



# Nature Regional Landscape Parks

Where Policy meets Practice

Position Paper



# Introduction

Europe’s 900 Nature Regional Landscape Parks (RNL) make up almost 8% of the total surface area of the EU+ Switzerland and Norway.

They are not only essential for the conservation of biodiversity and landscapes, they are also significant laboratories to promote a more socially inclusive, environmentally healthier and economically viable model for society.

NRL Parks help to prevent rural abandonment, promote community involvement in nature protection and support green jobs. They create sustainable tourism destinations and encourage sustainable agricultural practices, including developing partnerships between farmers and protected areas managers. NRL Parks embrace nature as an essential asset for human health and well-being: they protect ecosystems and healthy landscapes, manage resilient ecosystems and provide habitats for animals and plants. Also, they provide fertility, water and soil protection with natural solutions to mitigate and adapt for climate change impacts. Inclusive participatory governance models ensure, our parks can provide local people, especially young people, with a platform and a say in their **future management**.

This paper seeks to show that it pays to strengthen Nature Regional Landscape (NRL) Parks because they are in a position to help ensure on-the-ground implementation of integrated, forward-looking approaches for a sustainable rural Europe.

**This paper collates NRL Parks’ experience from across Europe and indicates the policy framework that they implement. It shows too, the potential locked in these parks to deliver more.**



Naturpark Our, Luxembourg © Sascha Wernicke

**NRLs Parks are Europe’s « sleeping giants ». It is time to wake up!**

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Naturpark Schlei, Germany © VDN/Hona Kompanik

**The term, Regional Nature Landscape Parks contains a wide variety of large scale Protected Areas across Europe. These include, Nature Park, Natural Park, Regional Park, Landscape Park, Regional Nature Park, Protected Landscape Area or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.**

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# Nature Regional Landscape Parks - MAKING THE CASE

**Biodiversity loss, climate change and spreading urbanization in natural and agricultural land threaten the foundations and quality of life, for all European citizens.**

People are increasingly concerned and are looking for leadership and action to reverse biodiversity loss and mitigate climate change. At the same time, reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for unspoiled nature and landscapes for people has been put into even sharper focus. As European society responds to the pandemic and ecological crisis, the need to invest in an integrated network of protected areas of which NRL Parks are a significant component could not be more important.

Appreciating our natural assets means supporting the structures that underpin parks, expanding and training the staff who interact with communities and visitors, encouraging scientists who monitor effects and impacts and farmers and fishermen who manage sustainably our cultural and

living landscapes. NRL Parks provide the opportunities to meet these needs and contribute to the global challenges we face, at a local level.

NRL parks, working together with a network of partners, are important for biodiversity and landscape protection, ecosystem services, mitigation and adaptation of climate change, sustainable agriculture linked with biodiversity, efficient and sustainable use of energy, health care, cultural heritage, education for sustainable development, recreation and sustainable tourism, research and innovation and overall sustainable socio-economic regional development.

Today, there are almost 900 Nature Regional Landscape Parks in 22 European countries. Although they differ across countries, they share common principles in terms of purpose, mission and governance. Overall, they have been designated, with the aim to integrate the protection of biodiversity with sustainable land use and socio-economic development in their territories. The multi-

functionality of NRL parks touches on all aspects of land management and life in Europe's rural areas. By means of their governance models, working in partnership with local authorities, farmers, business and all stakeholders in their communities. NRL Parks provide vital means to address, integrate and implement all 3 pillars of sustainable development; the environment, society and economy.

The work and achievements of NRL Parks **support the implementation of a multitude of European Policies and Directives as well as international commitments and sustainable development goals.** They are local facilitators and convey European objectives to the people in their regions.

By this means, NRL Parks are strong partners to address the **Green Deal** challenges at a local level, support implementation of the **EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030**, work towards the **2030 Climate Target Plan**, **support the Farm to Fork Strategy, CAP and Forestry Strategy**, as well as policies associated with health, sustainable tourism, culture and environmental education. **However, these parks remain an undervalued resource** to create Living Landscapes, which are good for nature and good for people.

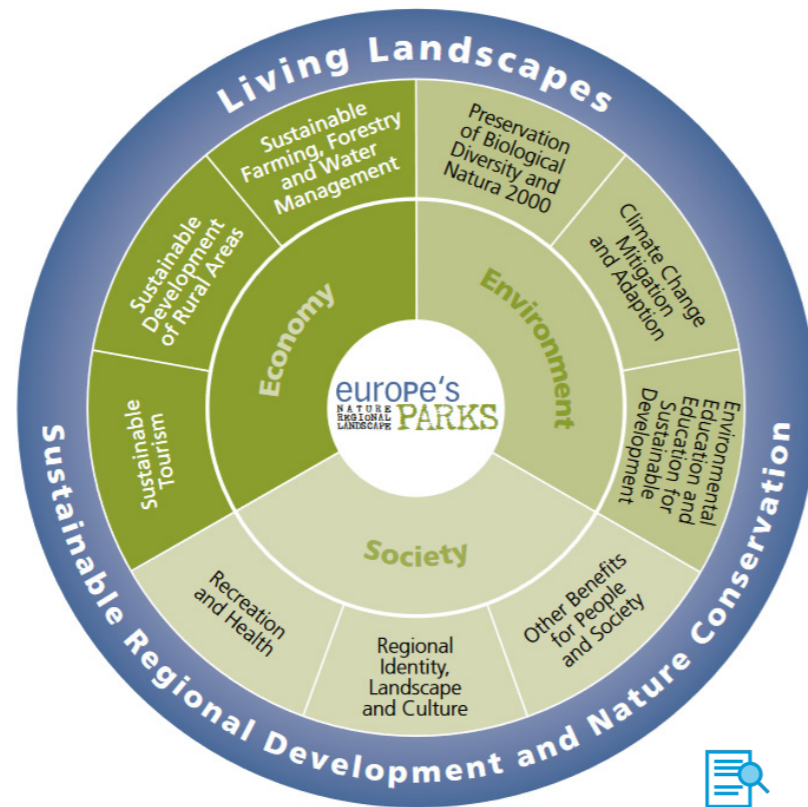
Local and regional authorities, need to **support the work of the Nature Regional and Landscape Parks** financially, legally and politically so that their full potential to **meet the needs of People and of Nature**, especially in such challenging times, can be realised.



# Key concepts about Nature Regional Landscape Parks

Nature Regional Landscape Parks are protected areas in rural, inhabited territories with a specific identity, where landscape, culture and nature heritage are inextricably linked. They are committed to people and nature, promoting a cooperative approach and integrating sustainable development with nature conservation and climate protection. They combine municipal, regional and state levels and are managed by permanent, salaried staff, who are communication and development units dedicated to the designated area.

The special benefits and strengths of NRL Parks lies in their structures and their unique functioning. The Diagram here shows facets of NRL Parks that create “Living Landscapes” which aim to deliver sustainable regional development married with nature conservation.



Services of European Nature Regional Landscape Parks presented in detail in the book “Living Landscapes”

## Governance

When operating at full potential, NRL parks exemplify a dynamic-innovation approach, known as an ‘integration approach’, in which cooperation among various stakeholders is a key element. These types of parks signify a change in perception of what a protected area is, shifting it from being seen as an isolated space to it being part of a living socio-ecological landscape. Their focus is the interests of both nature and humans. NRL Parks are integrative protected areas, which pursue the goals of sustainable regional development in the three sustainability dimensions - Economy, Social, and Environment - with participatory

governance models as a key facet of structure and delivery.

NRL Parks include people participating in their activities at different levels

- Participation in creation and delivery of projects.
- Proposals and grants to empower citizen or local actors in carrying out projects,
- Taking part actively in the realisation of park actions,
- Participating in the Park governance and decision making

Working closely with the municipal, regional

and state levels, NRL Parks can translate International, European and state policy objectives into practice oriented, regionally and municipality adapted actions.

## Inclusive

By working closely with communities, land users, businesses, numerous stakeholders and the population in their region, NRL Parks provide a common platform for regional development. They seek to include all parts of society and often lead special projects to include those with particular needs – for example, youth, the elderly or less able - to both access nature and feel included in decision-making processes.

NRL Parks are created for the common good and work towards

- The preservation and further development of social values,
- Nature, landscape and biodiversity,
- Culture, tradition and regional knowledge,
- Identification and engagement of people with their region,
- Regional value creation by valorisation of natural and cultural heritage, as well as sustainable development of the region. As such, they are broadly accepted by the public as their work contributes to human quality of life on a local level.

