



Protected Areas In-Sight

The Journal of the **EUROPARC Federation**

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT, BETTER PARKS

LIFE PAME EUROPE

A unifying approach to Protected Area
Management Effectiveness

GOVERNANCE IN PROTECTED AREAS

Learn how it is key to effective
management

A NEW WAY FORWARD FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

EUROPARC's ENA: an accessible
platform for nature managers

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Cover picture: Members of the Penpont Youth Leadership Group explore the peaks of the Bannau Brycheiniog. Picture by Andy Pilsbury

Back picture: NaturaConnect Consortium Meeting, Grenoble 2024.
Picture by Sandra Grego

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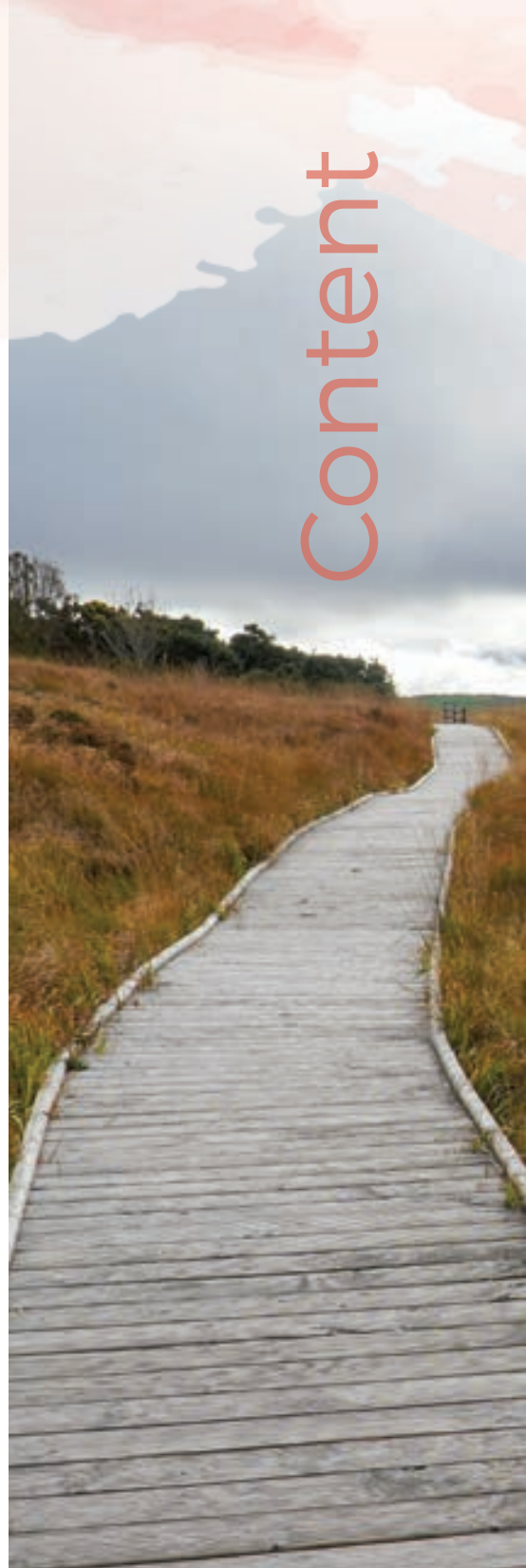


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Many thanks to all those who have contributed to this edition.

The EUROPARC Federation represents Protected Areas and governmental organisations in around 40 countries, who themselves manage the green jewels of Europe's land, sea, mountains, forests, rivers and cultural heritage.

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SAVE THE DATE!

ECST Meeting 2024, Wild Nephin National Park. Picture by Esther Bossink

Nature knows no boundaries and EUROPARC therefore facilitates international co-operation in all aspects of Protected Area management. Through networking, advancing policy and practice, sharing best practices and developing new solutions to the challenges of Protected Area management, we want to deliver a Sustainable Nature: Valued by People and ensure the value of Protected Areas is recognised at the heart of Europe.

For more information:



www.europarc.org

Editorial

STRONGER TOGETHER: Advancing Management Effectiveness in Protected Areas



By **MICHAEL HOŠEK**

EUROPARC Federation President

In a world where environmental challenges are becoming increasingly complex, the role of Protected Areas has never been more crucial. Especially in Europe, these places are more than just sanctuaries for biodiversity: they are vital strongholds against climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation. However, **protection alone is not enough**—effective and adaptive management is key to ensuring long-term success.

ECST Meeting 2024, Connemara National Park - Picture by Esther Bossink, EUROPARC.



Across Europe and beyond, conservationists, researchers, policymakers and local communities are working tirelessly to strengthen the governance and management of Protected Areas. Whether through **youth engagement, ecological connectivity, capacity building, citizen science, or collaborative research**, new approaches are emerging to bridge gaps and drive meaningful change through more effective and inclusive management.

One clear take-away from recent initiatives is that **Protected Areas must be managed as dynamic, living systems**, constantly evolving to respond to ecological, social and political realities. The **UNESCO MAB youth initiative** demonstrates how involving young people in decision-making fosters



innovation and long-term stewardship. Similarly, the **NaturaConnect project** highlights the importance of transboundary ecological networks and the need for strong policy frameworks to connect and expand Protected Areas.

Yet, despite these efforts, many challenges remain. **Insufficient funding, weak regulations, conflicts over land use and a disconnect between science and practice** continue to hinder conservation goals. EUROPARC wants to be at the forefront of driving a positive change for Europe's protected landscapes. Our **European Nature Academy**, as well as the **LIFE PAME-Europe project** are essential steps towards creating more effectively managed Protected Areas.

The path forward requires a **holistic approach**—one that combines sound policy, scientific research, innovative financial mechanisms and community participation. We must move beyond viewing Protected Areas as isolated territories and instead integrate them into broader landscapes and inclusive governance structures.

This issue of the Protected Areas In-Sight explores how we can strengthen the **management effectiveness** of Protected Areas through collaboration, learning and innovation. From grassroots initiatives, to international policy frameworks, the stories and projects featured here reflect a shared commitment to **building resilient and well-managed conservation areas** that benefit both nature and people. While reading through the articles, the

high level of engagement and innovation that the EUROPARC network holds fills me with pride.

This year's journal is structured around four essential elements of Management Effectiveness: **Planning, Governance, Capacity Building and Communication**. You will find inspiring work from across Europe on each of these topic areas.

As you read this edition, I invite you to reflect on how we can work **stronger together**—because only through **collective action and adaptive management** can we secure the future of Protected Areas for generations to come.

I wish you happy reading!

Michael Hošek
EUROPARC Federation President

DANGEROUS TIPPING POINTS ARE APPROACHING



Article written by **BRIAN MACSHARRY**

Head of Group, Nature and Biodiversity at the European Environmental Agency (EEA)

The biodiversity crisis is no longer a distant threat; it is here, and dangerous tipping points are rapidly drawing closer. Key reports such as the **State of Nature** (EEA 2020), the **IPBES Global Assessment** (2019), and the recent 2024 **Living Planet report** (WWF) paint a grim picture: 81% of EU habitats are in poor or bad condition and, worryingly, the trend is downwards. This biodiversity emergency, coupled with pollution and climate change, creates a “triple planetary crisis” that threatens life as we know it.

