



GRUNDTVIG Learning Partnership “European Volunteers in Parks”

August 2008 – July 2010

Experiences and results



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Introduction

The GRUNDTVIG Learning Partnership „European volunteers in parks“ (August 2008-July 2010) has been a great opportunity for the eight project partners throughout Europe, to build a lively network on the highly topical subject of volunteers in protected areas and to advance volunteer management in parks.

The documentation gives an insight into the project's results, and will support volunteer coordinators in parks in their daily work, demonstrate the quality of professional volunteer management to decision makers and enhance the enthusiasm for international cooperation of park management.

Thanks to all project partners, national project coordinators, participants of the workshops and volunteers for the fruitful and stimulating cooperation.

Looking forward to extending our collaboration with you for the benefit of European protected areas and volunteers in parks,

Anne Schierenberg, EUROPARC Deutschland/Germany

Please note:

If you wish to gain more insight into the activities and results of the Learning Partnership, please have a look at the webpage www.volunteers-in-parks.eu.

Project Partners

Country/Organisation	Name	Address	Telephone/Fax	E-Mail	Topic related websites
Germany EUROPARC Deutschland <u>Associated partner</u> EUROPARC Federation	Anne Schierenberg Federico Minozzi	Friedrichstr. 60 10117 Berlin	T: +49/(0)30/2887882-15 F: +49/(0)30/2887882-16	anne.schierenberg@europarc-deutschland.de	www.freiwillige-in-parks.de www.volunteers-in-parks.eu
Iceland Umhverfisstofnun (Environment Agency of Iceland)	Chas Goemans	Suðurlandsbraut 24 108 Reykjavík	T: +354/(0)5912000 F: +354/(0)5912020	chas@ust.is	
Italy Federparchi – EUROPARC Italia	Stefania Petrosillo	Via C. Colombo 163 00147 Roma	T: +39/06/51604940 F: +39/06/5138400	coopint.federparchi@parks.it	
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Lithuania Lietuvos Valstybinių Parku ir Rezervatu Asociacija (Association of Lithuanian State Parks and Reserves)	Gedas Kukanauskas	Didžioji g. 10 90420 Plateliai, Plunge raj.	T: +370/(0)44849337 F: +370/(0)44849337	info@parkai.lt	
Romania Administrația Parcului Național Muntii Rodnei (Rodna Mountains National Park Administration)	Claudiu Iusan	Principala Street, No. 1455 427 245 Rodna	T: +40/(0)263377715 F: +40/(0)263377181	iusan2000@yahoo.com	
Spain Fundación Interuniversitaria Fernando González Bernáldez para los espacios naturales (Foundation for natural landscapes Fernando González Bernáldez) <u>Associated partner</u> Sección del Estado español de la Federación EUROPARC (EUROPARC-España)	Marta Múgica de la Guerra Javier Puertas Blázquez	ICEI. Finca Mas Ferre, Edif. A. Campus de Somosaguas 28223 Madrid	T: +34/(0)913942522 F: +34/(0)91394287	martamugica@europarc-es.org jpuertas@europarc-es.org	
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Objectives and activities

The objectives of the Learning Partnership were

- to promote the culture of active citizenship (volunteering in parks as active and creative means of being citizen)
- to spread the importance of nature/biodiversity conservation as well as of sustainable development and hereby raise the parks' profile locally and nationally
- to create good surrounding conditions for volunteers in parks (support, recognition)
- to improve the volunteer management efficiency
- to establish a network of organisations involved in volunteering in parks as well as of community projects associated with parks; this facilitates knowledge and experience acquisition, capacity building (shared learning) and gaining support
- to bring recognition forward that parks, environmental NGOs etc. across Europe which already offer informal life long learning through volunteering (i.e. communication, inter-personal skills, management and project organisation skills), although not yet recognised as a mechanism for life long learning
- to broaden the horizons of the individual participants in educational and cultural terms and to stimulate creativity

Realised activities within the Learning Partnership were

Involving project partners:

- Kick-off meeting of project partners; Brasov, Romania; 24 Sept. 2008
- Closure meeting of project partners; London, United Kingdom; 3-4 May 2010
- Setup of a website as information and learning platform: www.volunteers-in-parks.eu
- Publicity on national and international level
- Common publication "Learning Partnership 'European volunteers in parks' – Experiences and results"
- Evaluation of the Learning Partnership