## Research and Innovation

NRL Parks are rural and natural places, territories with high characteristics and richness for all kind of research and innovation. Studies, experimentation, research and work to design new innovative approaches or concrete solutions for nature and peoples’ needs are carried out in numerous parks: from governance and citizen participation, to very technical topics such as climate change adaptation of biodiversity and crops and modelling coastal risks.

NRL Parks can be places to create and then share their experience with others. They need to find partnerships and innovative solutions to address the challenges they face. This reflects a high, strong and shared interest with universities and researchers in all sectors, from scientific to social and cultural.

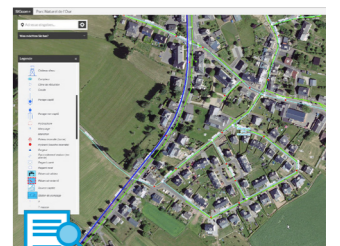
Better integration and recognition of NRL Parks by research programme funds and institutions, as well as building connection and alliances, are necessary to ensure that new research and thinking can be integrated into the work of the Parks.

Overall, NRL Parks seek, to investigate how to better protect both nature and people and find new “nature friendly” and “nature based” solutions for their areas.

## Here, parks share some Research and Innovation experiences.



Landscape and climate change - Adaptation strategies for the Southern Black Forest Nature Parks, Germany



Regional GIS North – interactive tool and service for municipalities using geodata in daily work, Luxembourg



Geohistory of the wetlands of the Scarpe and L'Escaut valleys, France



Whitepaper on innovation in NRL Parks, France

# Nature Regional Landscape Parks play an important role in **European policies and Sustainable Development Goals**

**The innovative work of NRL Parks bring inspiration and contribute to the implementation of numerous global, European and national policies and political objectives.**

With their activities in nature and landscape conservation, sustainable development and education they support the achievement of the goals of the Convention on Biological

Diversity of the United Nations and the corresponding national biodiversity strategies of the Member States. They also assist to implement Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Naturepark Bergisches Land, Germany © VDN/Rolf Wengenroth

# Nature Regional Landscape Parks and the **European Commission**



The European Commission states that The **European Green Deal** “... is our roadmap for making the EU’s economy sustainable. This will happen by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities across all policy areas and making the transition just and inclusive for all.”

The work of **NRL Parks** touches on numerous EU policy areas. Working in an integrative and inclusive way, they help to **guarantee coherence between public policies from regional to local levels with a link to national politics**. They are well placed to be key actors in implementation of the Green Deal at the local level.



The Berlaymont Building © EUROPARC Federation/Stefania Petrosillo

## Nature Regional Landscape Parks and Council of Europe Bern Convention and Landscape Convention

The Council of Europe is an international organisation which predates the European Commission, set up to promote democracy and protect human rights and the rule of law in Europe.

### Bern Convention

Like the Birds and Habitats Directives of the EU, the work of NRL Parks can also support the implementation of the **Bern Convention**, moreso if areas are listed as Emerald network sites, which EU Natura 2000 sites usually are, as the contribution to the Bern Convention from the EU member states. The Bern Convention is particularly relevant to European NRL parks outwith the European Union.



### Landscape Convention

The European Landscape Convention is the first international treaty devoted exclusively to all aspects of landscape. Signatories to the Convention have declared themselves “concerned to achieve sustainable development based on a balanced and harmonious relationship between social needs, economic activity and the environment”. The Convention is therefore the first international treaty devoted to sustainable development, with the cultural dimension a particularly relevant factor. As such, the Landscape Convention is highly relevant to the work of NRL Parks.



## Nature Regional Landscape Parks and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

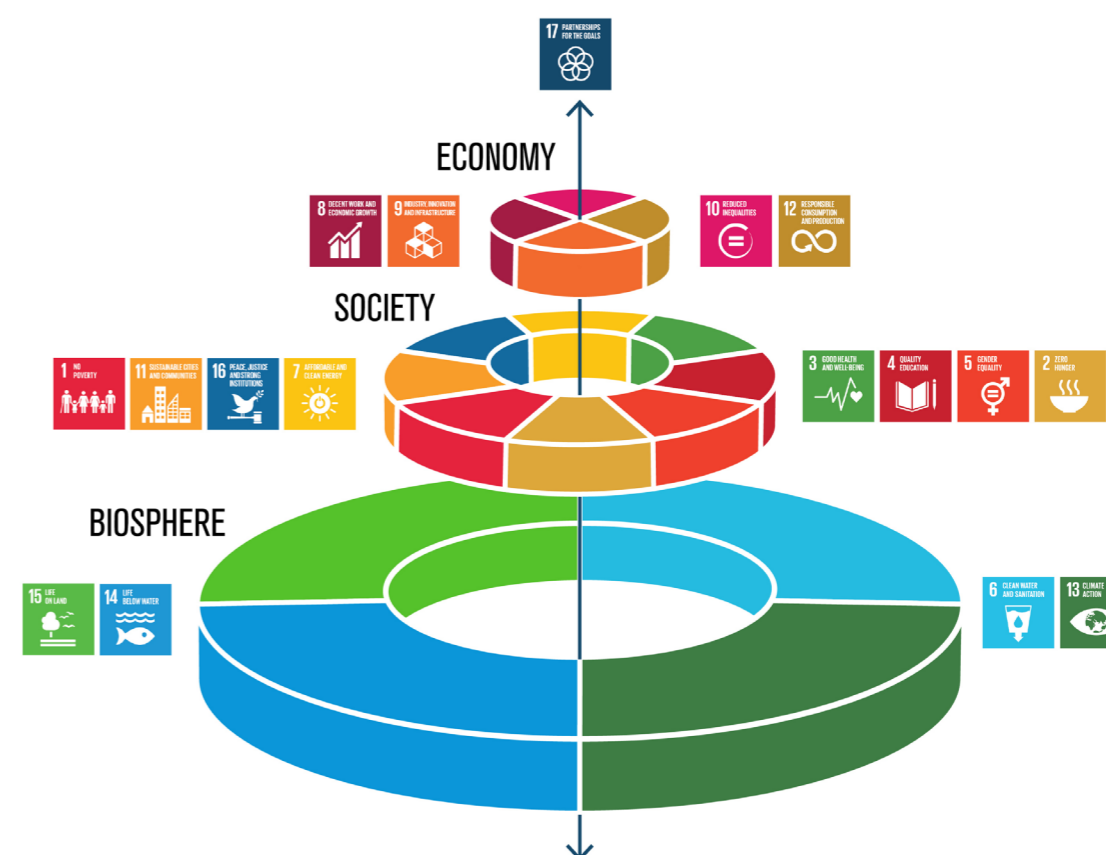
Implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals is something that has been agreed by all countries as the way forward to achieve a better and more sustainable future for us all.

