starting their work on the on-line materials, the trainers participated in TOT sessions about the e-learning environment and about the resources/activities available on the Moodle platform implemented on www.proparktraining.ro. The trainings took place in Braşov, in May (12th -14th) and June (23rd – 25th) 2014 and have been delivered by *Corporate Events*, a local company with wide experience in delivering Training of Trainers sessions.

ProPark trainers learned about the blended learning concept and how it can be used for the Protected Area Specialist programme, using the advantages of both types of learning: quality, flexibility and

memorability. They also learned about opportunities that online learning provides: more flexible access to learning; it can be useful to a higher number of students in a shorter time, regardless of their geographical locations; can work with more students at the same time; a higher quality of information; can present more varied contents; may be perceived as more democratic; education can be adapted to more profiles and more needs (it comes when you want it/as much as you need/only for you); better visualisation (graphs, animations); focus on the participant is possible (but is not personalised); at their own pace (not always, it depends on the programme); allows access to the course to participants of different levels; provides consistency.

Careful consideration was given to develop the training skills of ProPark trainers and to provide a platform for networking and experience exchange for experts involved in the ProPark project. The online platform serves now as a communication and networking platform for ProPark trainers too, a place to share information and experiences regarding teaching issues.

NOTE: The activity has been implemented according to the initial monitoring plan, with no unexpected changes or problems.

Output: 24 trainers trained in developing and conducting on-line lessons

2.2 Develop the design for the on-line materials and the evaluation system for the on-line lessons

At the beginning of the project, an IT assistant had been hired and a coordinator from the CBD on-line training programme consulted. With their input and help, the project team decided to buy the domain www.proparktraining.ro and implement there the free e-learning platform for online training -Moodle. The Moodle platform offers implicit options for the structure of training modules as well as the evaluation system that was discussed during the TOT – activity 2.1. The guidelines developed for the trainers are available in Annex 2 (coversheet).

The guidelines for preparing and structuring online lessons have the following structure: Part 1 – “Preparing and structuring the content of an online lesson”, Part 2 – “User's Guideline for using the e-learning platform Moodle” and were developed by the project team and the technical assistant. The evaluation of learning success consisted in several tests for each module and a final exam. All of them were graded and feedback to participants was offered by each module coordinator. Yet, only grades of the final exam were used to select people for the face to face sessions. The evaluation system offered by the Moodle platform and the coordinators survey allowed a good evidence of how participants were progressing with their lessons and if they responded at a good level to the questions and exercises included in the lessons. This system worked very well and provided the information that allowed participation of the trainees in the face-to-face training event.

NOTE: The activity was implemented according to the initial monitoring plan, with no unexpected changes or problems.

Output: Template for on-line lessons and guidelines for trainers on how to use it
Plan for on-line evaluation system

2.3 Develop and maintain the web platform for the on-line lessons

The IT Company hired in 2014 hosted the web platform for the on-line lessons, developed it and secured its maintenance. This activity has been carried out throughout the entire project implementation.

ProPark will maintain the web platform for the online lessons, will develop other teaching programmes using this platform and the cost will be supported through the incomes generated by the training events and through other projects.

NOTE: The activity has been implemented according to the initial monitoring plan, with no unexpected changes or problems.

Output: Web platform for the ProPark on-line lessons

Objective 3

“Efficient implementation of project activities and dissemination of the results by overseeing the management of the project and providing a European context and by widely disseminating the results.”

Figure 4 - The Project Action and Monitoring Plan - Activities within Objective 3

Activity 3.1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
Activity 3.1.1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
Activity 3.2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
	*green cells correspond to the initial monitoring plan, without delays																																	
	*yellow cells correspond to delayed or longer activities																																	
	*grey cells correspond to postponed activities, not happend according to the initial plan																																	

3.1 Project Management

The Project Management Team worked well and all members carry out their tasks according to the project proposal.

EUROPARC Federation assured the visibility of the project in Europe, a very good communication between partners, a robust financial management and advice on different aspects on the project.

Two monitoring visits were made by EUROPARC in Romania in order to assure the communication between the partners and a good implementation of the project.

The project end has been extended in order to include follow-up sessions. The importance of this activity lays on the need of the fresh community of Protected Area Specialists to be recognised and assisted, encouraged and motivated to pursue the path of this new occupation at a national and European level.