Involving volunteer coordinators:

- Workshop for volunteer coordinators I; Flusslandschaft Elbe Biosphere Reserve, Germany; 26-30 Nov. 2008
- Workshop for volunteer coordinators II; Abruzzo National Park, Italy; 1-5 April 2009
- Workshop for volunteer coordinators III; Gauja National Park, Latvia; 30 Sept.-4 Oct. 2009
- Development of short-term volunteering offers for foreign volunteers

Involving volunteers:

- Short term volunteering in foreign parks (in total 19) and evaluation



(Two German volunteers on Iceland)

The role of volunteer coordinators in protected areas

The role of volunteer coordinators in protected areas throughout Europe was intensively discussed in three international workshops for volunteer coordinators. The following list is a result of the 1st workshop in Germany, Nov. 2008.

Their most important tasks

- Keeping an overview
- Managing finances
- Finding funding
- Recruiting volunteers
- Finding work projects
- Developing volunteer opportunities
- Organising the volunteer tasks
- Managing logistics (food, equipment, transport etc.)
- Managing safety
- Promoting awareness within the staff (and partners)
- Coordinating cooperation with other departments and external partners
- Organising training and learning opportunities
- Supporting single volunteers
- Promoting communication
- Showing appreciation
- Managing conflicts
- Organising social events for volunteers
- Attending volunteer meetings
- Staying in contact after volunteer job
- Keeping record
- Organising assessment of activities
- Writing references
- Planning on long-term
- Being full-time available

Necessary qualities, skills... of volunteer coordinators

- Positive person
- Attractive (personality)
- Mobile
- Able to identify threats/dangers of volunteer jobs
- Realistic
- Well-organised
- Mediator
- Communicator/good listener
- Able to do 20 tasks at once
- Decisive
- Patient
- Coherent
- Open-minded
- With local knowledge
- Putting passion in what he/she is doing
- Leadership qualities
- Flexible, adaptable
- Enthusiastic
- Initiative
- Social person
- Team-player
- Extravert
- With a sense of humour
- Creative

What do volunteer coordinators especially need as training, support etc.?

- Training in leadership skills, communication, mediation
- Formal support (time budget), acceptance

Short-term volunteering descriptions

One objective of the Learning Partnership was the cross-boarder exchange of short-term volunteers. Volunteers were sent to a foreign park for a period of generally one to three weeks. For finding the right volunteer for a specific position the parks outlined and published specific volunteer placement descriptions. You find an example below.



Short term volunteering GRUNDTVIG Learning Partnership – “European volunteers in parks”

Placement for volunteers

HOST

Name of protected area or organisation:
Consorti del Parc de Collserola

Person in charge – name of volunteer coordinator/tutor:
Glòria Arribas i Muñoz

Address: Carretera de l'Església 92, E-08017 Barcelona

Phone: (+34) 93 280 06 72

E-mail: voluntaris@parccollserola.net

Fax: (+34) 93 280 28 40

Web: www.parccollserola.net

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Duration of volunteer placement: 12 days

Dates: 15-26 October 2009

Arrival/departure point: Barcelona

Tasks the volunteer will undertake:

Works relationship with the maintenance and the improvement of a natural area:
habitat management, construction work, monitoring, etc.

Working together with other foreigners: no

Approx. working time per day: 4-5 hours

Knowledge, skills, language skills, interests required:

To speak Spanish, Catalan or English language, interests in the works of the maintenance and the improvement of a natural area

Equipment required from volunteers: suitable clothes

ACCOMMODATION AND BOARD

Location of accommodation: 20' to Barcelona centre, near the Information Park Office

Single-bed room no
Double-bed room no
Others (please specify): rooms 20 people

Shared bath room yes

Cooking possibilities yes

Possibility to meet special dietary requirements:

Vegetarian food yes

Vegan food yes

Daily rates for food according to regional conditions (Euro per day, paid by sending country): 10€

Accommodation costs (Euro per day, paid by sending country): 20€

OTHER COMMENTS

Check list for volunteer coordinators: Hosting foreign volunteers

(Meldra Langenfelde, Nature Conservation Agency/Latvia, Anne Schierenberg, EUROPARC Deutschland/Germany)

Hosting international volunteers is an ambitious task for protected areas and requires good preparation. The following check list is based on experiences from the Learning Partnership.