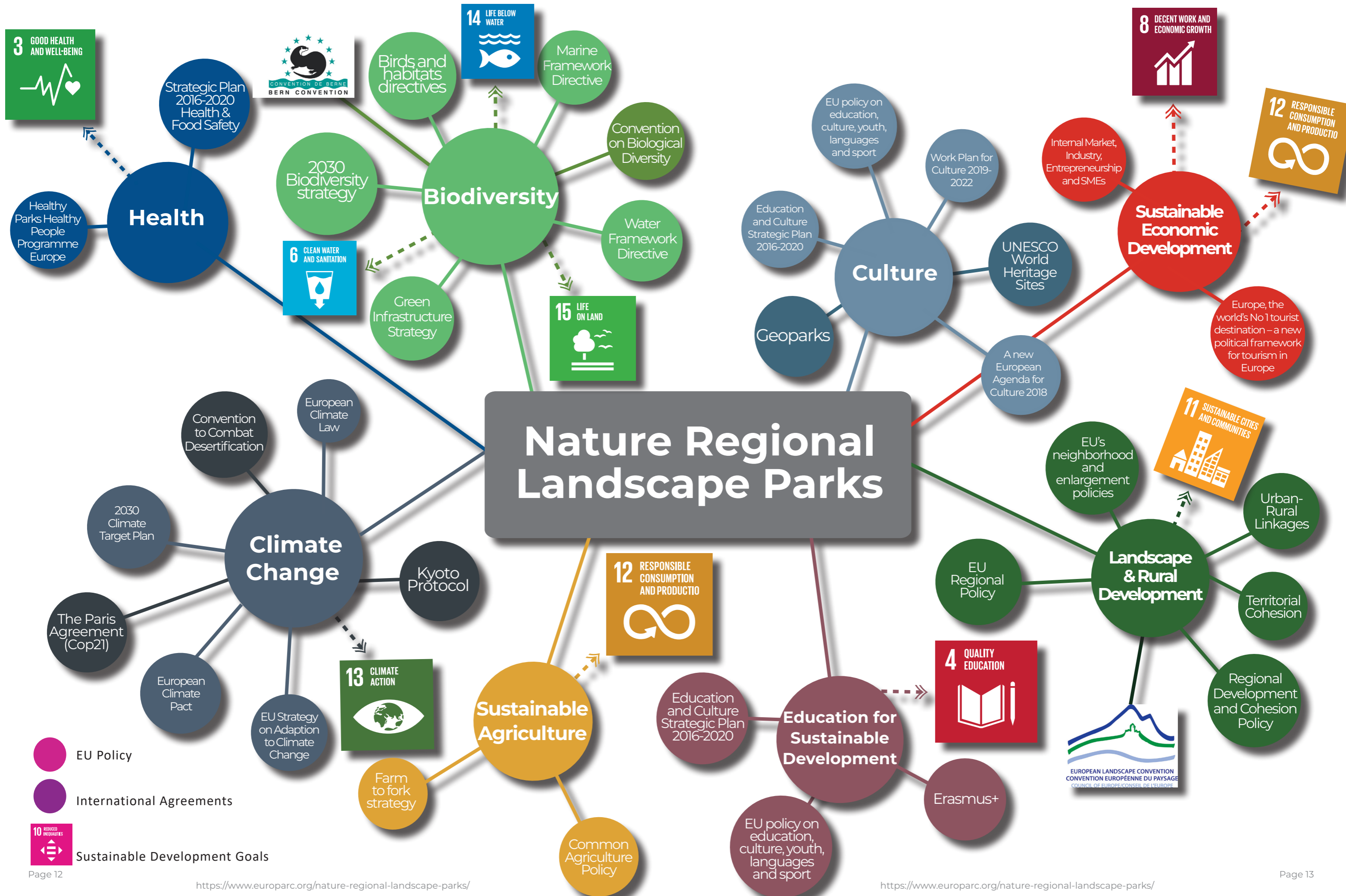
They address the global challenges we all face, including climate change, environmental degradation, poverty, inequality, peace and justice. Many of the actions arising from the goals need to be adopted at a country level, but it is clear, at a strategic level, that NRL parks should be part of the delivery and implementation mechanisms available to a nation, that will move towards greater sustainability.

There are 17 SDGs, which lay at the heart of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They are an urgent call for action to ALL countries in a global partnership. These goals recognize the importance of ending poverty and other global problems in a sustainable way.



The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (Above) and the UN Model of Sustainability (below)





## A CALL TO ACTION

In order to fully utilise the opportunities of Nature Regional Landscape Parks in implementing an integrated, visionary approach for a sustainable rural Europe, **EUROPARC calls upon the European Union and its Member States, local and regional authorities to be:**

**Actively involved in the work of Nature Regional Landscape Parks** with protection, valorisation and sustainable development of the natural and cultural heritage of their territories.

EUROPARC Federation also seeks that EU institutions, **better integrate Nature Regional Landscape Parks in EU policies**, recognising their implementation role, to give them the support and access to tools and funding required to carry out efficiently all actions needed.

**Europe's Nature Regional Landscape Parks are the "real" Green Deal**, with the potential to be the catalyst of local solutions that will bring about the changes needed to create a more sustainable Europe



Blue Tit at Naturpark Our, Luxembourg © Jean-Marie Hardt

## Europe's Nature Regional Landscape parks – “Think Global – Act Local” - Delivering European and Global policy.

**With these features of NRL Parks and the opportunities they present, the following pages describe the European and international policy areas Europe's NRL Parks address and indicate the principal Sustainable Development Goals and actions they can influence.**

### Key Features

NRL Parks provide key services for nature, environment, society and a good quality of life, especially:

- Protection and development of **biological diversity** and of a landscape shaped by sustainable use
- Mitigation of and adaptation to **climate change**
- **Sustainable agriculture** and regional food supply
- Sustainable **socio-economic development** of rural areas
- Sustainable **tourism and recreation**
- **Environmental education** and education for sustainable development,
- **Healthy** water, healthy air and healthy environment necessary for human health,
- **Innovation** for future sustainable development

### Main Opportunities

NRL Parks can provide

- Development of innovative adaptations of human activities to manage the transition from threats of climate change and environmental degradation into a sustainable future
- The means to unite inhabitants, local authorities, regional stakeholders and businesses under one umbrella of shared values and, thus, invoke collective and individual empowerment for common developmental goals
- Attractive and vibrant territories which enhance life quality, health and good living
- Beautiful landscapes that endeavour to balance the needs of nature with the needs of food production and land management
- Places which make people conscious of the inherent values of natural and cultural heritage, give them a sense of belonging and involve them in the future of their region.



**The following 8 NRL themes, describe the work undertaken by different types of Nature Regional Landscape Parks across Europe.**





# 1 Biodiversity

Protecting biodiversity and ensuring healthy ecosystems within an integrated managed landscape is one of the principle functions of Europe's extensive network of NRL Parks.

Europe needs healthy ecosystems, which offer multiple benefits to human society by delivering essential environmental services, including food, water, air and soil, as well as direct benefits for human health, recreation and tourism. The mission of NRL Parks is to maintain healthy ecosystems, restore degraded habitats, whilst combating damaging impacts on their land. **Protecting and restoring** the natural and rural landscape located on their territories further contribute to more effective implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy and make a **Green Deal** more realistic.

NRL Parks host high levels of biodiversity and many of them include Biosphere reserves (UNESCO Man and the Biosphere programme), national and regional reserves and **Natura 2000 sites** in their territories. They are an essential component for nations to achieve the global Aichi targets for protected areas identified by the Convention on Biological Diversity.

NRL Parks are an essential and indispensable contribution to the Natura 2000 network: on average about 25% of Natura 2000 sites in Members State are located in NRL Parks. **The effective management of all Protected Areas, with a specific attention to the NRL Parks, is therefore crucial in order to contribute to achievement of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Targets and to ensure meaningful progress in the conservation of Natura 2000 sites.**

NRL Parks are often responsible for direct management of areas that protect **biodiversity and ecosystems**: also, by working with other land managers, they ensure **sustainable multiple-use of managed natural resources such as water, forestry and agriculture**. **Combining conservation and local sustainable development** is principally achieved through cooperation with farmers and foresters within a sustainable land use goal.

NRL Parks help people to be inspired by nature and work in partnership to find **"Nature based solutions" that will deliver a more sustainable and integrated land management.**

The NRL Park network has few truly marine designated sites, but many parks in several countries have a coastal and inshore elements to them. These parks, like their terrestrial cousins, seek to have an integrated and sustainable management to coastal and marine resources.