Most of the alumni have been able to attend one of the two meetings organised as follows: the first one in Rimetea, Alba county, between 8th and 10th July 2016, and the second one in Băile Tușnad, Harghita county, between 29th and 31st of July 2016. As a result, a new section on the platform has been created, with the purpose to reunite them, discuss issues and share knowledge, as well as keep in contact with their trainers for ongoing support. Also, an interactive map with their contacts is available at this link: <http://www.proparktraining.ro/static/contacte-sap-national.html>, for collaborations and partnership with interested institutions, organisations or protected area administrators.

Picture 2 – Photos from the follow-up sessions



3.1.1 Financial and project reporting

The financial report is not a part of this technical report and will be delivered separately.

NOTE: The activity has been delayed, to include follow-up sessions.

Output: Biannual project reports
Monitoring and contingency plans

3.2 Project communication and networking

The communication of the project is being done according to the plan developed by the communication officer from the project management team. The project results and the Protected Area Specialist Programme are famous in Romania, due to the wide communication that we conducted and to the graduates who already spread the idea of the programme and its quality.

Project results, and in particular the e-learning platform, have also been presented in two of the biggest university centres in Romania: Brașov and Bucharest. Teachers, students and decision makers within profile universities have attended the presentations and joined the team during field trips in protected areas nearby.

In 2014 and 2015 ProPark participated at EUROPARC conferences and presented the project in workshops and during the Marketplace (in 2015). The workshop was conducted by Erika Stanciu on Professional development for Protected Area management. During the Marketplace ProPark had the opportunity to share directly different experiences with over 70 participants and give visibility to the online platform.


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The effects of the project are sustainable and will continue beyond the funding period. ProPark developed a strong and structured training programme which will be delivered in the next period in partnership with at least one University from Romania and in different other combination at national and European level. The content of the online lessons is updated continuously. Because of the investment in developing the training skills of ProPark trainers, ProPark will be able to provide this combination of face to face and online learning in the next years for all training events from the ProPark portfolio.

ProPark anticipate that the dedicated graduates will contribute to the development of both institutional and individual capacities by working directly with PA management teams and through their involvement in lobbying and advocacy activities on behalf of PAs in Romania.

These capacity building efforts will only be efficient if the overall protected area management system improves and the institutions that are responsible and / or involved in the management process are efficient. The Protected Area Specialist certified within this project will have the role of facilitators and they will “make protected areas work”, they will look for solutions and alternatives for development that are benefitting both nature and society. Beneficiaries will be employees of protected areas but also freelancers working in the field of nature conservation.

EUROPARC Federation assured the visibility of the project in Europe, through its various communication channels (social media, website, newsletter) and events (e.g. annual conference), ProPark promoted it on a national level but also toward EU institutions, such as: Flora and Fauna International, Birdlife International (the ProPark team presented the project results during a study visit in Cambridge, on David Attenborough Building, on these two organizations.) and Sunce-Association for Nature, Environment and Sustainable Development, from Croatia (through the “Capacity Building Plans for Efficient Protected Area Management in Eastern Europe” project, funded by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN)).

ProPark will distribute the results of the project on a national level through the training courses organised on different topics related to protected area management, by articles in the ProPark newsletter, at the 3rd Protected Area Gala in 2017. The results will be presented also on the study visit organised at the end of November 2016 in 3 countries: Hungary, Austria and Switzerland through the project “Southwestern Carpathian Wilderness and Sustainable Development Initiatives”, funded by Swiss Government.

Output:

6 paid facebook posts;
3 articles in newsletters, reaching at least 500 contacts;
3 articles and news items in the EUROPARC newsletter, reaching at least 2000 contacts;
2 presentations of the project at EUROPARC conferences (2014 and 2015);
2 press release.

Conclusion

As a general conclusion, the project implementation followed the plan established in the beginning and exceeded the planned results. The project was a great opportunity for ProPark to be more visible not only in Romania, but also in Europe as a capacity building provider for PA management.

The first officially certified Protected Area Specialists in Romania were trained to become efficient administrators of natural protected areas in the country.

In total 145 people followed the 6 weeks online course on www.proparktraining.ro, which was developed and opened in June 2015. This platform was created with help of 30 trainers involved in developing 38 on-line lessons divided in 12 modules. 12 of the trainers were then responsible for mentoring and supporting the trainees during the online courses (trained by ProPark). A guideline (available in Romanian; in English only the first part) was also developed on how to conduct an on-line course.

In addition to the virtual learning module, during the 12 days of intense professional training the trainees acquired specific skills for the efficient administration of natural protected areas, for promoting them as model areas for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources as well as for increasing the level of acceptance of protected areas among communities and the public.