Phases	Tasks of coordinators
Motivation and preparation	
Motivation	<p>Be clear that you would like to work with volunteers. Clarify this opinion with colleagues, especially of the head of the organisation. You can organise an informal information seminar about volunteering in protected areas to give an insight and answer questions, showing the benefits for the protected area and organisation. It is advisable to have supporters among the colleagues who could help in the management of volunteers if necessary.</p>
Infrastructure	<p>There must be time and capacity to involve and manage volunteers – room for volunteers, available computer and printer, telephone, internet access, office equipment, tools and transportation (including fuel).</p>
Legal status	<p>You must clarify the legal status of volunteers in your country – what does the legislation say about insurances, responsibilities, agreements and labour safety.</p>
Kind of involvement, duration and support	<p>Before inviting volunteers you must state clearly their key roles and tasks. Prepare a description for every job. Point out the duration. Identify maximum and minimum times of the involvement, and the skills and attributes of the volunteer you are searching for, available / needed equipment, provided services, accessibility to work place and free time plan. Involve media and announce the possibility to apply as a volunteer in your PA. Put as detailed as possible the information about volunteering possibilities on your home page. Ensure contact phone numbers and / or e-mail address are provided. Plan your own time to manage the volunteers Involve your colleagues in the preparation of the arrival of volunteers.</p>
Decision taking (for international volunteers)	<p>When volunteers have shown an interest in being involved in the volunteering, send them a volunteer questionnaire to get to know more about them and their contact details. If the volunteer seems to be appropriate, invite them for an informal interview, if it is possible, to your office to clear all the possible questions from both sides and to give full understanding into the kind of involvement of a volunteer in your organisation. Have a telephone interview with an international volunteer to be sure that you will be able to communicate at least on a minimal basis. Prepare and update a data base about your volunteers that includes contact details, description of the person, possible kinds of involvements etc.</p>
Before arrival (for international volunteers)	<p>Provide accommodation within your organisation or help to find a cheap place for them to stay in close to your office. Remember all the things needed for living – have finances to purchase it or use other ways, such as second hand or borrowing.</p>

Motivation and preparation (cont.)	
Costs of transportation	Provide a bike or office car for mobility or explain the ways how the costs for fuel will be reimbursed.
Language (for foreign volunteers)	Please ensure that you will be able to communicate with a volunteer in at least in one common language. Provide a possibility to learn your native language in a course, if necessary. Encourage your colleagues to learn / to speak (use) foreign languages in communication to volunteers.
Setting the rules	Talk to every volunteer about the conditions of the role, involvement into the organisation, safety, use of tools and transport, as well as living conditions. Sign an agreement and agree on insurance issues.
On arrival	
Assistance for foreign volunteers	Provide a detailed and easy to use description of how to get to your office. Meet your volunteer on the day of arrival if possible. Help with adapting to the new country, Explain things that could be different from volunteer's home-country.
Information about the organisation and PA	Provide information about your organisation and protected area, and answer any questions.
Introduction into work	Give detailed information about the tasks of the volunteer, possible assistance, duration of work hours and available equipment.
Communication to volunteers	Be open and available to volunteer as much as possible. Indicate the telephone number on which you are available in case of emergency.
Equipment	Provide equipment to the volunteer and explain how to use it, where to keep it and how to care for it.
Health and safety requirements	Explain all health and safety requirements and risks that are connected to duties of volunteer(s). Agree on behaviour that is not accepted in the organisation and protected area. Explain how to act in case of emergency.
Integration into the organisation	Let the volunteer feel welcome to your organisation. Involve them in decision making where appropriate, as well as in free-time activities. Make friends!
Cultural integration (for foreign volunteers)	Outline the cultural of your community. Visit some of events together, if possible. Provide a possibility to show the volunteer's culture and traditions to the organisation or local community.
Work with media, PR	Tell the media about volunteering in your organisation / protected area both to local and if possible regional or national level. Send press releases on every special event you organise together with volunteer. Invite in interested journalist to take an interview of your volunteer. Put information regularly on homepage about activities of volunteer(s). Let them produce an article and pictures for the homepage or even publication. Take pictures of all activities – make a kind of photo and information archive.