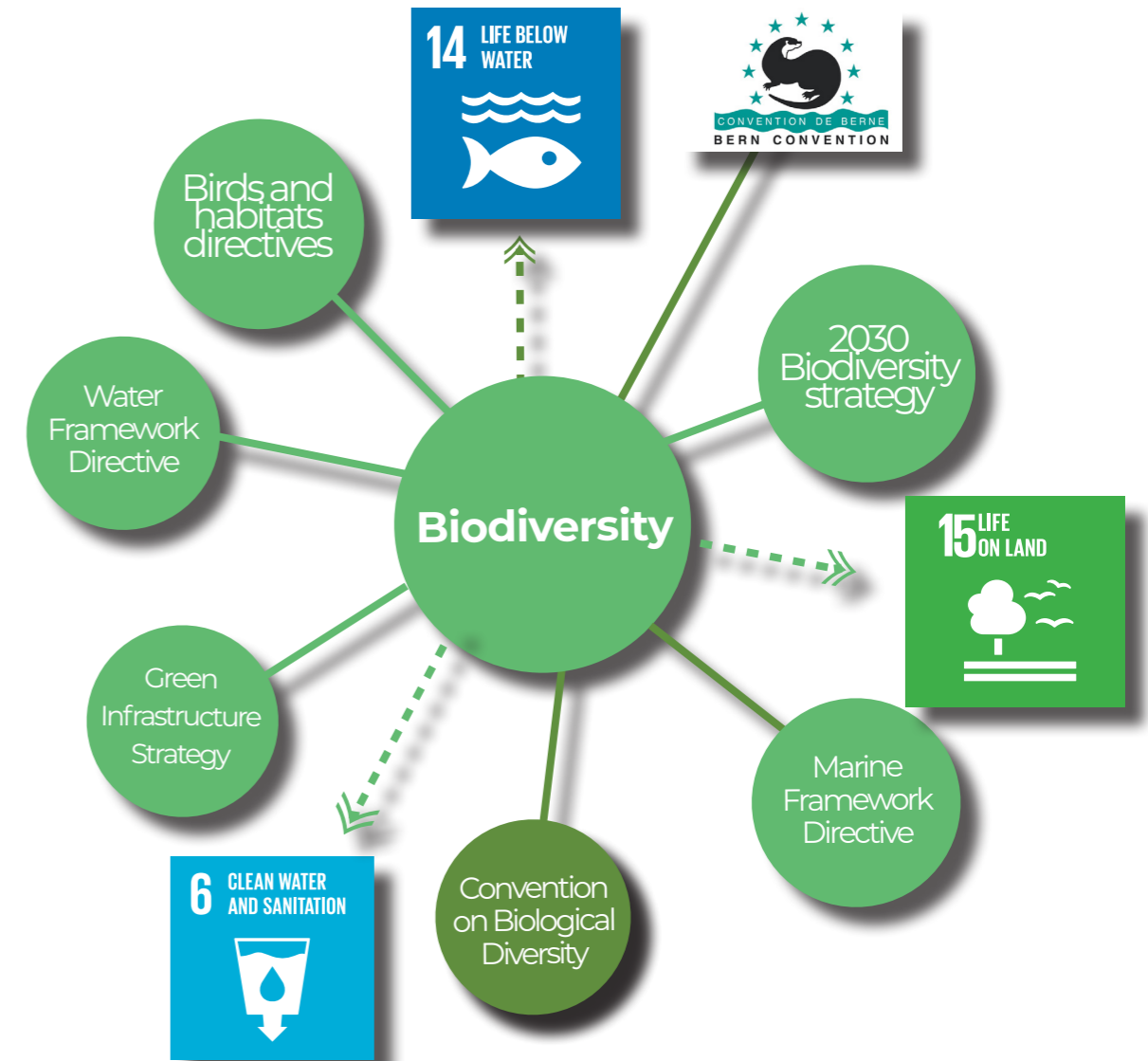
10% of the total EU marine area in Europe is designated as Natura 2000 sites and the new 2030 Biodiversity Strategy sets a target of 30%. With the marine network remaining incomplete and where national park or reserve status may not be possible, the creation of regional "marine nature" parks or indeed biosphere reserves, which adapt the good practice borne from experience in terrestrial sites,

may very well bring agreed sustainable management of the marine habitats.

**NRL Parks are key areas for investment in green infrastructure:** they can often be the green links between territories and land uses, from urban to rural; also, they have a role in working with water management. These Parks act as multi-functional areas that connect the protected and also unprotected nature areas thanks to ecological corridors and reservoirs of biodiversity.

NRL Parks use **nature-based solutions** in order to resolve many challenges – for example, their natural features can mitigate the urban heat island effect through plants and trees, prevent damage from flooding or other climate change impacts.

It is exactly the frontier-breaking, inter-thematic work between biodiversity and agriculture, forestry, tourism, economy, culture, climate change that is the mission of NRL Parks. By involving local people, NRL Parks are core to the necessary shift in terms of thinking and practice, required to make the changes needed that will contribute to the achievement of **Sustainable Development Goals** and deliver a **Green Deal** for a more sustainable and biodiverse Europe.



Overview of the policies related to the work of NRL Parks on Biodiversity

Bringing together Protected Area professionals to learn together, share experience and knowledge in various aspects of Protected Area management and innovate new ideas is at the heart of the EUROPARC Federation's work. Building on the experience of NRL Parks from across Europe, EUROPARC enables all to be connected to a living network of experience, ideas and innovation. By identifying common challenges, it is often the case that solutions can be found from others' experience: this collaborative working has helped many NRL parks in the EUROPARC Federation over the years.

### Here, NRL parks share some BIODIVERSITY experiences



Flowering Meadows Contest in France



Implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy Austria 2020+ in Austrian nature parks



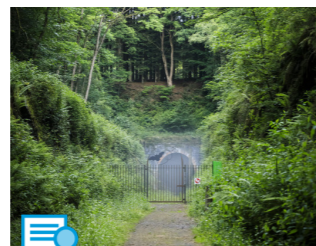
Graubünden's parks create space for animals and plants, Swiss



Wild areas in German Nature Parks



"Without Pesticides" Campaign in Luxembourg



Bat Tunnel Vennbahn / Luxembourg, Belgium



LiFE in Quarries, Belgium



Doe at Naturpark Our, Luxembourg © Jean-Marie Hardt

Cows at Naturpark Our, Luxembourg © Pierre Haas



# 2 Sustainable Agriculture

NRL Parks have significant economic, social and environmental functions, including food production and the important human connection with nature. Agriculture, along with Tourism, are often the main 2 economic activities in NRL Parks. Working in partnership with the parks, these sectors, are working too, to improve and adopt more sustainable practices.

The fundamental mission of the NRL Parks is to find an integrated and sustainable means of protecting landscapes and nature. This means working with agriculture to sustain incomes by promoting new activities such as agro-tourism and valorising their products, improving quality and territorial branding, and finding new markets and opportunities to thrive. Through this work, Parks can help to meet the demand for ZERO km (km0) products, local supply and quality food.

NRL Parks also preserve landscapes and help to protect or increase biodiversity through maintaining traditional agricultural practices and biodiversity agreements with farmers.

**NRL Parks are valuable actors in the Common Agricultural Policy and the Farm to Fork Strategy 2030, an integral part of the Green Deal.** They are key partners to design better policies and tools, widely sharing results and success stories.

It is therefore of major importance that EU Policies, such as the new Common Agriculture Policy and the Farm to Fork Strategy, take into account the key role **NRL Parks can play as indispensable allies in advancing sustainable agriculture.**

Collectively, sustainable agriculture practices alongside Protected Area management can nurture resilient rural areas and create living landscapes.

**Specific measures, programmes and funds are needed to support initiatives on partnership building among Protected Areas, farmers and consumers.** The new CAP should pay specific attention to farmers who are acting within or close to Protected Areas and Natura 2000 Sites, are engaged in environment-friendly agriculture and work in partnership with Protected Areas authorities, in order to recognise their work and reward their efforts.

As part of the EU Green Deal, the **Farm to Fork** Strategy seeks to rethink the **whole food value chain** in order to improve its sustainability and health for nature, producers and consumers at each step: **from production to consumption, healthy food needs healthy environment. This is central to the mission of NRL Parks and their experience can be utilised to show that agriculture and conservation can be sustainable and compatible.**



## European Protected Areas & Sustainable Agriculture, Policy Paper EUROPARC

The EUROPARC position paper introduces the role of Protected Areas, illustrated by many successful examples of collaboration with farmers from the EUROPARC network, and reinforces the need for new, better-integrated approaches and more innovative funding mechanisms at regional, national and European level. It builds on 5 key-strategic points outlining concrete ways how Protected Areas' potential to integrate EU agricultural interests with environmental concerns can be tapped within a reformed CAP framework.



### Here, NRL parks share some SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE experiences.



Cooperation between the drinking water supplier, the Nature Park and farmers to conserve water without economic disadvantages, Luxembourg



Organisation of a sheep transhumance in order to maintain remarkable natural environments, France



Générations Terre: Towards a pesticide-free agriculture - the farmers of Natural Parks are committed! France



Protecting through utilizing - the Austrian Nature Park Specialties



Spelt from the UNESCO Biosphere Entlebuch, Swiss



## 3 Climate Change

Climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies call for healthy and well connected ecosystems at a watershed or regional scale. NRL Parks offer the opportunity for long-term large-scale integrated land management. Equally, they are great tools to improve ecological continuity and connectivity, central to the foundation of sustainable climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.

NRL Parks offer the right level of integration and governance upon which communities can (re) develop sustainable and climate resilient and resistant territories. They can encourage and support the development of systemic or holistic, land use management practices.

Climate change and biodiversity loss are undoubtedly major societal concerns. Climate change increases the frequency and intensity of extreme weather, causing, environmental and economic damages, which particularly affect agriculture and forestry.

