

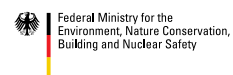
Living Landscapes

europa's
NATURE
REGIONAL
LANDSCAPE
PARKS

Results of the project "Europe's Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks"



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Imprint

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An overview map of the European Regional Nature Parks can be found on page 12/13.

Preface

Dear Reader,

Regional Nature Parks are model regions for the sustainable development of rural areas that serve the purpose of preserving Europe's outstanding landscapes with their natural and cultural diversity. In the framework of the project "Europe's Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks" and in cooperation with EUROPARC Federation, from October 2014 to November 2017 the Association of German Nature Parks collected extensive information on Regional Nature Parks and their work in the European Union Member States as well as Norway and Switzerland. The project was supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with resources from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety.

After the book published in June 2017 entitled "Living Landscapes. Europe's Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks – Model Regions for the Sustainable Development of Rural Areas", this brochure summarises the main project results. The brochure shows that the work of the nearly 900 Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks in 22 European states represents important services for man, nature and the rural areas in the European Union and its Member States.

Regional Nature Parks require suitable framework conditions including adequate human and financial resources, a qualified management plan and a functioning network with local communities and stakeholders in their region.

The results of the project impressively demonstrate that it is worthwhile for those responsible in the European states, in the European Union as well as in the communities to invest in the successful work of Regional Nature Park supporting organisations. This will secure the preservation and development of unique landscapes, the strengthening and sustainable development of rural areas and the quality of life of current and future generations, who contribute to the further development of Regional Nature Parks in their region as “Living Landscapes” and as places for man and nature.



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Introduction

The Association of German Nature Parks (VDN) carried out the project “Europe’s Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks” from October 2014 to November 2017 in cooperation with the European umbrella organisation for protected areas EUROPARC Federation. The project was supported by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with resources from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety.

The aim of the project was to gather knowledge and experience on the work of protected areas with comparable responsibilities and structures to Nature Parks in Germany, in European countries. Furthermore, the exchange between Regional Nature Park associations in Europe was mutually strengthened and the achievements of Regional Nature Parks for the EU and the individual states were analysed.

The project met with great interest among Regional Nature Park umbrella organisations and the competent authorities in the European states. This great interest and the active participation of Regional Nature Parks from the European states shows how significant the joint work of Regional Nature Parks is at the European level.

For the first time, the project identified a group of Regional Nature Parks in the large number of protected areas in the European states that had thus far not been described jointly. In their tasks and operation, they share common points and provide valuable services for individual states, regions, local residents and Europe. The responsible actors in Regional Nature Park management and the supporting organisations are committed to the people and nature in their regions and at the same time to a sustainable and future-proof Europe.



The book contains a description of the development of Regional Nature Parks in Europe and their tasks and work areas. The spotlight is placed on the benefits that Regional Nature Parks offer to the European Union, the individual European states and society. The book also contains a separate chapter on the work of Regional Nature Parks in 20 EU Member States, as well as in Switzerland and Norway.

The “First European Summit of Regional Nature Parks” was held in Brussels on 21 June 2017, where Regional Nature Park representatives from 20 European states signed the joint declaration “Regional Nature Parks – Working for Europe”.

This brochure summarises the results of the project: The accomplishments of Regional Nature Parks at the European level and in the individual states are identified, the framework conditions for successful development and work of the Regional Nature Parks elaborated, and recommendations for the support of the work of Regional Nature Parks are voiced.

In most countries, the areas summarised here under the general term “Regional Nature Parks” are called Nature Parks, Landscape Parks or Regional Parks. Based on this multitude of names, the project name “Europe’s Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks” was chosen. The authors of this brochure propose that the English term “Regional Nature Parks” be used for the whole of the territories in the future, as this is used hereinafter in this brochure.

As part of the project, in June 2017 the book “Living Landscapes. Europe’s Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks – Model Regions for the Sustainable Development of Rural Areas” was published. It can be downloaded at www.european-parks.org in German and English. The English version is also available as a printed book and can be ordered from the VDN (email: sekretariat@naturparke.de).