On arrival (cont.)	
Regular support	The more you are able to support your volunteer, the more response and initiative you may receive from them. If there are any problems, try to find an early solution to them. Look for help, if necessary. Be open to critics – have evaluation of the process, if necessary.
Appreciation	Tell volunteer(s) about your and your colleagues' satisfaction of their work.
By the end of involvement	
Express of gratitude	Prepare and collect presents to express gratitude to volunteer(s) about their involvement. Involve sponsors for it.
Handing out a 'certificate'	By the end of the cooperation prepare a certificate for volunteer(s) that acknowledges all the work that has been done and qualification of volunteer. You may also look for some kind of official recognition.
Evaluation of involvement with volunteers	At the end of cooperation do an evaluation together. Talk about all aspects of volunteering, discuss positive and also negative experience. Find suggestions for improvements. Advise volunteer(s) on their future involvement, if necessary.
Evaluation of involvement with colleagues	Provide evaluation results to colleagues and discuss with them all the aspects. Look for solutions and improvements, by involving all parties. Do not forget to say thanks also to them for cooperation! And do not forget to be proud of yourself for the great work you do!



(Italian volunteer in Gauja National Park, Latvia)

Evaluation form for volunteers

Returning from their short-term international volunteering stay volunteers were asked to evaluate their experiences. The following form was used to record the volunteer's opinion.

Other reports of experience can be found on www.volunteers-in-parks.eu (short-term volunteering, reports of experience).

Short-term volunteering evaluation form

Please could you take just a few minutes to provide us with some feedback from your volunteering experience by answering 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe' to the following statements:

Location: Volunteer work:	yes	no	maybe
I feel that I have carried out some meaningful work.			
The voluntary activities came up to my expectations.			
I was able to bring my own skills, interests and ideas to the project.			
I was provided with sufficient information about the project and what was required.			
If there was a problem or a question, I always knew whom I could contact.			
Most of the personnel accepted me as a colleague.			
I learnt many interesting things about the area in which I was volunteering.			
I have been very happy with my volunteer time here.			

Thank you. This information will help us to improve the experience for future volunteers.

Please return the completed form to:



(Latvian volunteer in Rodna Mountains National Park, Romania)

Check list for international workshops

(Meldra Langenfelde and Iveta Iveta Biseniece, Nature Conservation Agency/Latvia, Stefania Petrosillo, Federparchi/EUROPARC Italia/Italy)

In the course of the Learning Partnership three international workshops for volunteer coordinators in protected areas took place. The following check list is based on the experience of organising these events.

Procedure/ document/ activity	Description	Priority
Before the workshop (Look also in following sections)		
First step	Define the objectives of the workshop. Decide who should attend. Set a date (or agree on a date with other potential participants).	High
Financial planning	List all costs, decide how much you can spend. Define costs covered by organiser and costs covered by participants. Detail how payments can be made and set a deadline for payment.	High
Agenda/ time-table	Set the agenda to fulfill the workshop objectives and ensure a balanced time-table, mix between active and passive sessions. Identify the optimal time for breaks. Take into account any suggestions from the previous workshops.	High
Facilitator/ organizing working group	Involve colleagues from your organisation. Agree on distribution of tasks. Involve volunteers or recruit other staff if needed.	High
Moderator/ speakers	Choose and invite moderator and presenters / speakers. Prepare a brief for the speakers outlining the purpose of their presentations and timings. Agree on deadline for sending in the presentations for checking and uploading on the seminar's computer or preparation (copying) of printouts for participants. Agree on fee (if there are finances for it), ask them to send data for an agreement or any other document that states the given presentation. Agree on travel expenses and the way how they will be covered.	High
Invitation letter/ regis- tration	Create a registration form – clear and easy to complete. Set deadline for registration. Specify method of registration (by e-mail or fax, etc.). Require essential information – name, surname, organization, arrival and departure, special meal requirements (dietary, vegetarian, etc.), also accommodation wishes (if rooms are to be shared) and internet access. Send out invitation letters and registration forms to potential participants as soon as possible. Send out reminders and ensure that they have received the information. Send confirmation of registration to participants. Compile a final list of registered participants. Do not forget to inform the host and catering company about the numbers and dietary requirements of the participants.	High
Working room	Find and book a workshop room with appropriate facilities – equipment, room lay-out, easy to oversee, room-size. Easy to get to from the main points of arrival. Provide facilities to promote participating organisations. Organise facilities for tea/coffee breaks.	High