It is in the "DNA" of NRL Parks to work together with local authorities to better identify, anticipate and elaborate procedures or actions that protect or adapt their territories against natural risks and climate change impacts. NRL Parks' past and present projects include land management to deal with floods, heatwaves and droughts, forest wildfires or coastal erosion. NRL Parks promote water-permeability of soils, enabling aquifers to refill, thus reducing excess water on the surface after heavy storms. They also support the greening of urban or peri-urban areas to reduce urban heat island effects.

**To address climate challenges faced by European landscapes and biodiversity, Regional Nature Parks:**

- **Promote habitats conservation and restoration**, ensuring better ecological resilience in and around territories;
- Work on **raising the capacity of protected area managers and land use planners** to better understand climate change, assess local vulnerability and improve adaptation measures and management planning;
- **Play an important role in adaptation to climate change by protecting human activities**, people's homes and nature areas from natural risks;
- **Help local actors to adopt best practices in terms of sustainable development**, creating a virtuous circle to develop innovative social and environmental solutions.

In addition, Parks **contribute to the global climate change mitigation effort** as inhabited rural areas and healthy ecosystems contribute positively to absorbing CO2 and greenhouse gases. They also help to reduce CO2 emissions thanks to education for sustainability and promotion of low-emission actions, such as improving housing, green transport and energy production by encouraging renewables.

NRL Parks support the organisation and development of the local food sector, create short supply chains and direct sales from producers to consumers. They also promote best practices in terms of production to help **reduce the impacts of climate change on agriculture and food supply**.

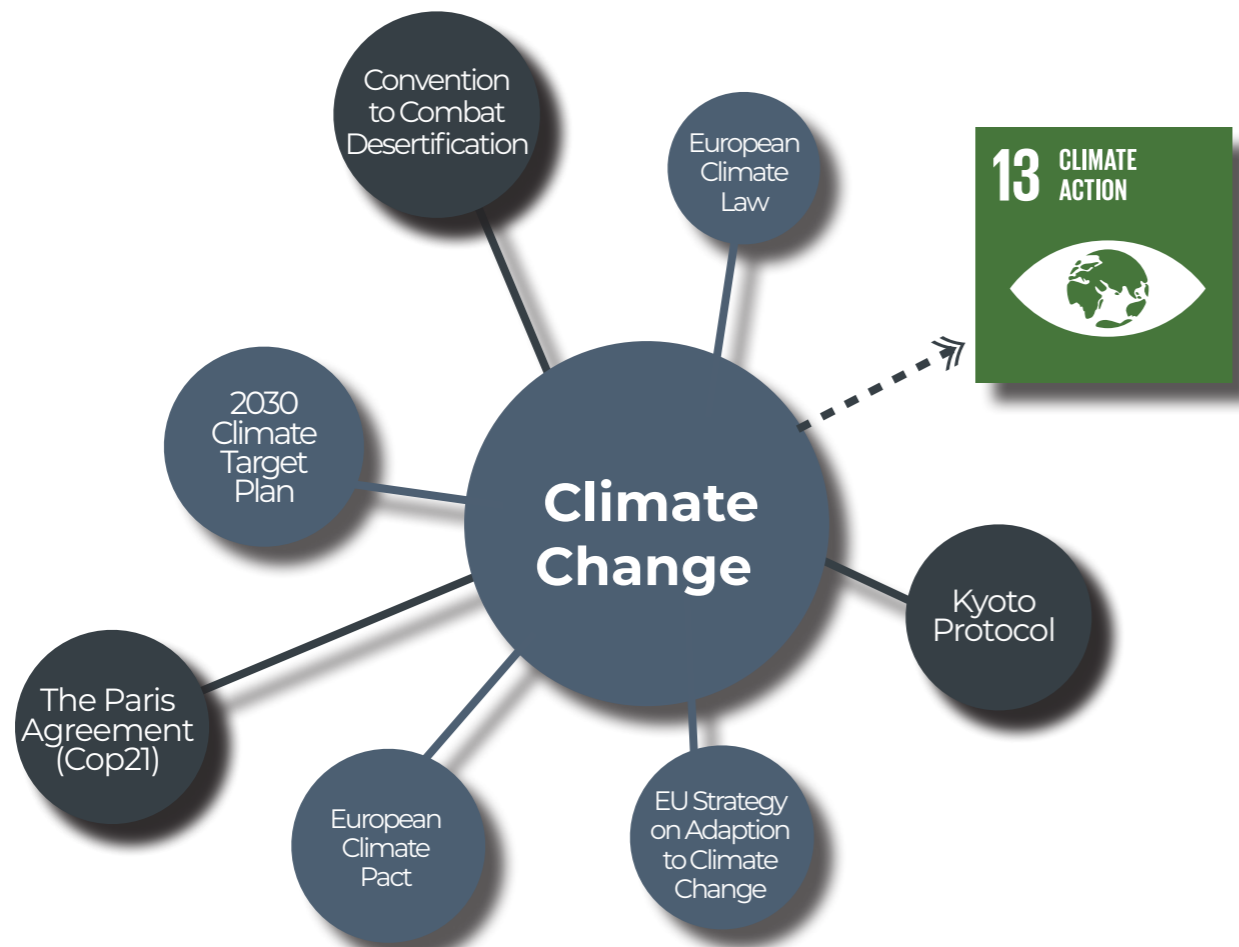
In 2020, the European Commission passed the European Climate Law, including the 2030 Climate Target Plan. It states that all Member States must become climate neutral by 2050. On October 7, 2020, the EU Parliament adopted its negotiating mandate on the EU climate law. The new law aims to transform political promises that the EU will become climate neutral by 2050 into a binding obligation and to give European citizens and businesses the legal certainty and predictability they need to plan for the transformation. **It also launched, together with the European Environment Agency, the European Climate Adaptation Platform, or Climate-ADAPT.** The resources locked into Europe's NRL Parks are a crucial component in ensuring a viable climate adaptation and mitigation response, not only at local and regional levels, but in contributing to nation's

commitments in the Paris (climate) Agreement. NRL Parks offer an excellent partner to implement such an ambitious law and strategy for climate action.

In light of the above information that shows how impactful NRL Parks can be in the fight against climate change,

**EUROPARC calls upon the Covenant of Mayors Initiative on Climate Change Adaptation to sign up to the Mayors Adapt initiative, to support and enlarge the network of NRL Parks as part of their comprehensive local mitigation and adaptation strategy to Climate Change.**

EUROPARC also calls for collaboration with NRL Parks to run comprehensive climate change vulnerability assessment and plan for adaption on a large scale and in the long term.



Overview of the policies related to the work of NRL Parks on Climate Change

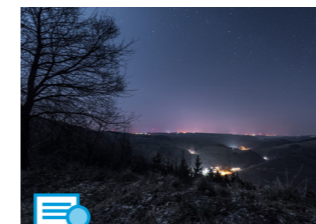
## Here, NRL parks share some CLIMATE CHANGE experiences:



**Destination nature – promoting sustainable mobility and slow tourism, Swiss**



**More carbon for our soils, Belgium**



**INTERREG Europe NIGHT LIGHT Improving regional policies to reduce light pollution and protect and valorise dark night skies at Naturpark Our, Luxembourg**



**Inter-municipal cooperation between the Nature Park Our municipalities in the Climate Pact, Luxembourg**



**„Katzensprung – Kleine Wege. Große Erlebnisse“ / „A stone's throw away - Short distances. Lasting experiences“, Germany**

## LIFE Natur'ADAPT:

In Europe, Réserves Naturelles de France, EUROPARC and eight partners have come together in this LIFE Climate Action project to transform this challenge into an opportunity to innovate.

NaturAdapt aims at triggering a transition towards the adaptive management of protected areas while laying the foundations of a dynamic collective learning process.



Naturpark Barnim, Germany © VDN/ Petra Küster



# 4 Landscape & Rural Development

Protecting natural and cultural heritage and landscapes is the basis of what NRL Parks do, hence their direct contribution to the Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe.

NRL Parks have landscapes protection, management and valorisation at their heart, preserving the unique identity and features of each territory that make up its cultural and natural character.

NRL Park's management is inextricably linked with landscape management due to human activities, which have shaped and are influencing the landscapes of their territories. NRL Parks look after, monitor, advise and involve different actors to avoid or restore any negative change or minimize loss or damage to the landscapes. They aim and work hard to achieve collaborations that generate win-win situations between landscape managers and other sectors.