Biodiversity is the backbone of our planet’s resilience, stabilising ecosystems, regulating climate, and providing essentials like food, water, and clean air. It supports our health, culture, and economy. In fact, 3 million companies in the Eurozone depend on ecosystem services (**ECB, 2023**), and over half of the world’s GDP relies on nature’s contributions (**WEF, 2020**). Yet, these critical services are under threat.

THE PATH FORWARD: WELL-MANAGED PROTECTED AREAS

However, there is a way forward. We know what works: well-managed, effective Protected Areas. Both the **EU Biodiversity Strategy** and the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** stress the importance of expanding Protected Areas to cover 30% of land and sea by 2030 and ensuring they are all managed effectively. Designating areas alone will not solve the problem—we need to ensure that these areas are effectively managed. It’s not just about numbers; it’s about quality and outcomes.



Wild Nephin National Park, Ireland

EUROPE'S PROTECTED AREAS: TURNING POTENTIAL INTO PERFORMANCE

Europe has over 130,000 protected sites, covering 26% of its land and 12% of its seas. But many of these areas are not fulfilling their potential. To halt biodiversity loss, these sites must become more than Protected Areas on a map—they must become bastions of conservation. Well-managed Protected Areas not only safeguard species and habitats, as well as vital ecosystem services, but also function as critical corridors that allow nature to flourish even in degraded landscapes.

A TANGIBLE SOLUTION: INVESTING IN MANAGEMENT

The solution is within our reach: by investing in and effectively managing Protected Areas, we can help reverse biodiversity loss and build a resilient future. Protected Areas are among the most powerful tools we have to safeguard life on Earth. Now is the time to act—by expanding and enhancing Protected Areas, whilst improving the quality of conservation practices, we can ignite the transformative change needed to restore our planet's biodiversity.

FURTHER READING:

- Living Planet report - WWF
- State of Nature - EEA
- Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - IPBES
- The economy and banks need nature to survive - European Central Bank
- Nature Risk Rising: Why the Crisis Engulfing Nature Matters for Business and the Economy - World Economic Forum
- EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 - European Commission
- The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

A UNIFYING APPROACH TO PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS: **THE LIFE PAME EUROPE PROJECT**



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Article written by **ESTHER BOSSINK**

EUROPARC Federation's Communications Manager

Effective management of Protected Areas is a cornerstone of all leading biodiversity strategies. But how do we measure that effectiveness? And just as importantly, how do we transform the wealth of data we collect into actionable insights?

The LIFE PAME-Europe project, led by the EUROPARC Federation, aims to answer these questions by developing a Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) methodology that harmonises with existing national and international systems.

NOT JUST ANOTHER METHODOLOGY— THE METHODOLOGY

Currently, the evaluation of Protected Area Management Effectiveness in Europe is fragmented. Some Member States rely on their own national or international systems, while others have none. This patchwork leads to unreliable and incomparable data, making it challenging to form a clear picture of biodiversity trends across the EU.

LIFE PAME Europe seeks to change that—not by imposing yet another system, but by building upon the best of what already exists. The project will analyse established MEE methodologies such as the IUCN Green List, European Diploma, IUCN's Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT), and WWF's Rapid Assessment and Prioritization of Protected Area Management (RAPAM), along with national approaches. By identifying their strengths, LIFE PAME Europe will create a flexible, adaptable framework tailored to the diverse needs of EU Member States.

FROM DATA TO INSIGHT: A DIGITAL TOOL FOR MEMBER STATES

To ensure consistent, comparable data, the European Environmental Agency will develop a digital tool based on the LIFE PAME-Europe methodology. This tool will enable Member States to report their MEE findings, creating a cohesive dataset that provides a comprehensive overview of Europe's biodiversity management. It will also promote a landscape-scale approach, shifting from isolated site-based assessments to a broader, interconnected perspective.



BUILDING A COMMUNITY FOR SUCCESS

A core component of the LIFE PAME-Europe project is the establishment of a Management Effectiveness Community (MEC). This group, comprising key stakeholders and tool users, will offer valuable feedback and share on-the-ground experiences to ensure the methodology meets real-world needs.

WIE „BUILDING A COMMUNITY FOR SUCCESS“

LIFE PAME-Europe isn't just about theory; it's about practical, impactful solutions. The methodology will be tested in 40 pilot sites across Europe, providing opportunities to refine and adapt the framework. Additionally, an online training course will be developed and employed on EUROPARC's European Natura Academy (ENA) to enhance the competencies of those conducting MEE assessments.

The project's commitment to Capacity Building ensures that the methodology will serve both Member States with advanced systems and those just starting their journey. After all, how data is gathered is just as important as the fact that it is gathered.

Interested in becoming one of the pilot sites?

Reach out to us!

Contact neil.mcintosh@europarc.org

with europarc@europarc.org in cc.

PROJECT STEPS:

1.

Assess existing approaches;

2.

Develop the LIFE PAME Europe Methodology;

3.

Pilot the methodology in Parks;

4.

Assess the Pilot;

5.

Create capacity building on the use of the methodology.

LIFE PAME EUROPE IN NUMBERS:

- 5 Project Partners: EUROPARC Federation, Metsähallitus Parks and Wildlife Finland, DHP Conservation, Nationale Naturlandschaften e.V., Generalitat de Catalunya
- 52 months: September 2024 - December 2028.
- 40 pilot sites.
- €1.6m total budget over four years.



GET ALL INFO ON THE PROJECT!

Project partners at the LIFE PAME Europe Kickoff Meeting in Regensburg



MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION SHOWS:

FINNISH PARK MANAGEMENT IS OF A HIGH STANDARD, BUT CHALLENGES LIE AHEAD



Article written by **MATTI TAPANINEN**

Senior Specialist, Tourism at Metsähallitus
Parks & Wildlife Finland

In 2004, Finland's Protected Areas undertook a pioneering review of their management effectiveness, evaluating the entire Protected Area system for the first time. In 2023, nearly two decades later, this comprehensive assessment was revisited, offering valuable insights and lessons. This article delves into this process and its significant importance for the future of conservation.

THE NEED FOR QUALITY INFORMATION

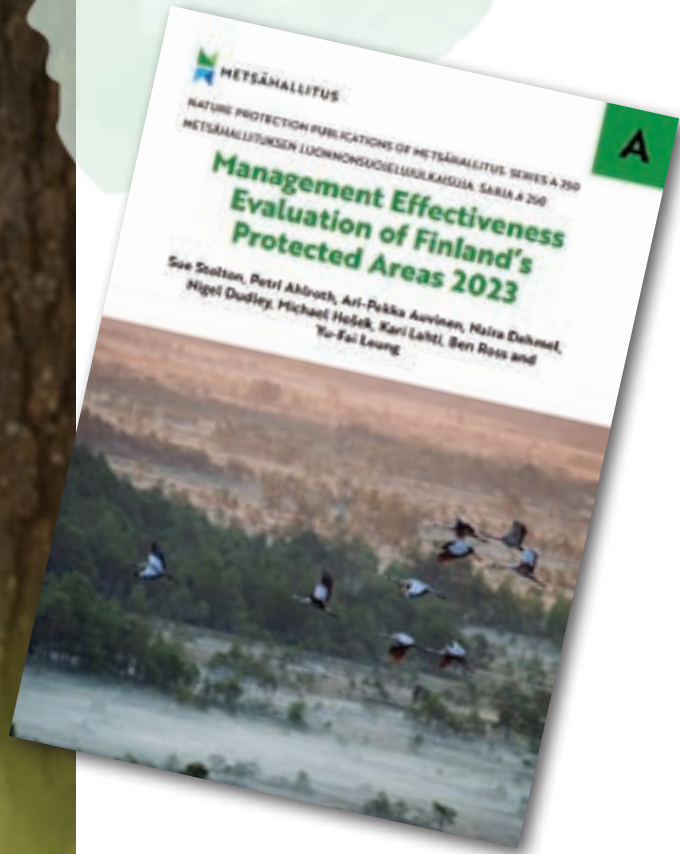
To ensure the effective and efficient management of Protected Areas, conservation agencies around the world need a wide range of up-to-date, transparent, and quality information. In addition to the baseline information of ecological, cultural, social and economic values of Protected Areas, there is growing interest in monitoring trends and predicting future changes. This need to measure and enhance management effectiveness is also recognised in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which states:

"Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 percent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed."

EU and national biodiversity strategies play a crucial role in achieving this goal.



Lemmenjoki National Park (FI).
Picture by Harri Tarvainen



THE ROLE OF PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS (PAME)

A good tool is needed to organise the wealth of information at hand. The Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME) assessment provides national agencies with the support needed to achieve this. Feedback from external evaluators is a particularly important element of the process, as it gathers new insights and recommendations from other (European) Protected Areas.

In 2004, **Finland was the first country in the world to commission an independent review of the management effectiveness of the entire Protected Area system.** In 2023, Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland (PWF) repeated this process. The Evaluation

Team itself consisted of experts representing a range of speciality areas relevant for Protected Area management. This included Park agency management, biodiversity research units, conservation-related private consultancies, and visitor and tourism management experts.

THE 2023 PAME ASSESSMENT

The 2023 PAME assessment was guided by the Principles of Protected Area Management in Finland. This encompasses key components of management objectives, ecosystem services and an ecosystem approach, along with adaptive management processes that are operating under a changing environment and are bound by national and regional obligations. The evaluation covered these different elements and entailed a system-wide questionnaire spanning six broad categories: context, planning, input/resources, process, outputs, and outcomes.

Special attention was given to important changes in the management context since 2004, as well as future domestic and regional trends that may facilitate, hinder or otherwise impact management effectiveness in one or more categories. The focus of the evaluation was on the Protected Area system in Finland, but additional evidence was obtained from site-specific assessments using the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) in five selected Protected Areas.

STRENGTHS, BUT CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR FINLAND'S PROTECTED AREAS

The evaluation concluded that Finland's management of Protected Areas is of a high standard and that the Protected Area system managed by Parks & Wildlife Finland works well. However, significant challenges lie ahead. Many species are endangered, threats due to climate change are increasing and resources available for management are declining.

Henrik Jansson, Executive Director of Parks & Wildlife Finland, emphasises:

"The international assessment is an important step towards safeguarding biodiversity and more effective conservation work. This assessment provides guidelines for increasing the impact of the work and helps to compare our competence internationally. Next, we will analyse the recommendations and draw up a development plan from them. We will prioritise the recommendations that we can implement promptly."



Michael Hošek, president of EUROPARC, was also part of the international evaluation team assessing the Finnish sites. He positively notes: "Globally, Finland was the first country to develop a methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of its Protected Areas system in 2004. Moreover, Finnish colleagues understood the importance of an independent perspective, i.e. they invited international experts to the evaluation team."

In 2023, after 20 years, the evaluation was carried out again. The methodology was updated, of course, but with the awareness that the results could be compared to see trends in development.

Personally, I consider the combination of the assessment at the level of the Protected Areas network and the specific sites to be of great importance. We cannot assume that we have the capacity to carry out a very thorough and repeated evaluation of effectiveness at the level of each individual site. The Finnish example is innovative in this respect, as it combines the assessment at the level of the network and a sample of sites, while maintaining the quality of the result. To make the evaluation truly independent, it is really important to invite colleagues from other countries to the team, taking into account the experience of other countries within Europe and the world - I hope we have done that. Personally, I am very happy with the result."

READ THE FULL REPORT!

On behalf of Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland, Matti will bring this experience to the LIFE PAME Europe Project! You can read more about this project on page 8.

*External Evaluation Team during their visit in Finland.
Picture by Mervi Heinonen, Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland*



MANAGING MARINE PROTECTED AREAS UNDER A CHANGING CLIMATE



Rabbitfish, an Lessepsian alien species that found its way into the Mediterranean thanks to the raising sea temperatures, at Kavο Greco MPA, Cyprus – Photo by Lorenzo Merotto.

Article written by **FERNANDO PINILLOS**

Communications and IT Officer at EUROPARC and Project Manager for Interreg Euro-MED MPA4Change

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) play an important role in protecting species, preserving habitats and enhancing the resilience and adaptive capacity of ecosystems in the marine realm—encompassing not only the open ocean but also seas, coastal areas, and other critical marine environments. This protection, to be effective, needs a solid design and support through governance and management processes that are aligned with the MPAs conservation outcomes, as well as an appropriate number of expert staff and sufficient funding, among other factors. However, the effectiveness of MPAs is increasingly under threat due to the most pressing challenge of our time—climate change¹.

Interreg
Euro-MED



Co-funded by
the European Union

MPA4Change





Corals in Brijuni National Park. Picture by Fabio Iardino

CLIMATE CHANGE AND MPA'S EFFECTIVENESS

Climate change is leading to rapid and severe shifts in marine ecosystems at a global level. In the Mediterranean region, for instance, the increasing frequency and intensity of heatwaves² are triggering mass mortality events of entire marine communities, including key species like gorgonians, corals, and sponges³, which are essential for building habitats that support many other forms of marine life.

Under such dynamic conditions, MPAs cannot be expected to achieve their conservation goals, even when appropriate and effective management schemes are in place¹. Besides, if we take into account that the majority of MPAs were designed without taking into account climate change, the overall efforts to protect our oceans seem to be at stake⁴.

It is paramount to adopt a more comprehensive approach that incorporates the effects of climate change into both the definition of MPA conservation targets and the development of management actions.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT: TAKING CLIMATE CHANGE INTO ACCOUNT

The definition of conservation objectives and management actions focused on minimising the impacts of human activities at local level, have been shown to significantly improve the resilience of marine ecosystems³. Priority actions in an MPA should, therefore, focus on reducing stressors such as fishing, tourism, or resource extraction, particularly on species and habitats that are highly sensitive to climate change or play a crucial role in providing key ecosystem services.