4 face-to-face sessions of 2x6 days each were organised by ProPark:

- the first one between September and October 2015 (16 participants)
- the second one in October and November 2015 (14 participants)
- the third one In November 2015 (13 participants)
- the fourth one in April 2016 (19 participants)

12 trainers were involved in leading the different workshops during these face-to-face sessions.

In the end of this course, successful trainees were awarded graduation certificates issued by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly and the Ministry of National Education, and thus became the first Protected Area Specialists.

Two meetings to promote the results of the project were organised in Brasov and Bucharest. After these meetings, a partnership with the Faculty of Geology and Geophysics at the University in Bucharest was signed for a Master programme where online modules developed within the project will be used and students will also receive at their graduation the Protected Area Specialist certificate.

ProPark will continue to deliver the PAS programme (online and face to face combination) in order to establish the capacity building framework for PA management. The programme will be translated to English and adapted for different countries and will be delivered also in Europe. Based on the EUROPARC network and communication, ProPark will register the new occupation at European level in the next years. Also, ProPark will develop *communities of practice* for the youngest graduates of the programme, for protected area staff with vast experience in the field and NGO's staff members. These *communities* will

be the place to share information, learn from each other, provide support to PAs, to the Ministry etc. and also contribute to the distribution of knowledge and information in their environments.

Annexes

Annexe 1: Testimonials of the participants

“At first it seemed it would be just another intensive course which would leave us only with some new information. But then I realised that it turned into a course with practical examples aiming to present the reality of Protected Area activities as accurately as possible. Although fatigue grew during the course, my state of mind was maximum, which shows that indeed I felt good at this course.” (Alimnesc Alin-Flavius)

“As a beginner in the field of Protected Areas I felt "bombed" not just with information and acronyms but also with the professional and personal experience of the other participants and trainers. All this in a supportive environment which stimulates collaboration. I go home with an overall picture of what Protected Area Specialist (SAP) means, as well as with specific details and techniques in certain areas of interest of the SAP curricula. I wish you to have continued success and inspiration!” (Muşa Cristian)

„The SAP professional training programme was one of the most useful, interesting and complex learning experiences I attended so far. From my point of view the main factor which significantly contributed to the success of this programme was the wonderful team of trainers - real professionals, but mainly humans. I wholeheartedly recommend this course! Congratulations!” (Enescu Mihai)

“I came here thinking to study more thoroughly and to clarify theoretical knowledge. And this is what happened. To conclude: I think one has to be very good professionally to get to this training and one certainly improves oneself upon completing it! Well done, trainers! Well done, support team! Well done, Propark!” (Puiu Iulia-Ana)

It was a unique experience where I met professionals in the field, in a relaxed environment, thanks to the organisers and trainers. I think this course, as well as the complexity of practical exercises which have taken us out of the comfort zone, have brought added value to our knowledge and practice in this field. I thank ProPark for their professionalism!” (Romanescu Andrada – Alina)

„The nicest experience for me, from a human point of view! I learned a lot from every course colleague and I realised that even my experience can contribute to protected area management. The course itself is the most multi-disciplinary, interactive and varied course, in terms of teaching methods, which I have ever attended so far!!!” (Martini Monia)

“The course offered a lot of practical information useful for the management of a Protected Area. The trainees were directly involved in the activities performed.” (Anonymous)

Annexe 2: The guidelines developed for the trainers (coversheet)

Cursuri online pentru arii protejate

Ghid pentru elaborarea și structurarea lecțiilor online (part 1)



EUROPARC
F E D E R A T I O N



Introducere și Sumar

Acest ghid a fost realizat în cadrul proiectului **“Creșterea oportunităților de educație în domeniul dezvoltării durabile pentru managerii de arii protejate din România”**, finanțat de DBU - Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt, derulat în parteneriat cu Federația EUROPARC.

Ghidul pentru elaborarea și structurarea lecțiilor online este structurat după cum urmează:

Partea I – “Elaborarea și structurarea conținutului unei lecții online”, autori Georgiana Andrei, Ruxandra Nițu, cu contribuția Cosminei Dinu

Partea a II-a – “ Ghid de utilizare a platformei de e-learning Moodle”, autor Călin Chiorean 3



Cursuri online pentru arii protejate

Ghid de utilizare a platformei de e-learning

Moodle (part 2)

Această platformă este adaptată și personalizată pentru specificul lecțiilor pentru domeniul managementul ariilor protejate, în cadrul proiectului “Creșterea oportunităților de educație în domeniul dezvoltării durabile pentru managerii de arii protejate din România”, finanțat de DBU - Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt, derulat în parteneriat cu Federația EUROPARC.

ProparkTraining.ro 2015