Regional Nature Parks in Europe

- ▶ about 900 Regional Nature Parks (as of 2016)
- ▶ in 20 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland
- ▶ occupy 8% of the area of the EU, Norway and Switzerland

(Overview map in the middle of the brochure)



Project Presentation

To be able to fulfil the responsibility of taking a position on Regional Nature Parks in numerous European states, as the umbrella organisation of a country, a task force to accompany the project was convened at its start. This task force was composed of representatives of Regional Nature

Parks from a total of seven European states, funding bodies and the cooperation partner Europarc Federation.

The following diagram shows the individual phases and milestones during the project.

Investigation in all 28 Member States, Switzerland and Norway and identification of the states with Regional Nature Parks (2014/15)

Online survey among the responsible umbrella organisations (or responsible ministries/authorities) (2015)

3 – 5 day study trips to the Regional Nature Parks and umbrella organisations/ministries in 11 chosen states* (2016)

Publication of the book “Living Landscapes” – first comprehensive publication on European Regional Nature Parks (June 2017)

First European Summit of Regional Nature Parks in Brussels (June 2017)

Publication of the result brochures (November 2017)

* Austria, Croatia, England, France, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Spain, Switzerland

Course of the Project



The results of the project presented in this brochure are based on the evaluation of an online survey, on experiences during study trips, supplementary research and numerous discussions with Regional Nature Park experts from all over Europe as well as exchange with the task force supporting the project.

We would like to thank the members of the task force named in the acknowledgment and everyone in the European states who supported the project and has thus laid the foundation for its successful completion.

Definition 'Regional Nature Parks'

Because the protected areas in the individual states differ according to their respective legal situation, administrative organisation and other framework conditions, the task force supporting the project has agreed on which areas are Regional Nature Parks in this project. What is concerned here are protected areas of a state that meet the following criteria:

1. Regional Nature Parks are government recognised or government-designated protected areas that have the objective of protecting nature and landscapes, especially those landscapes that are characterised by long-term human use (cultural landscapes), with their diverse species and habitats. They therefore correspond to the description of Category V 'Protected Landscape / Seascape' according to the management criteria of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources). However, they do not necessarily have to have been assigned by the IUCN to Category V or even categorised by the IUCN at all.

2. Regional Nature Parks have the following basic areas of work and objectives:

- Conservation, protection of biological diversity and preservation and further development of a landscape shaped by sustainable use
- Sustainable tourism and recreation
- Sustainable development of rural areas
- Environmental education and education for sustainable development

Regional Nature Parks fulfil their responsibilities and achieve their objectives in cooperation with a network of regional actors and involving regional administrative organisations (e.g. local authorities) and the population.

3. Regional Nature Parks are large scale protected areas. Apart from exceptional and duly justified cases, the median size of Regional Nature Parks within a country should be at least 3,000 – 5,000 ha.

4. Regional Nature Parks are areas that are managed by permanent, salaried staff from the organisation responsible. They are considered to be one communication and development unit. Regional Nature Parks can be managed by their own office or administration or by an organisation responsible for several protected areas in one region.



Benefits for the European Union, its Member States and Regions

Europe's Regional Nature Parks support the EU, its Member States and the individual regions in achieving political objectives, particularly in the areas of nature conservation, sustainable development and education. This became very clear in the course of the project during the survey, the tour and the meetings of the task force supporting the project.