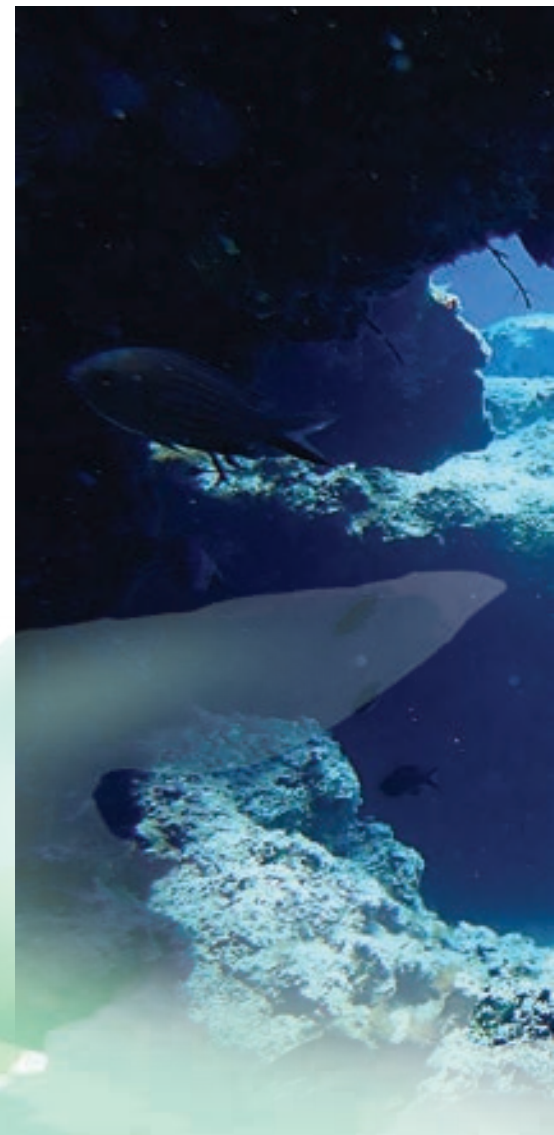
Accounting for climate change effects into MPA management schemes, though, can be challenging. In order to ease the way forward, the project MPA4Change, launched in 2024 as part of an Interreg Euro-MED initiative, capitalises on the decade-long experience of organisations that have taken the lead in developing and testing climate-change adaptation tools to improve the management effectiveness for MPAs.

HOW MPA4CHANGE IS SUPPORTING MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Focused on the Mediterranean region but with the intention of expanding its reach across the EU, MPA4Change provides solutions and support for MPAs that wish to integrate climate-change adaptation plans in three critical ways:

- by building the capacity of MPAs on the use of consolidated toolkits for climate change;
- by advocating for the integration of recommendations on climate-change adaptation in key strategies at EU, Mediterranean and regional level;
- by creating a roster of experts to provide long-term assessments and support to MPAs willing to engage in the adaptation process.

Additionally, the engagement campaign *100 MPA MedAlliance*, set to launch soon, aims to involve at least 100 MPAs in the Mediterranean region in improving their management



1 Rilov, G., Frascchetti, S., Katsanevakis, S., 2020. A fast-moving target: achieving marine conservation goals under shifting climate and policies. *Ecol. Appl.* 30 (1), e02009 <https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.2009>.

2 Smale, D.A., Wernberg, T., Donat, M.G., 2019. Marine heatwaves threaten global biodiversity and the provision of ecosystem services. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* 9 (4), 306–312.

3 Zentner Y, Rovira G, Margarit N, Ortega J, Casals D, Medrano A et al. (2023) Marine protected areas in a changing ocean: Adaptive management can mitigate the synergistic effects of local and climate change impacts. *Biol Conserv* 282:110048. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2023.110048>

4 Bruno, J.F., Bates, A.E., Aronson, R.B., 2018. Climate change threatens the world's marine protected areas. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* 8 (6), 499–503. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0149-2>.

effectiveness by incorporating climate-change adaptation schemes. This campaign aims to provide the essential operational support and establish a suitable political framework to enable the implementation of climate change adaptation toolkits.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION TOOLKITS FOR MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

MPA4Change offers a range of toolkits covering different areas that aim to improve the overall management effectiveness of MPAs through the integration of climate change.

One of the toolkits, a Vulnerability Assessment methodology, allows MPA managers to integrate climate change into the scenario in order to set conservation targets and management measures that will help to improve the resilience of specific habitats and ecosystems.

Additionally, the project will provide protocols to monitor climate change impacts and share them with a Network of Mediterranean MPAs. This protocol will not only provide MPAs with additional support to collect valuable data in order to take better informed management decisions and continuously adapt to changes, but will also allow them to collectively gather a better understanding of how climate change effects are impacting the Mediterranean basin.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, various toolkits will be developed to guide the implementation of citizen science programmes and participatory approaches. These resources aim to actively engage local communities in monitoring environmental conditions and contributing to decision-making processes related to the management of MPAs.

For further information on these solutions for climate change adaptation, please visit the MPA4Change website or register for our mailing list to receive regular updates on future events and training opportunities.



TO THE WEBSITE!

SIGN UP TO THE MAILING LIST!

Underwater sea caves in Cavo Greco MPA Cyprus. Picture by Irini Valanto Papageorgiou





GOVERNANCE IN PROTECTED AREAS: KEY TO EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT



Article written by **MARTA MÚGICA**

EUROPARC Federation Council member
and Director of Fungobe

Governance is essential for the success and sustainability of Protected Areas. However, this seemingly simple term embodies complex principles like participation, responsibility, accountability, transparency and trust. These elements form the foundation of sound governance, ensuring that decisions made in Protected Areas are both effective and fair.

WHAT IS GOVERNANCE?

Governance refers to the systems and processes through which decisions are made, power is exercised, and responsibilities are assigned. In Europe, governance is often characterised by a multi-stakeholder approach, involving national governments, regional authorities, private organisations, and local communities.

While governance determines the „how“ and „who“ of decision-making, management is the practical implementation — the „what“ — involving the operational tasks that maintain biodiversity and ecological processes. The link between governance and management effectiveness is crucial: well-structured governance leads to better decision-making, which directly influences management outcomes and operational success.





Meeting of the project 'Co-Adaptation 2021: collaborative knowledge to accelerate adaptation to climate change' promoted by EUROPARC-Spain in which stakeholders of the Garajonay National Park and the Sierra Espuña Natural Park participated.

Stakeholders in a workshop on future scenarios for the Sierra Norte de Guadalupe Natural Park



GOVERNANCE MODELS IN PROTECTED AREAS

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) outlines four main types of governance models, each with distinct roles for stakeholders:

- 1. Governance by Government,** the most common model in Europe, where national, regional, or local governments are the primary decision-makers.
- 2. Shared Governance,** where multiple stakeholders such as governments, local communities, NGOs, or private sectors collaborate in the decision-making process. Shared governance is often seen as more inclusive and can lead to better management outcomes by leveraging local knowledge and broader societal support.
- 3. Private Governance,** may be applied when private actors own the land or take responsibility for conservation, allowing for flexible and often innovative management approaches.
- 4. Governance by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities,** used where indigenous or local communities have strong cultural and historical ties to the land. Identifying local knowledge and the vision of different social agents is fundamental to co-create a common future. Especially in territories that face challenges due to depopulation where the bioeconomy will play a new role.

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF SOUND GOVERNANCE

To ensure that governance leads to effective management, five principles are crucial:

- 1. Legitimacy and Voice** All stakeholders, including marginalised groups, must have an opportunity to participate in decision-making. Shared governance models are increasingly favoured because they allow for broader participation, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered.
- 2. Accountability** Transparency and accountability are essential. Decision-makers must be answerable for their actions, ensuring that management strategies align with conservation goals and stakeholder expectations.
- 3. Performance** Efficient resource use is key. Public and private resources are allocated effectively, ensuring management actions achieve the desired conservation and societal outcomes.
- 4. Fairness** Governance must ensure equity, including equitable distribution of benefits and costs, ensuring that all stakeholders can maintain or improve their well-being while contributing to conservation.
- 5. Strategic Direction** Long-term vision is critical. Governance frameworks must consider future challenges like climate change, ensuring that management strategies are resilient and adaptable to global change.

