



EUROPARC
Atlantic Isles

Conservation Without Frontiers

The relationship between protected areas and health - thoughts from a UK perspective

September 2009

Introduction

- Currently in the UK there is considerable debate over the purposes, rationale and functions of protected areas in general, and designated landscapes in particular.
- EUROPARC Atlantic Isles is helping to shape this debate through the development of an ambitious new Vision, to be published later this year.
- We are trying to move away from a rationale that centres on *protection*, towards one that instead focuses on *celebration*, and that fully values the **services** that such places provide.
- One such service is the contribution these landscapes make to health and wellbeing, both of individuals and of communities.



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The door is already open; taking England as an example:

1 In July 2009 Natural England launched its campaign for a '**Natural Health Service**', the main points of which are:

- it is aimed at tackling the 21st century illnesses of obesity, depression and diabetes
- it argues that everyone should live within 5 minutes walk of of an area of green space that is of at least 2 hectares, and aims to increase this number
- it produced a manifesto with the Department of Health to work alongside primary health care providers - General Practitioners and community nurses - to enable every GP or community nurse to point people towards health walk initiatives

www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/health/ournaturalhealthservice

2 **Brand new policy for protected landscapes in England** (currently out for consultation) states that:

Protected landscapes are capable of delivering more for the nation. As they evolve, they should ... maximise their contribution and relevance to the needs of 21st century society. A range of environmental and societal benefits flow from our landscape designation system, including links to public health...

Some facts

- 8.5% of UK income goes on healthcare; about £110 billion annually
- People who live the farthest from green space are 27% more likely to be obese
- The Chief Medical Officer has reported that walking between 6 and 12 miles a week can reduce the risk of premature death by 20 to 30 per cent.
- He is also on record as stating that 'physical activity is effective in the treatment of clinical depression and can be as successful as psychotherapy or medication'
- For every £1 spend on establishing healthy walking schemes the NHS could save £7.18p in the cost of treating conditions such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes. If every household in England were provided with good access to quality green space it could save an estimated £2.1 billion in health care costs.



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EUROPARC Atlantic Isles held a seminar on the topic in March 2009

- We heard from the UK, Denmark and Germany, and aimed at taking forwards the work done at Maribo, Denmark in May 2008. Main conclusions at this point are:
- Partnerships must be cross-sectoral, with both municipalities and, crucially, delivery through and with the health sector. The point to make, and make repeatedly, is that this is part of sustainable development; everyone is responsible for making it happen
- The evidence base still lacks data on the causal relationship between space and health outcomes
- The current DG Research Health Programme provides opportunities for international non-profit partnerships to build capacity and create and share the evidence base
- There are relevant projects under both COST and INTERREG that are either ongoing or have recently come to an end, providing the basis for further work

What next?

This meeting can take the agenda forwards. A key seems to be to align international research agendas to understand the health benefits that protected areas provide in more detail. A few ideas to put on the table:

- Encourage EUROPARC at the Federation level to support an initiative in this topic (new working group?)
- Learn from those outside Europe - eg Parks Victoria (further learning partnerships?)
- Develop a European model that: builds partnerships with health services; supports planners and policy makers; creates and disseminates research; and encourages everyone to make the most of local public green space.
- Develop a project proposal for funding a programme of work (DG Research Health Programme?)