Procedure/ document/ activity	Description	Priority
Before the workshop, cont. (Look also in following sections)		
Accommodation	Decide, who will be responsible for the hotel-booking: 1) facilitator books accommodation for workshop participants at the workshop venue (if possible) or book hotels or accommodations easy to get to from the workshop venue. 2) inform participants about nearest hotels to the workshop venue (send hotels' web page links) and let participants to be responsible for booking. Ask them to inform you after successful reservation of hotel and travel. Keep in mind that there might be participants in the workshop who require special accessibility of buildings and surrounding area.	High
Catering	Organise meals – breakfast, lunch, tea and coffee breaks, dinner. Take into account special meal requirements of participants. Either hire a caterer at the workshop venue or prepare list of closest restaurants and how to get there. Ensure water and soft drinks in working room during the sessions.	High
Transportation	Think about the accessibility of the location to public and international transport hubs. Give information on local public transport and if possible ticket prices and timetables available on the web. If necessary you may need to organize local shuttle transport between accommodation and venue or from local transport locations.	High
Events	Plan events for evenings, as well as some out-door activities – do not forget to let participants know in advance about the activities.	Recommended
Final mailing	Contents: – workshop title, dates, location (home page advisable); – description of workshop venue (home page advisable); – postal address, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail address of facilitator; – accommodation details and locations related to workshop venue (a map); – transportation information; – dress code for all activities; – possible 'home work' – things to be taken with or arranged before coming to workshop.	High
Additional information	Contents: – currency information and exchange facilities, ATMs; – weather forecast; – information about country; – emergency numbers, – medical services; – visa requirements; – electricity (plugs, voltage); – telephone/fax/internet accessibility.	Recommended
Workshop Pack	Prepare Workshop Pack with contents: note paper, updated agenda, list of participants, evaluation form, logistical information, souvenirs etc.	Recommended
Badges and name tags	Produce name badges for workshop participants and facilitators. Prepare and do not forget a registration sheet for participants to sign in.	High

Procedure/ document/ activity	Description	Priority
Just before and during the workshop		
Working room	Final check. Prepare projector, computer, all presentations and presentation area. Ensure stationery. Distribute Workshop Packs.	High
List of participants	Update list of attendant participants.	High
Agenda/ time-table	Run workshop to agenda timings but be flexible to change your scheduling, if necessary. Be open to suggestions and provide any assistance if needed. Have colleagues or helpers to handle these situations.	High
Certificate of participation	Prepare and distribute certificates of participation.	Recommended
Evaluation of workshop	Prepare evaluation forms – best before the seminar, because later there might not be time or facilities to print out or to copy. Collect evaluation forms.	High
After the workshop		
Workshop documentation	Summarize evaluation forms. Prepare workshop documentation. Send out workshop documentation and summary of evaluation to participants.	Recommended
Payments	Make all the payments on time.	High
Thank you letters	Send out thank you letters to participants and partners.	Recommended
Wrap-up meeting	Hold facilitators wrap-up meeting. Discuss lessons–learned, good-practice, difficulties.	High
Valorization	Promote and inform the media about workshop (briefs, press releases, etc.). Disseminate and exploit results of the workshop.	High
During all the process		
Communication	Draft press releases and decide ways of dissemination.	High
Logos	Don't forget to include logos and all the information required by funding organisations and partners on all materials of the workshop.	High

Benefits: for hosting parks, sending parks and volunteers

(Dan Bloomfield, EUROPARC Atlantic Isles/UK)

What is the outcome of international volunteer exchanges? Who benefits and in which aspects? The following list summarizes the benefits to parks hosting and sending volunteers as well as the benefits to volunteers themselves.