Incorporating these principles can foster broader societal support by addressing the interests and rights of various stakeholders, as well as strengthening ecological conservation and social cohesion.

“UP FOR PARTI*? (*CIPATION)”: A MANIFESTO FOR PARTICIPATION



Canoe trip in Biosphere Reserve Spreewald. Picture by Jorina Rath

Article written by **JULIA BENESCH** and **MARLA SCHULZ**

EUROPARC Youth Council Member

The UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme recognises the transformative power of youth engagement, which is embodied in the MAB Youth initiative. In Germany, the umbrella organisation for National Parks, Biosphere Reserves, and Wilderness Areas, Nationale Naturlandschaften e.V. (NNL, formerly known as EUROPARC Germany), has consistently supported this movement. By organising major MAB Youth gatherings in 2019, 2021, and 2023, NNL has created platforms that inspire dialogue and drive meaningful action to enhance youth participation.



THE CREATION OF 'PARTI*FEST'

One of the most significant outcomes of these gatherings emerged in 2021: the creation of a „Parti*fest,“ a manifesto championing youth involvement in biosphere reserves.

This innovative name combines the words ‘participation’ and ‘manifesto’, and reflects its purpose: promoting youth participation, strengthening connections between young people and biosphere reserves, and fostering networking opportunities. Over 40 young participants developed the Parti*fest in just two days, outlining 15 pivotal demands. These include equal treatment in decision-making processes, greater accountability, increased public visibility, and specific actions such as appointing youth representatives to committees and establishing designated youth liaisons within management structures.

The Parti*fest was distributed to all biosphere management offices across Germany, prompting a variety of responses ranging from constructive feedback to full support. This initial step has sparked a crucial dialogue and raised awareness of the value of youth perspectives within governance structures.

FORMALISING EFFORTS IN 2023



Building on this momentum, the 2023 MAB Youth Forum marked another milestone as participants committed to formalising their network. This led to the founding of the Jugendnetzwerk Biosphäre (Youth Network Biosphere) in late 2023. In less than a year, the network has made impressive strides, organising three seminars, recruiting new members, and actively engaging in meaningful discussions with representatives from German biosphere reserves. In November 2024, the network became an officially recognised association and has joined the EUROPARC network of Youth+ groups.

Members of the Jugendnetzwerk Biosphäre have recently participated in various governance-related activities, including the EuroMAB Conference and its youth-focused pre-conference, where they contributed to the „Message from EuroMAB“ – a position paper for the upcoming MAB World Conference. These experiences have allowed young people to influence policy discussions at both national and international levels.

The network continues to foster dialogue with all biosphere reserve administrations in Germany, sharing updates from youth meetings and discussing youth participation strategies during on-site visits. This regular exchange has gradually built mutual understanding and highlighted the importance of integrating youth perspectives into governance frameworks.



Group picture in the Black Forest Biosphere Reserve.
Picture by Foto Franziska Leimkühler



Working group during the networking meeting. Picture by Friederike Itzek

FUTURE PLANS AND VISION

Looking ahead, the Jugendnetzwerk Biosphäre plans to launch a participation programme for 2025. This initiative aims to make involvement in biosphere reserves more accessible by offering flexible and youth-friendly formats for engagement. Simultaneously, the network seeks to expand the impact of the Parti*fest by encouraging biosphere reserves to adopt its recommendations as practical guidelines for strengthening youth governance.

However, to embed youth engagement as a standard practice, Protected Area staff must embrace innovative approaches to engaging young people. By recognising the unique challenges and seizing opportunities for collaboration, we can move towards more inclusive and adaptive governance in Protected Areas, reflecting diverse perspectives. Together, we can empower the next generation to shape the future of our Protected Areas.




Stall at the German Nature Conservation Day.
Picture by Jugendnetzwerk Biosphäre

READ THE PARTI*FEST HERE!

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ORGANISATION HERE.

CONNECTING EUROPE'S NATURE FOR 2030

HOW CAN WE MOVE FORWARD?



A key component of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 is the development of a Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N), which involves the design of a connected system of Protected Areas. Despite existing frameworks or strategies for ecological connectivity, many European countries face shared governance and implementation challenges. Weak regulations and limited enforcement, poor conflict management, unsustainable land use and infrastructure development, along with gaps in technical capacity and knowledge, have been identified as major obstacles. How can we address these challenges and create an interconnected system of Protected Areas and ecological corridors?

As part of the NaturaConnect project, partners have conducted an in-depth analysis in six key regions—spanning the Danube-Carpathian Transboundary region, Finland, France, Portugal, Spain, and Germany, with two main objectives:

- 1.** Identifying the direct and indirect drivers that support the implementation of Protected and Conserved Areas.
- 2.** Highlighting best practices in policies and governance frameworks in Europe.

INSIGHTS FROM THE NATURACONNECT ANALYSIS

Through extensive research, including literature review, workshops, surveys and stakeholder interviews, NaturaConnect has recently published a report summarising its findings.

CURRENT STATUS:

- Guiding conservation frameworks at the European level, such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and the Green Infrastructure Strategy, have been established.
- Ecological connectivity frameworks and strategies exist or are being developed in several EU countries. Of 19 countries included in the analysis, 15 (79%) have a strategy or legal framework for ecological connectivity in place.

Furthermore, several countries offer valuable lessons through successful practices and frameworks:

- The Danube-Carpathian region demonstrates effective cross-border cooperation under the Carpathian Convention. Regional governance bodies and international treaties have proven essential for implementing ecological connectivity. Collaboration between sectors, in particular transport infrastructure and nature conservation, leads to better data sharing, critical for planning processes.
- Germany's Federal Green Infrastructure Concept integrates ecological connectivity into spatial planning. Developed in close collaboration with research, it is grounded in the Federal Nature Conservation Law and offers guidance for ecological planning across multiple administrative levels and international boundaries.
- The National Spatial Planning Policy Programme in Portugal combines the optimisation of environmental infrastructure and ecological connectivity, from which other regional and national spatial planning tools are derived.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Public funding is available for ecological connectivity, but the lack of post-project funding as well as the under-resourcing of Protected Areas are key challenges. Existing funding opportunities include:

- Private financing instruments. These are being developed, but still on small scales, e.g. payments for ecosystem services, the use of investments tied to insurance schemes or green bonds.

Article written by
MARIT SCHNEPP

project manager for
NaturaConnect at the
EUROPARC Federation



- EU funds, notably under the Interreg and LIFE programmes, offer opportunities for supporting transboundary collaborations, network planning, habitat restoration, land purchase etc.
- The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund could be used in a more targeted way to fund ecological connectivity and management.

Within the project, a range of publications on financing options for the TEN-N have been created. You can find them here.

THE WAY FORWARD

Based on the findings, the analysis outlines **four complementary pathways of change and potential interventions** to be applied across various levels..