NRL Parks are integral to regional land-use planning. They have a vital role in territorial planning, acting to check unlimited growth of urban settlements. **By protecting landscapes**, in themselves linked to and influenced by the human settlements and activities within those landscapes, a key role of NRL Parks involves **spatial and rural development and planning**.

By protecting natural and agricultural landscapes, including on the edges of urban settlements, NRL Parks help to sustain both the quality of construction and local architecture, which also reflects their important contribution to safeguarding cultural traditions.

NRL Parks can also help prevent current rural abandonment and landscape fragmentation, promote community involvement and support green jobs. They can create sustainable tourism destinations, encourage sustainable agricultural practices and partnerships between farmers, local producers and Protected Areas management.

The new Farm to Fork Strategy, together with the new Common Agricultural Policy, should underline and support sustainable rural development and the role of NRL Parks. In addition, NRL Parks are also strong partners to facilitate the good implementation of priorities in such policy areas, mobilising local actors by accessing funds from rural development policy funding instruments.

## Here, NRL parks share some LANDSCAPE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT experiences



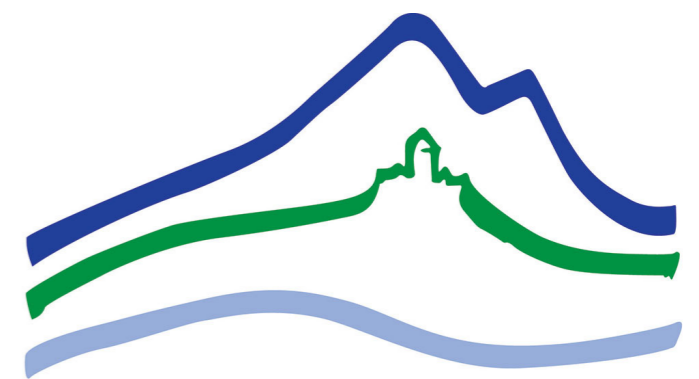
Maintenance programme for the conservation and renaturation of orchard meadows. Survey of fruit variety diversity, Luxembourg



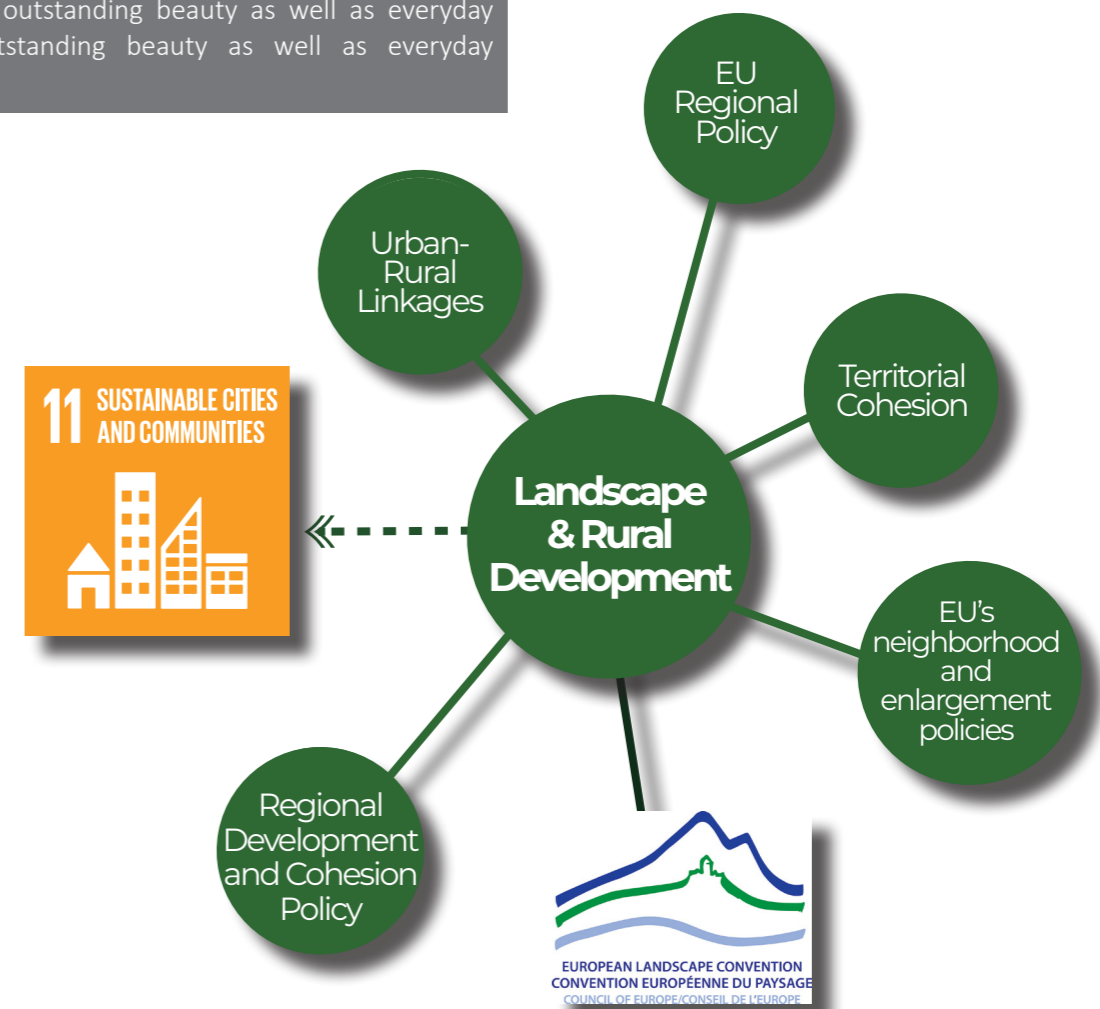
Grazing as a cooperative instrument of nature protection in the Nature Park Solling-Vogler, Germany

The European Landscape Convention of the Council of Europe promotes the protection, management and planning of the landscapes and organises international co-operation on landscape issues. In its preamble, it states several arguments and definitions, including that:

- "The landscape has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields, and constitutes a resource favourable to economic activity and whose protection, management and planning can contribute to job creation."
- "The landscape contributes to the formation of local cultures and that it is a basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, contributing to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity."
- "The landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas."outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas."



EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION  
CONVENTION EUROPÉENNE DU PAYSAGE  
COUNCIL OF EUROPE/CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



Overview of the policies related to the work of NRL Parks on Landscape & Rural Development.



# 5 Sustainable Economic Development

Europe needs a sustainable and more resilient economy. NRL Parks can be laboratories to promote a more socially inclusive, environmentally healthier and economically viable model for society. They value nature as an essential asset for a green and sustainable economy, promote territorialized food systems, sustainable productive chains and a local circular economy.

NRL Parks have been shown to be a catalyst for sustainable economic growth, which is especially true for structurally weak regions that have limited economical alternatives.

A study of Lea Ketterer and Dominik Siegrist (2009) showed that the Austrian Nature Parks create **€144 million per year of touristic added value**.<sup>1</sup> This figure includes day trippers and overnight stays. A certain part of this value remains in the regions. The potential of parks to bring considerable regional economic effects is further evidenced with the development of regional quality products, as well as services and the associated value chains, which increase the revenue share that stays within a region.

European NRL Parks work in partnership with all local enterprises present in their territory, having developed wide experience and specific methodologies to implement dialogue and collaboration with land owners, farmers and the tourism sector. These alliances are indispensable in finding a more sustainable use of natural resources, whilst maintaining a viable economy.

NRL Parks develop collective action, networking and also branding to incentivise, encourage and involve economic actors. This is done by promoting and valorising their best practices, their commitment towards the territory through visual recognition, communication, technical and in some cases, financial support.

## Focus on NRL Parks & Sustainable Tourism

Previously, NRL Parks worked with EUROPARC to design and implement a specific tool to address and manage visitation, the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. This tool elaborates a territorial shared sustainable tourism approach by coordinating all sectors around the Park and organizing and empowering local actors. Through a 5-yearly assessment and external verification to internationally agreed standards, a park and its territory can be awarded as a sustainable destination.