Benefits to parks hosting volunteers

Tangible benefits

For the parks managers themselves, the project accrued a number of very practical benefits. Parks are under financial threat across Europe, and these sorts of pragmatic, direct and tangible benefit are very significant, especially in terms of securing buy-in from participating parks in any future work. They include:

- helping in activity management
- marking thematic trails
- organising environmental education activities
- translating the information materials into a foreign language
- collecting biological data from the field
- helping the communication skills of the administrators
- mounting tourism infrastructure in the park
- monitoring visitor activity helping to organise different events including symposiums, conferences, festivals
- disseminating informative materials
- carrying out questionnaires for assessing the public awareness local stakeholders or visitors regarding the park

Intangible benefits

- bringing new experience for the administrators of the park
- increasing the level of communication, and the degree of collaboration, between park administrators and local communities and stakeholders
- promoting local nature and economic values of the protected areas
- increasing the level of confidence of the protected area administration
- diversifying the activities of park managers
- improving the image of the protected area in surrounding communities

Network benefits

- increasing the collaboration between different protected areas
- establishing partnerships between different protected areas from European countries
- interchange of experiences, work together with people from other countries
- gaining in-depth insights into other countries and parks

Benefits to parks sending volunteers

Our surveyed parks reported a series of benefits that accrued to them when they sent volunteers on mobilities to other parks. These included:

- an increase in the level of collaboration with parks with which they had had no direct relationship previously, leading to a range of future potential collaborations and exchanges
- an increase in the level of knowledge and understanding throughout the staff of sending parks about GRUNDTVIG, further opportunities, and park management systems elsewhere
- the use of that knowledge to set in train further regional projects
- improvement in the motivation of all of a park's volunteers
- interchange of ideas and concepts
- recognition of the contribution made by sent volunteers and the improvement in their overall skills set

Benefits to the volunteers themselves

Learning

All our surveyed volunteers stated that they had gained a range of useful and interesting knowledge. Essentially this is the core of both this project and the EUROPARC network as a whole. Specific learning elements include: finding out how parks are managed in general; understanding specific management issues such as species monitoring or vegetation management; improving language skills; and gaining insight into different legislative and institutional frameworks.

Satisfaction and personal journey

All our surveyed volunteers reported general satisfaction with their experiences. These journeys represent considerable steps in terms of personal and professional growth. Conservation is traditionally a competitive yet poorly paid field, and volunteering is a common pathway for people to move to employment. By expanding the professional experience of volunteers to include an international element, our volunteers gain an important edge over others.

Assistance

Our survey of volunteers found that the majority felt that it was important to feel helped when need be. Outdoors, often in difficult terrain, it is particularly important that our volunteers felt welcomed in this way, able to ask for, and to expect, help.

Forming new relationships

Again, the majority of our surveyed volunteers reported a very basic yet crucial benefit that accrued to them personally; the formation of new relationships. This is again central to what the project is about; European parks require better networking and sharing between them; this is only possible if people come together, and *this* will only happen if the future generations of conservationists know who to contact and feel they will be welcomed.

Meaningful work

Nearly all our surveyed volunteers felt that the work they carried out was important. We wanted to ensure that this was the case as it is often too easy to give volunteers the less interesting, more routine tasks to do. Our volunteers returned knowing that they had made small but significant contributions to the conservation goals of the parks they visited.

Being valued

Half of our surveyed volunteers reported that they felt that their own skills, interests and ideas were brought to the work. We would have liked this to be a higher figure, and have given considerable thought to the question of how to improve this in possible future work. We feel that it is important because a sense of being valued, as a colleague and professional equal, is a prerequisite to a more firmly grounded sense of international collaboration.



(Spanish volunteer in Curonian Spit National Park, Lithuania)

Social networks in “Volunteers in Parks”

(Juan Diego López Giraldo, Programa de Voluntariado Ambiental, Espacios Protegidos, Region de Murcia/Spain; reviewers: Javier Puertas, EUROPARC España/Spain, Stefania Petrosillo, Federparchi-EUROPARC Italia/Italy, Anita Prosser, BTCV/UK)

Voluntary or self-organized action will be vital to our success. Our swiftly developing world situation is far too complex for any one individual or group to figure out and propose remedies that will work for everyone. Nonetheless, the world has become so interdependent that our consciousness as citizens needs to match the actual nature of the world of which we are inseparable part. Thus this will be a time for rapid learning and experimentations locally while being mindful of how we connect globally. From Duane Elgin. Promise Ahead. 2000. www.simpleliving.org

During 2009-2010, 100 years of national parks were celebrated, and it is more than ever recognized that people in parks are potential positive driving force to enhance natural values or for the contrary, it could be a damaging and destroying force of nature. As humans, we have the possibility to choose directions of our actions. And this is where education plays a key role in our life.