Pathways of change

Pathway 1 – Regulatory framework

If an appropriate ecological connectivity regulatory framework exists, it is implemented well, and it is backed by solid incentives, **then** the different stakeholder groups are supportive **because** they recognise the values, benefits and importance of the ecological connectivity for people and wildlife.

- Regulatory frameworks bring clarity for all actors on prevention and compensation mechanisms.
- Legislations must address the need for ecological corridor planning to be embedded in spatial planning, and must address tenure rights, funding, incentives, prevention and compensation schemes.
- Guidelines should be provided for all sectors and stakeholder groups.

Pathway 2 – Sustainable economic development

If economic development is coupled with clear guidance for mitigation measures, accounting for ecosystem services, and preventing land use conflicts via collaboration across sectors, **then** it shifts towards a sustainable economic model that values and profits Green Infrastructure **because** the power of each sector is balanced when all have to work towards mutual benefits.

- Leadership and collective thinking are needed to address social dilemmas.
- Compensation increases acceptance of decisions in land-use conflicts.
- Spatial planning mechanisms like land use zonation are needed to balance economic developments with ecological connectivity, e.g. protecting ecosystem types throughout the landscape, strategic planning, impact assessments, the integration of connectivity in project planning, construction and maintenance of transport infrastructure and retrofitting of existing hydropower.

Pathway 3 – Knowledge and capacity building

If the appropriate knowledge base, technical and human capabilities related to ecological connectivity are developed and communicated, **then** planning and design as well as the implementation of a well-connected, resilient TEN-N improves **because** they will facilitate the access of all relevant sectors to the most beneficial solutions, with optimised costs.

- Information sharing and evidence-based decisions build trust and encourage collective action.
- Data collection and monitoring systems must be established.
- Ecological knowledge must be fostered in teams involved in planning and decision-making processes. Land-use planning should involve ecologists and conservation scientists.

Pathway 4 – Empowerment and conflict management

If civil society working for ecological connectivity (NGOs, environmentally-friendly farmers and foresters, other green entrepreneurs) is empowered and causes of existing conflicts around connectivity are clarified by bringing actors together **then** engagement can be built, conflicts can be managed, and stakeholder trust and intersectoral and cross-border cooperation improved, **because** bottom-up initiatives and improvements are catalysing positive change.

- A shared vision is a prerequisite for cooperative solutions.
- Improved conflict management is necessary.
- Funding for cooperative actions, such as CAP funding for landscape-scale ecological network creation can overcome negative economic and motivational barriers and forge partnerships.
- In urban areas, financing and facilitating participatory processes of citizens are important for mobilising social capital and supporting grassroots organisations.

The outlined pathways are interconnected, addressing governance, policy, and financing as critical enablers—or obstacles—to the successful implementation of a connected network of Protected and Conserved Areas across Europe.



Funded by
the European Union

NaturaConnect receives funding under the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 101060429



LEARN MORE

Explore the full report and summaries in 18 languages to learn how we can shape a Europe where nature and people thrive together.

NATURACONNECT GOES EUROPEAN NATURE ACADEMY



Article written by **SIMONE PRESTES DÜRRNAGEL**

EUOPARC Project Officer for NaturaConnect

BUILDING CAPACITY, CREATING EFFICIENCY

The NaturaConnect Learning Platform is a dynamic resource designed for biodiversity and conservation managers, spatial planning technicians and data analysts. It offers a comprehensive range of training modules to support effective management, enhance critical competences, and provide the expertise needed to plan and establish new Protected and Conserved Areas and ecological corridors, utilising the tools and knowledge developed within the NaturaConnect project. The course is both technical, offering tutorials on spatial conservation planning and biodiversity modelling, and also addresses the policy context of Protected Areas, financial instruments for potential funding opportunities, and stakeholder engagement methods, among other topics.

A NEW ERA OF LEARNING: SELF-PACED TRAINING

By including the NaturaConnect Learning Platform in the European Nature Academy, EUOPARC is not only creating additional learning resources for Protected Areas managers and practitioners. We are also embarking on a new journey, testing an innovative capacity-building approach that we have not applied before: A self-paced online training course!

Training modules will be produced and launched throughout the duration of the NaturaConnect project, up until 2026. They can be accessed by anyone, free of charge. The self-paced learning approach enables participants to learn completely independently, in their own time, and to prioritise specific topics throughout the course.

In April 2024, the NaturaConnect project launched its self-paced online training course, the “NaturaConnect Learning Platform” as part of EUOPARC’s European Nature Academy. The European Nature Academy (ENA) is THE training hub for Protected Areas managers in Europe, and is the next step in EUOPARC’s capacity-building journey.



Funded by
the European Union

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NaturaConnect Training Modules on the ENA.

USE THE TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT TO BUILD THE SKILLS OF YOUR TEAM

To maximise the benefits of the NaturaConnect Learning Platform, we recommend conducting a Training Needs Assessment (TNA) to identify and address training needs in a targeted manner. Building on previous training needs assessment tools, the NaturaConnect TNA features a selected number of competences from the IUCN global register of competences for Protected Areas, tailored to plan or manage Protected Areas or ecological corridors. The assessment can be used by both individuals and teams to better identify and plan for capacity-building needs, ensuring the prioritisation of resources for specific training activities.

EXPLORE. LEARN. BUILD CAPACITY

The NaturaConnect Learning Platform is more than just a resource—it's a journey toward more effective conservation practices, stronger teams, and well-planned Protected Areas and ecological corridors. Start exploring today and help shape the future of conservation training.

FEEDBACK-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT

Although some modules are still in development, we invite users to explore the existing content and provide valuable feedback. Tell us:

- Which materials are most useful to you?
- How can we do better?

Your input will help ensure the Learning Platform and future modules are as effective and impactful as possible.

Access the Learning Platform:



*NaturaConnect Consortium meeting in Grenoble.
Picture by Sandra Grego, EUROPARC*

JOIN

the Learning Platform,
explore the training modules
and conduct your TNA today!



LIFE ENABLE:

TRANSFORMATIVE CAPACITY BUILDING - CREATING THE EUROPEAN NATURE ACADEMY

Completed in July 2024, LIFE ENABLE supported EU policies such as the Green Deal and the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy. The project worked to provide capacity building for Natura 2000 managers. It helped Member States to improve conservation practices, enhance management quality and meet practical challenges facing biodiversity. Discover all that the project achieved in three years!





Article written by **NEIL MCINTOSH**

former LIFE ENABLE project manager and current
LIFE PAME Europe project manager



PRACTICAL TRAINING APPLIED TO MEET POLICY TARGETS & BIODIVERSITY CHALLENGES

To help Member States deliver better outcomes for nature and people, LIFE ENABLE created a European-level training system to build capacity at national, regional, organisational, and site levels. Launched in January 2023, the European Nature Academy (ENA) became a dynamic and innovative learning hub for Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners. Through this co-learning community, nine competence-based training courses were developed and delivered, meeting high-quality standards agreed upon by project partners.

WHY IS THE ENA TRANSFORMATIVE & WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE?

The European Nature Academy (ENA) is the only dedicated learning platform offering comprehensive, competence-based training for Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners. Its courses, materials, and delivery methods are designed to enhance practical skills and deepen knowledge across legislative, regulatory, managerial, technical, and administrative aspects of Natura 2000 site management.