NRL Parks contribute to the viability of the touristic activities in a region through promotion and valorisation by co-ordinated communication, branding and inspiring diversification of activities. One of our successful “charter parks” is Parc Natural de la zona volcànica de la Garrotxa, Catalonia Spain. Once a rather underdeveloped and poorer area of North East Catalonia, by being involved in the charter process, the Park has been able to develop a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan. This has given them a shared vision, a goal and plan of action that involved everyone. **Due to the coherent sustainable tourism plan** produced, the Park has been able to leverage **€99 million of public and private investment in the area over a 10 year period and develop 8,500 jobs. The money supply generated by tourism in the municipalities of Garrotxa during the period between 2001-2010 was €700 million.**

NRL Parks pay specific attention to bringing their territory and activities within reach of everyone, visitors and inhabitants alike. Significant benefits are realised by adapting infrastructures, designing activities, sharing the experience of the actors and inhabitants, and by ensuring these living landscapes are places for people to live, work and visit.



Overview of the policies related to the work of NRL Parks on Sustainable Economic Development

## Here, NRL parks share some SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT experiences.



Projekt “Barrierefreie Naturerlebnisangebote in Naturparken in Nordrhein-Westfalen“ (Accessible tourism in Nature Parks)



Living History - Guided Theme Walking Trails, Luxembourg



Challenge Wool, Wallonia - Belgium, France, Luxembourg



Active for nature parks, Germany

1) Ketterer, L.; Siegrist, D. 2009. Touristische Potenziale der Österreichischen Naturparke. Rapperswil: ILF Institut für Landschaft und Freiraum



# 6 Health

Study after study has indicated significant and sustained increase in people's health and happiness when they are able to connect to nature. The COVID-19 pandemic more than ever highlighted the urgent need for people to have a healthy nature in which to recover and restore their own physical and mental health.

However, we are experiencing **tangible biodiversity loss associated with removal of places for nature** to be replaced by buildings, industry, roads and other infrastructure, not to mention the challenges of climate change.

Increasingly sedentary, urbanised lifestyles, social isolation and an aging population all contribute to these health problems. Despite sustained investment in health care, **health inequalities between different socio-economic groups in many European countries are significant and growing**. However, Europe's NRL Parks can be places for a range of progressive policies for biodiversity and green infrastructure that promote health at the European, national and local levels.

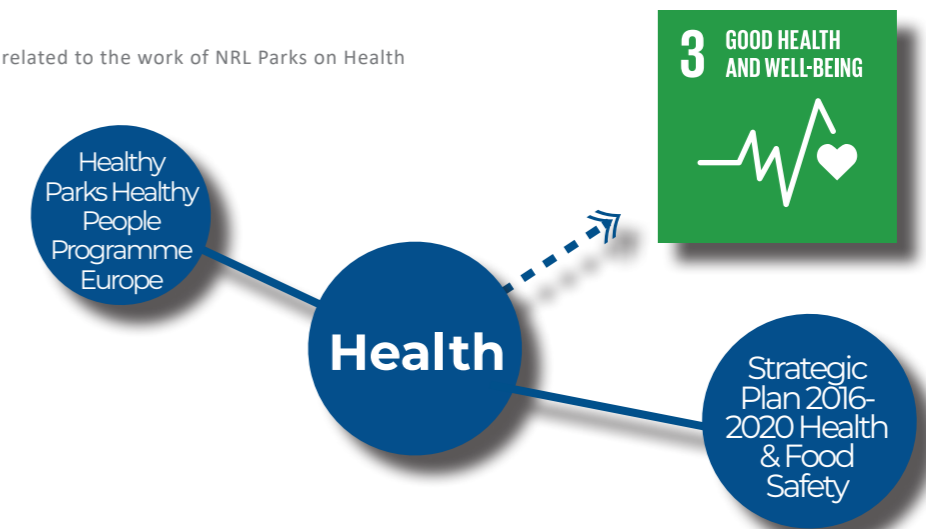
It is recognised that physical and mental human health are improved and that health inequalities can be addressed by using green exercise and increasing contact with nature through outdoor sports and recreation. Thus, through the provision of infrastructure and activities, NRL Parks contribute to individual and community health and social well-being.

## NRL Parks can;

- Offer access to beautiful scenery and opportunities to practice regular outdoor activities for local people: in addition, they offer valuable leisure-time breaks (during weekends and holidays) for visitors. Having regular access to outdoor exercise contributes to reducing health problems associated with sedentary behaviours, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and strokes.
- Put nature within reach through leisure and volunteering activities, which allows citizens to experience the restorative effects of nature, thereby reducing stress and mental health disorders.
- Promote active aging.
- Offer opportunities for citizens and children to access nature and reduce what has been named as nature-deficit disorder.
- Preserve typical landscapes and contribute to an improved sense of well-being.

- Offer large amounts of biodiversity in their soils including bacteria, plants and fungi.
- Support farmers and local producers to grow organic fruit and vegetables and work with agroecological practices, contributing to the promotion of healthy food.
- Support the organisation and development of local aromatic and medicinal plants sectors and the production and promotion of natural healthcare products.
- Work with local actors and authorities on land-use planning to maintain and adapt services to the needs of their local populations, with specific attention for vulnerable groups to ensure better global health and life conditions in the territory.
- Promote and enhance a sense of identity with and belonging to their territory, strengthening social-links, combating loneliness and reviving community spirit through shared projects and endeavours.

Overview of the policies related to the work of NRL Parks on Health



## Here, Parks share some HEALTH experiences.

### EUROPARC: Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe Programme

The sustainable nature of Europe's parks and protected areas is a key asset for health and well-being. **Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe** is a paneuropean programme, developed by the EUROPARC Federation to support parks and protected areas at the national, regional and local level. A toolkit will help parks develop projects and programmes, to deliver better outcomes for the health of people and nature.



„weiterweg“ (long way) – The good way into the wide world, Germany



The Health Challenge and a Label for Gîtes de France: Fitness, Nature & Well-being



# 7 Culture

NRL Parks are de facto places where nature and culture coexist. They form the bedrock of much of Europe's cultural heritage. Cultural identity is rooted in the connection to the land. It is reflected in architecture, crafts, literature, art and food.

Moreover, culture in NRL Parks is inextricably linked with nature. Indeed, almost half (ca 170 sites) of all World Heritage Sites in the EU are in or within 2 km of a Natura 2000 site (many themselves in NRL parks) and 27 of the 29 natural and mixed World Heritage Sites in the EU overlap with Natura 2000 sites.

These NRL Parks are repositories of cultural heritage, host and promote cultural traditions alongside modern events that connect people to their heritage and landscape. They give space to and support for both ancient and modern traditions, making culture accessible and alive to all, especially by developing the participation of the inhabitants, local actors and artists.

It is important to understand that the territory within which an NRL Park sits is a synthesis of many factors - natural, cultural, economic, development, integration and intergenerational.

However, cultural identity, is not always as fixed as it may seem. Interpretation, offered by NRL Parks can be a powerful tool to help communities appreciate their history, even if fractured by major forces such as war, translocation, politics, modern travel and lack of connectivity.

In an increasingly disconnected European society, it is often by reconnecting to nature through our protected areas that people can understand their culture once more.

### Nature Regional Landscape Parks are;

- Repositories of cultural heritage and host old cultural traditions (e.g. local festivals, pilgrimage routes) alongside modern events that connect people to their heritage and landscape. NRL Parks are not static, but are alive with natural and cultural heritage.
- Often classified in the UNESCO recognised heritage lists and programme (World Heritage Sites, World Intangible Cultural Heritage, Man and Biosphere Reserves) and also Geoparks.
- Places where valuable phenomena of cultural heritage and how people have lived with the lands, are found. This includes buildings, tools, immaterial know-how and memory - testifying to the history of human settlement and activities, but also nature and its use.
- Open-air settings and peculiar places in which cultural events are organised, such as theatres, concerts, festivals, photography contests, Land-Art, etc. In addition, NRL Parks often involve local
- Providers of interpretation to better know, appropriate and understand the heritage, identity and evolution from ancient time to the present. NRL Parks help to transmit preserved memory and heritage.

- Leading proponents of innovating projects based on links between heritage and living culture, artistic creation and the natural environment.
- Drivers to promote rural regeneration and identity, through tourism development, product diversification, and attraction of new financial investments.
- Guardians of culture as a key driver of multiple social-economic benefits to communities: NRL Parks create jobs, promote better understanding of the environmental present and future through interpretation, social inclusion and participation to build links between all people in the territory.