Developing and enhancing new connections in an interdependent world will provide a dynamic social system to influence the natural world somehow and at the same time, to feed us as humans trying to live together in harmony with nature which nowadays seems to be an utopia. But a lot of us are still struggling for a better world even in a voluntary simplicity.

International net

This GRUNDTVIG project has created an extensive social network at various levels. The protected areas web project offered a four days workshop experience in Flusslandschaft Elbe-Brandenburg Biosphere Reserve, in Burg Lenzen (Germany) then four days in Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park in Villetta Barrea (Italy) including a day as a volunteer in park and the last four days in Gauja National Park, Sigulda (Latvia) experiencing again a day as volunteer for the park and exchanging experiences with local associations and visiting unique ecosystems as Suda Swamp (bog) with a local wise guide and the local team. However this is the face value of these project meetings, there is much more and this is what more valuable of this particular GRUNDTVIG partnership as Lifelong Learning Programme.

More EU Countries for the net

Participants of the meetings came from a rainbow of organisations including Rodna Mountains National Park (also a biosphere reserve) in Romania, and Curonin Spit National Park and Kurtuvenai Regional Park from Lithuania, from Peak District National Park and Northumberland National Park from UK, from Regional Parks in Catalonia, Murcia and Canary Islands, from Spain and finally from the Environment Agency of Iceland.

Nº	Countries	Average Nº of Volunteer Coordinators / Volunteers as workshop participants
1	Iceland	1
2	Italy	6
3	Germany	4
4	Latvia	5
5	Spain	5
6	Lithuania	2
7	Romania	2
8	United Kingdom	2
	TOTAL	26

Figure 1. Average number of workshops' participants from eight different EU countries

National level networking

The GRUNDTVIG project offered opportunities to meet new park people from different European countries whose values, skills, hopes, knowledge, experience and beliefs are shared about nature conservation but not only on an international level, but a national one or even just locally. The national social-environmental network was strengthened as the project enabled participants from different parks and remote protected areas to meet others, even from their own country such as in Spain where park people met coming from Madrid, Barcelona, Canary Islands and Murcia – and a similar case in Italy, park people gathering together from Emilia Romagna Region, Roma, Abruzzo, Calabria and Florence. These meetings strengthen the sense of working together towards a common goal: Biodiversity conservation and people participation in protected areas at national level and also in Europe.

Institutional and organisational levels

The project has worked at a supranational level aiming to influence decision making process around issues of citizen involvement in biodiversity conservation and protected areas through to a local level with communities and local government. The involvement of volunteers in protected areas provides many positive achievements. One to be highlighted is volunteering as a source of good news for the media. It contributes to the profile raising of protected areas and the active role they play in managing the natural environment while public participation is promoted and enhanced by public servants. This is similarly true at a local level providing inspiration for local communities to become involved. The project has also helped the EUROPARC Federation secretariat work more closely with the national sections.