From the outset, LIFE ENABLE partners aimed to innovate capacity building by introducing innovative learning approaches tailored to diverse training needs. Key features of the ENA include:

- **A co-learning space** for a networked community of nature professionals
- **Hybrid learning**, mixing face-to-face networking offline and online, incorporating case studies and expert presentations
- **Applied learning**, focusing on real-life assignments to improve practice.
- **High-quality standards**, ensuring consistency in content and expert delivery.
- **Interactive methods and tools**, designed to engage and stimulate participants.
- **Extensive resources**, including case studies and expert contributions for site-level knowledge sharing.
- **A rich self-learning library**, supporting continuous professional growth.
- **Flexible learning pace**, allowing professionals to balance training with work and personal commitments.

Additionally, two new online Natura 2000 Training Needs Analysis tools, available in five languages, help individuals, teams, and organisations identify key competency gaps. These purpose-built tools provide valuable insights to inform capacity-building plans and guide future training investments.

NEW, RECURRING AND INCREASING MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

LIFE ENABLE's capacity-building courses support all staff working in Natura 2000 and Protected Areas, not just managers. Anyone contributing to effective site management can co-develop and apply practical solutions to real challenges.

Many nature management professionals, whether new to the field or highly experienced, have never received formal training in essential competencies. Feedback from ENA participants highlights key areas where training is in high demand:

- Management planning – production and processes
- Conflict resolution and building cross sectorial relationships
- Stakeholder engagement and participatory management
- Effective communication techniques and tools.

Across these areas, there is an urgent need to build capacity and equip nature managers with the training, knowledge, skills, and attitudes they will increasingly require in the future. Effective nature management is as much about people as it is about nature, meaning it also involves understanding human psychology. While technical expertise is essential, successful nature management also depends on navigating political, social, and economic factors.

Applying new skills and ideas



ENA Participant feedback



ENA induction meeting at Schneverdingen.
Picture by Sandra Grego, EUROPARC.

EVALUATING THE ENA'S RESULTS

The ENA is now a unique and comprehensive capacity-building resource, designed to meet current and future policy needs for Natura 2000, nature protection, and restoration. The External Evaluation highlights the platform's flexibility, noting that courses can be adapted or re-run to meet specific demands. This includes offering shorter courses for those with time constraints or creating tailor-made mini-courses for specific roles, such as communication specialists or project managers.

The Evaluation results speak for themselves:

- Demand for ENA places was more than double the available spots, with 166 participants selected from 34 countries.
- Participants reviewed the ENA Platform and course materials a positive rating of 4.5 out of 5.
- 94% of participants reported improved digital skills, and 89% felt more confident working online.
- 100% found the course content engaging, 95% found the training clear and relevant, and 96% felt it applied directly to their work.
- Between 92% and 95% valued the blended learning approach, finding it suitable and engaging.
- Overall, 96% of participants would recommend the courses, with 92% to 96% appreciating the networking opportunities and new knowledge gained.

Most notably, almost all participants are already applying their learning in their work, underscoring the immediate relevance and impact of the ENA's applied approach.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT
THE PROJECT HERE!**



Final Project event at Castelfranco, Italy in May 2024

CONCLUDING REMARKS

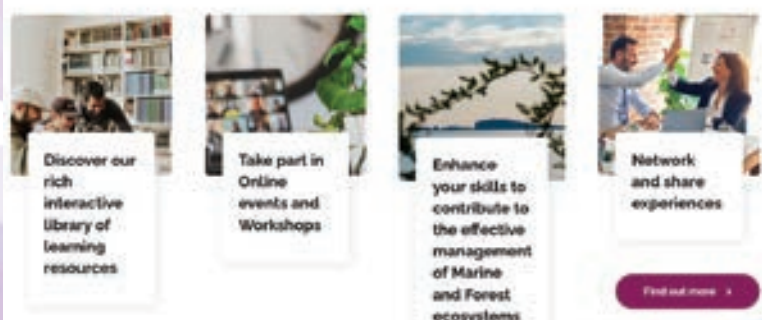
LIFE ENABLE and the ENA have shown that the future of capacity building lies in the provision of quality participatory online learning, especially when combined with a greater range of online only, or hybrid (including face-to-face) courses. LIFE ENABLE and the ENA have demonstrated that the future of capacity building lies in high-quality, participatory online learning, especially when complemented by hybrid courses. The ENA has filled a critical gap in professional development for Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners, offering a unique, comprehensive focus on practical, applied co-learning, peer-to-peer networking, and competence-based training. Participants have confirmed that, while they were experienced in technical management, the ENA provided the essential training needed to improve their management practices.

Looking ahead, demand for this kind of capacity building is set to grow, driven by the increasing challenges of managing Europe's nature to meet social, economic, and ecological goals. To tackle the challenges ahead, including expanding restoration efforts and protecting more areas, effective, sustainable, and inclusive management is crucial.

Essentially, individual practitioners, all forms of organisations working in Natura 2000 sites and Protected Areas, and also Member States, need to develop the knowledge skills and attitudes required for effective management of nature and people. Technical skills, knowledge and experience are not in themselves enough to achieve conservation objectives. The ENA meets this need heads-on.

Strengthening the role of Natura 2000's key players

Natura 2000 and Protected Area managers are integral to ensuring progress towards the ambitions of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy at a local, national, and European level. This is why we invite you to:



CREATING EUROPE'S NATURAL GREEN HEALTH CENTRES

EUROPARC has been an Advisory Partner of the Interreg Europe GREENHEALTH project since April 2023. The project aims to enhance the connection between biodiversity conservation and human health and well-being in six regions throughout Europe. Our advisory role focuses on capacity building, stakeholder engagement processes and communications.



Article written by **ANNA CASTELLI**

EUROPARC Federation project manager for the Interreg Europe GREENHEALTH project



Interreg GREENHEALTH Project Partners

LEVERAGING PROTECTED AREAS AS 'NATURAL HEALTH CENTRES' WITH GREENHEALTH

During the COVID-19 crisis, Protected Areas experienced a steep increase in visitors, underscoring the vital role that natural sites play in supporting our mental and physical health. But how can we maximise the potential of these 'natural health centres' while ensuring environmental conservation?

For the local administrations involved in the GREENHEALTH partnership,

a significant challenge was the lack of a platform for Park authorities to interact with health and social sectors over common challenges and opportunities to use natural spaces to improve citizens' well-being without compromising environmental conservation.

By offering specialised support through the EUROPARC Federation's Healthy Parks Healthy People

Europe toolkit, EUROPARC has contributed to enhancing the health and environmental conservation opportunities for the GREENHEALTH participating administrations and their communities. The initiative focuses on policy, fostering partnerships, and implementing practices to connect the health and conservation sectors.

THE HPHPE TOOLKIT AS A METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE

To support this process, EUROPARC held a training session on the Healthy Parks Healthy People Toolkit for partners and key stakeholders at the project's Kick-Off Meeting.

The Toolkit serves as our methodological compass to identify and share regional good practices with other partners in the three focus areas of the project: 'Management of Protected Areas' (incl. enhancing staff capacities), 'Partnerships and Coordination' (primarily with the health sector, but also involving transport and social sectors, etc.), and 'Sustainable Inclusivity'.

Using the HPHPe toolkit has been instrumental in determining Good Practices in the different project focus areas, and in identifying areas for improvement, expansion, and knowledge transfer.