Overview of the policies related to the work of NRL Parks on Culture

## Here, RNL parks share some CULTURE experiences.



**Dry stone in the Greater Region. Protection, restoration and enhancement of a heritage of high natural and landscape value**



**European Wood Sculpture Competition – Art with chainsaws, Germany**



**Sound Trail (Klangwanderweg), Luxembourg**





# 8 Education for Sustainable Development

NRL Parks play a substantial and vital role in environmental education, not only for schoolchildren, but for all, through long-life learning. It is important that citizens can better (re)connect to their region. NRL Parks promote the awareness and involvement of citizens to know, protect and promote their own territory and heritage.

NRL Parks are great places to host outdoor learning experiences of all types and specifically sustainable development education that targets both inhabitants and visitors. They provide rich natural, cultural and landscape settings, centres for activities where teachers can take their pupils for a great diversity of learning experiences, outdoors in Nature. There, they can encounter the territory, its traditions and characteristics, identify and interact with its culture and traditions and also consider its future. Moreover, NRL Parks are developing numerous programmes, projects, events and activities, accessible and affordable to everybody.

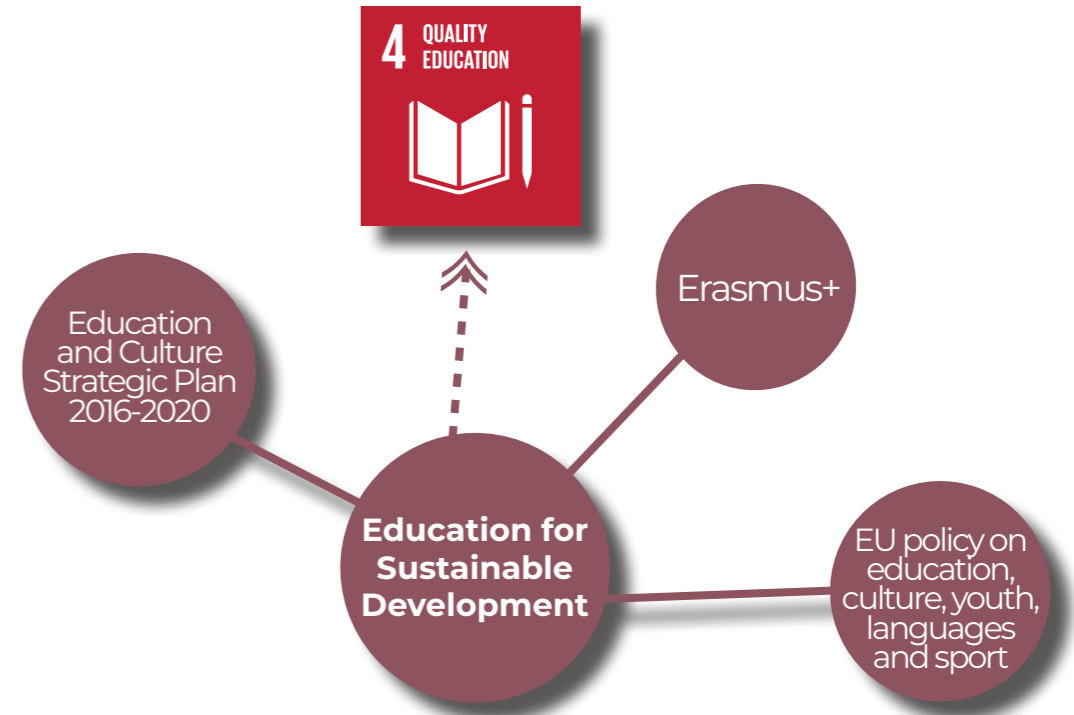
**Young people** want to play an important role in looking after our nature. As such, it is vital that young people are encouraged to get involved in the governance of nature heritage, so they can share their perspectives and develop the skills to manage resilient parks and build sustainable communities.

EUROPARC, working with Youth from across Europe, launched the Youth Manifesto, a source of ideas and inspiration for decision-makers in Protected Areas and rural communities to ensure the involvement and empowerment of young people. Young people play an important role in looking after our Protected

Areas: they are the decision-makers of tomorrow and they are capable to help lead the way to a sustainable future of our NRL Parks ... if they get the chance to have their say. Across Europe, NRL Parks and rural communities face similar challenges: they struggle to engage meaningfully with younger generations. Young people and families are the future of rural places in Europe and yet they are increasingly moving away, robbing rural areas of future stewards of our natural heritage, our cultural landscapes and the biodiversity they are home to.

Working in partnership with the youth in the NRL Parks, together they can create real opportunities for young people to keep living, learning and working in their rural environment and communities. This is vital to ensure environmental stewardship and create more dynamic, future-oriented and sustainable communities.

NRL Parks thus deliver a wide variety of long-life learning experiences, including job integration workshops, educational programmes or (re) training opportunities for inhabitants.



Overview of the policies related to the work of NRL Parks on Education for Sustainable Development

## Here, parks share some EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT experiences



École du Goût – School of Taste A project of the 3 Luxembourg Nature Parks Our, Upper Sûre and Mëllerdall



Crafting consciousness and connections for truly meaningful visitor experiences in Norway's regional parks



Shaping the future now – the Nature Park Schools and Kindergartens, Austria



Nature discovery class trips to German Nature Parks



Corporate Volunteering in Swiss parks



# Nature Regional Landscape Parks – Working for Europe

Working with farmers, parks promote local markets and short marketing chains. In NRL Parks, region-level solutions are being developed for global challenges, such as climate change and demographic change in rural areas. NRL Parks coordinate their development objectives in the region with a wide range of stakeholders, providing a structure that facilitates a commitment to the future-oriented development of the region from multiple interests.

## NRL Parks support Education for Sustainable Development

**NRL Parks provide many educational opportunities and raise the awareness of citizens, especially of young people, about nature conservation and the sustainable development of their region.** They are strong partners for schools and other public educational institutions in implementing Education for Sustainable Development programmes.

## NRL Parks connect the European Union to its citizens

**NRL Parks act as partners to governments in developing rural areas across Europe:** essentially, they aim to reconcile efforts in the conservation of biological diversity with efforts in sustainable land use, spatial planning and job creation. NRL Parks cooperate closely with regional stakeholders and municipalities, and are widely accepted by the population.

They are therefore able to implement measures in a particularly effective way and are perfectly suited to connect the European Union to stakeholders in rural areas and to citizens in general.

## NRL Parks support the goals and strategies of the Council of Europe, the European Union and Global Agreements

**NRL Parks already support a number of goals and strategies of the European Union, conventions of the Council of Europe and global agreements.** They serve as models for sustainable rural areas, integrating sustainability's natural, economic and social aspects, and thus foster the region's development and quality of life.

## Europe needs NRL Parks: Strong parks – strong rural areas

**Europe's rural areas provide the life support system of our continent.** They are the locus of the management of our natural resources in terms of agriculture and forestry, water management and nature conservation. It is clear that the long-term viability of rural areas needs an integrated, visionary approach. NRL Parks contribute to nature conservation, sustainable agriculture and rural development, and they promote sustainable tourism and environmental education. While preserving the beauty, biological diversity and cultural heritage of rural areas, they also provide spaces for recreation for all segments of society, as well as promoting public health.

## NRL Parks are model regions for integrative nature conservation and sustainable agriculture

**NRL Parks combine the protection of natural landscapes with their use according to the principles of sustainable development.** They are a vital component in restoring and preserving ecosystems, and include many sites that fall under the European Union's Natura 2000 network of protected areas. NRL Parks are closely tied to local authorities and regional stakeholders, and they contribute to the acceptance and implementation of Natura 2000 on the ground. By advising farmers, they foster sustainable agriculture and reduce species loss on agricultural land.

## NRL Parks – a driving force behind regional development

NRL parks stimulate tourism, economic diversification, job creation and sustainable food production, strengthening rural communities.



Ölberg, Naturpark Siebengebirge © VDN / Ulrike Sobick

# Imprint

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## About EUROPARC



**EUROPARC**  
FEDERATION

[www.europarc.org](http://www.europarc.org)

EUROPARC is the representative body and network organisation of Parks and Protected Areas of Europe. Our work, through international cooperation, capacity building and advocacy, brings knowledge and innovation in policy and practice to support those parks and promote sustainability by bringing people together, in order to protect our shared nature.

Our members manage Europe's Protected Areas, covering almost every regional, national, European and international designation, such as National Parks, Nature and Regional Parks, Natura 2000 Sites, Biosphere Reserves, Ramsar Sites, Geoparks, World Heritage Sites.



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