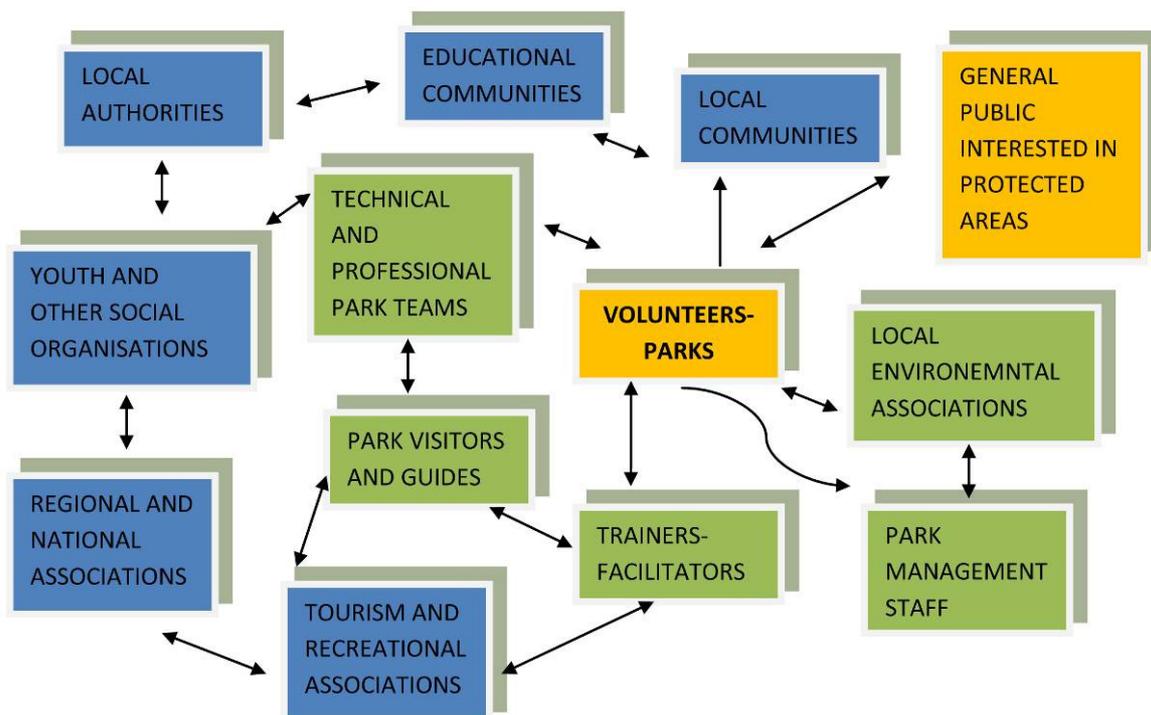


Figure 2. Diagram of a social network centre red on volunteers in parks

Thematic networking and the future

The potential and present impact of this new born network is significant with the use of a web based process of sharing experience and discussion. This is especially relevant at a country level but also by joining the country-regional and local-networks. Together significant impact and networking is achieved; reaching even an international echoes.

In addition, the network established already for this project could deal in the near future with the following key themes, arisen from GRUNDTVIG workshops:

- Citizen participation in conservation.
- Environmental volunteer programme/projects management.
- Participatory park management plans.
- Informal and non formal education and training at the park and for the park.
- Productive and “green self-reliance” activities linked to protected areas.
- Exchanging good citizen practices within similar ecosystems and conservation measurements.

These themes could be used to develop a forum to share experience and discussions for local, regional, national and European organisations around a common theme within this network. To make this work, the focus must be around practical solutions and address local needs, complimenting existing networks at various levels and sectors. The outcome of the discussions should be translated into political, economical and regulatory facts to be really effective otherwise they will be senseless.

Working with both horizontal and vertical strands in communications is needed but also working with other sectors such information, economy, technology and so on to show how agendas are linked, i.e. taking a holistic approach while planning new actions. In all these activities communication is essential in all directions as well as ensuring that other sectors are fairly weighted involved.



(Workshop for volunteer coordinators; Flusslandschaft Elbe Biosphere Reserve, Germany)

What do I do next?

(Dan Bloomfield, EUROPARC Atlantic Isles/UK)

This brief section of the report is intended as a simple resource for all park management staff, EUROPARC staff, and staff volunteers who may be considering taking a similar initiative forwards.

Lessons

First, we would like to report three simple insights that we have gained in the course of this project:

- Work with experienced volunteers where possible.
We found that those volunteers who had a reasonable amount of experience in volunteering in their home park were more likely to be able to contribute, and gain, significantly from the programme. As a guideline, we suggest at least one year's experience.
- Plan in full.
All parties benefit from a detailed and clearly understood plan of what the volunteer placement will involve. If the volunteer knows what is expected of her or him, and the park managers know what additional activity they can expect to achieve, the relationship will be good and the benefits to all will more readily accrue.
- Don't incorporate too much officialdom.
We found that volunteers wanted to outside, doing the work. All countries have a different attitude to things like the emphasis on health and safety issues, or how many meetings with managerial staff should be scheduled. Without ever offending a host park, we recommend that the focus always be on practical work, meeting operational staff and so on.

Next steps

- Secondly, we would direct others to a series of important resources:
- Look at other projects that have been completed. Search the existing online database (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/trainingdatabase/search.cfm>) using tightly defined search phrases.
- Go to our project page (www.volunteers-in-parks.eu), read through the documentation, contact us!
- Contact other parks. We recommend using the EUROPARC Federation members' page (www.europarc.org/who-we-are/our-members) in the first instance. Contact Section co-ordinators (www.europarc.org/who-we-are/our-sections), or the parks themselves directly.



(Spanish volunteer in Abruzzo National Park, Italy)

Impressum

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