LOCAL LIVING LABS: BREAKING DOWN SILOS

A key innovation of the project has been the establishment of Local Living Labs (LLs) in the project partner regions, involving key stakeholders in each territory to share their experiences in utilising natural spaces for health and well-being. These groups meet twice a year and their members also participate in inter-regional learning events and study visits.

LLs facilitate connections among actors who typically operate 'in silos', allowing them to understand each other's realities. These 'Labs' act as venues for gathering knowledge, exchanging information, and identifying innovative actions. Key stakeholders join and contribute to the momentum needed to "make things happen" or enhance ongoing initiatives in their communities.

REGIONAL STUDY SYNTHESIS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

EUROPARC Spain assisted the Lead Partner in producing a GREENHEALTH Regional Study Synthesis Report. This report, compiled during the first semester of the project, identifies regional initiatives for nature protection and health outcomes, consolidating results from partner studies. It guides partners in prioritising future key policies and practices.

The project's capacity building activities have included multiple workshops, both online and in four transnational events, as well as individual meetings with partners to discuss their Good Practices. After 18 months, we have observed improved work quality and a growing interest in the project and its outcomes.

GROWING COLLABORATION AND IMPACT

To date, over 50 public, private, educational and not for profit entities across the project regions have contributed to GREENHEALTH initiatives. Several organisations have shared their good practices during the inter-regional learning workshops focusing on the management of Protected Areas, partnerships and coordination, and sustainable inclusivity.

STAY CONNECTED

The Interreg GREENHEALTH project has much more in store! Sign up for the newsletter, available in six languages, to stay updated on new developments and results.



Interreg
Europe



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GREENHEALTH

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NEWSLETTER!**

INNOVATIVE COMMUNICATION CONCEPTS

BRIDGING THE GAP:
TURNING KNOWLEDGE
INTO ACTION FOR
PROTECTED AREAS



Article written by **JANA BAUMGARTNER MSC**

Team Forest at E.C.O. Institut für Ökologie

THE COMPLEXITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Environmental problems are complex. They involve many stakeholders, each with different interests, competing demands on resources such as water and forests, and global threats such as climate change, biodiversity loss and changes in land use. So how can Protected Area practitioners access and apply the most up-to-date information to ensure effectively managed Parks?

CLOSING THE SCIENCE-PRACTICE DIVIDE

Research is producing many solutions to complex problems. The academic world is brimming with results that contribute to solving complex environmental issues. However, environmental practitioners and policymakers rarely find the time and resources to engage intensively with the

latest scientific findings. At E.C.O., we work closely with both practitioners and scientists. Right from the start, we realized that there is a gap between what science delivers and how it is put into practice. This disconnect, known as the “science-policy interface,” was first identified in the 1970s as a key barrier in global environmental policy. This underlined the need to translate practice-relevant knowledge from the theoretical world.





We live in an era of modern technology. With just a few clicks, we have access to an overwhelming amount of information on virtually any topic. But how can we make sense of this information? How can we use all the available data to solve complex problems?

Workshop on Forest Management as part of the ENA course.

In our projects, we have used communication and collaboration tools that bring stakeholders together and present scientific findings in an easily understandable way. Visualisation tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and data modelling techniques help translate complex scientific data into actionable insights that can be easily understood by practitioners and decision-makers. Collaborative platforms such as webinars, virtual conferences, and knowledge-sharing hubs focus on pressing questions and make research accessible to practitioners. This approach ensures that conservation strategies are both evidence-based and grounded in real-world contexts.

Workshop on Forest Management as part of the ENA course.



THE LIFE ENABLE PROJECT: TURNING KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION

As part of the LIFE ENABLE project, together with EUROPARC, we developed several webinars on topics such as nature restoration, use of new technologies and digitalisation in nature conservation, as well as payment for ecosystem services. Our aim was to create interaction by asking questions, engaging participants in discussions and sharing their experiences. This approach created a two-way communication channel that is often missing in conventional scientific publications.

Through the process, we have learned that a proactive and participatory approach is required to understand future knowledge needs. Regular assessments and feedback loops with Protected Area managers can help identify gaps in skills, knowledge and resources. Direct involvement of practitioners through workshops, meetings or webinars allows managers to name their challenges and the specific areas where they need support. This input is invaluable in developing targeted programmes that address real issues and are based on local priorities. This exchange not only clarifies complex scientific concepts but also informs researchers, ensuring future studies are relevant and solution-oriented.

Solving conservation problems requires a commitment to lifelong learning through the use of tools that are easily accessible, flexible and solution-oriented.

Access the webinars!

Learn more about E.C.O.





ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENT “FRAME OF LIFE”:

Day field work by Aleksandar Stefanović - Ecological movement Frame of life

CITIZEN SCIENCE DRIVING CONSERVATION

Citizen science is a powerful tool for conservation work in and around Protected Areas – it provides a lot of data, fosters the interest of citizens in nature and decision-making processes and promotes Protected Areas to the wider public. It also creates deep, meaningful and long-lasting connections between people and local Protected Areas.



Article written by **IVANA RADOVIĆ**

Ecological Movement ‘Frame of Life’.

THE CITIZEN SCIENCE INITIATIVE: A TWO-PART APPROACH

In 2023, the ecological movement “Frame of Life” demonstrated the potential of citizen science in biodiversity monitoring and advocacy for Protected Areas. The initiative focused on the Monument of Nature

Ribnica, a 28-hectare site with immense biodiversity. Expert studies indicated that it was too small and should be expanded, as various different parts of Ribnica gorge, which are very rich in biodiversity, remain unprotected and are, therefore, vulnerable to threats. The main risk factors are a planned

dam construction upstream of the Protected Area in an unprotected part of the gorge and pollution from different sources. During this project, a community of citizen scientists was created, a crucial step for stronger involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. The implementation of the project followed a two-part approach:

1. Collaborative research: scientists from academic institutions teamed up with citizen scientists in order to conduct desk and field research on biodiversity in the wider Ribnica Gorge area.

2. Advocacy: an advocacy campaign was launched to initiate the process of expanding the Protected Area.

Scientists from the Faculty of Biology at the University of Belgrade provided expertise during the field work, data management, species determination and writing of publications.

The results were groundbreaking, the project identified six new animal species, unknown to science, and 12 new animal species never before recorded in Serbia. In total, 944 species were catalogued. The research also revealed that Ribnica gorge serves as a unique glacial refugium, making it a site of global importance for biodiversity conservation.

*Night field work by Aleksandar Stefanović,
Ecological movement Frame of life*

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Based on the findings, the project proposed a fivefold expansion of the Protected Area. The approval process is still ongoing. Participants have urged the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to reconsider possible funding plans for a dam project on the Ribnica River, due to its potential catastrophic impact on this fragile ecosystem.

RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT

The Frame of Life initiative was supported by the IMPETUS project, funded under the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation program ("Citizens for SDG 15.1", grant agreement number 101058677). Its success earned an honorary mention in the EU Prize for Citizen Science Projects in 2023.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS PROJECT!



7-10 October

EUROPARC Conference

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2025 EUROPARC

Nature for People, People for Nature

7-10 October, Birštonas, Lithuania

Photo: Meteliai Regional Park, Lithuania, by Laurynas Andriušis.

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