With their activities in nature and landscape conservation, they support the achievement of the goals of the **Convention on Biological Diversity** of the United Nations, the **Biodiversity Strategy** and the **Water Framework Directive** of the European Union and the corresponding national biodiversity strategies of the Member States. They also support the objectives of the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Regional Nature Parks contribute significantly to the effective implementation of the EU Birds and Habitats Directive, for example by implementing preservation and development measures, providing thematic trails and education at Natura 2000 and supporting the development of management plans. Because a significant proportion of the **Natura 2000** areas designated under these directives are in Regional Nature Parks (approximately 25% on average in each state), the potential of Regional Nature Parks to support the Natura 2000 network is considerable. Through cooperation with farmers in sustainable land use, Regional Nature Parks promote the conservation of many species of plants and animals that are dependent on sustainable use, such as the lapwing and partridge, field hamsters, wild bees and field pansies.



Regional Nature Parks support **landscape-related and sustainable tourism development** and the marketing of high-quality regional products. This promotes regional added value, creates local jobs and supports **rural development policy**. By promoting regional economic cycles, sustainable mobility and transport development, and the sustainable use of energy that is kind to nature and the landscape, Regional Nature Parks also support **climate protection**, one of the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives.

By preserving an intact natural world with its diversity of animals and plants, Regional Nature Parks also help preserve the services of ecosystems for humans, such as clean drinking water and the pollination of flowers by insects. Thus, and with the preservation of the cultural,

recreational and restorative value of landscapes, they make further significant contributions to society. Through educational programs, Regional Nature Parks also promote awareness in the population of the value of landscapes, thus supporting the Council of Europe **Landscape Convention** in many states.

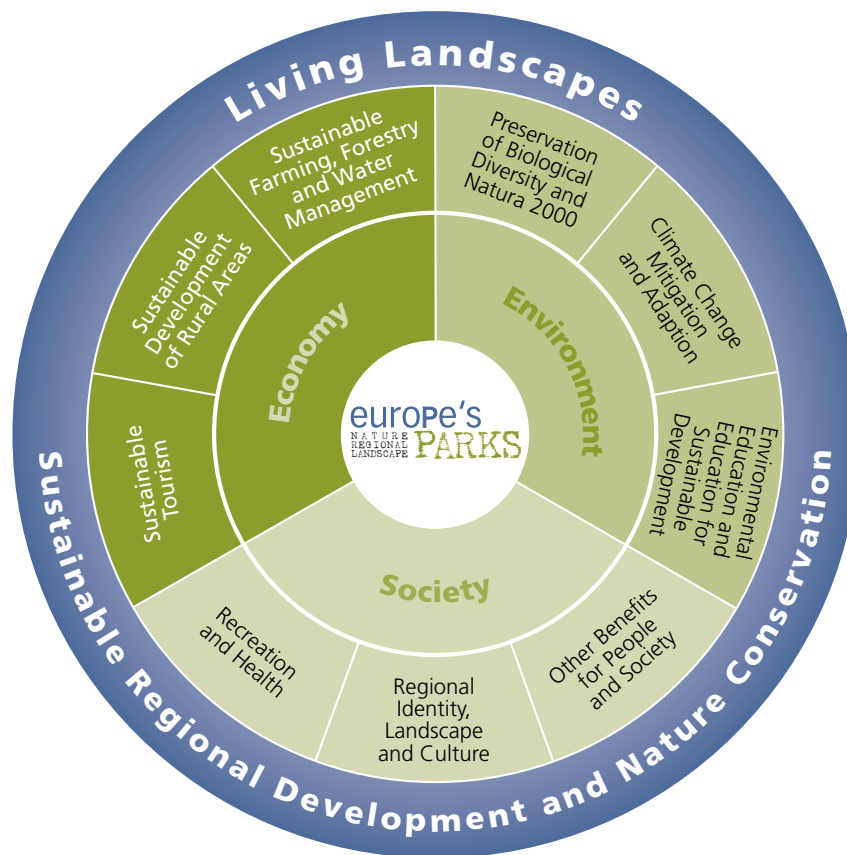
Whether it concerns cooperation with schools and kindergartens, guided excursions for families, nature experience camps or volunteer projects – the Regional Nature Parks of Europe set the standards in **Education for Sustainable Development**. This makes them particularly suitable for communicating biodiversity, Natura 2000 and sustainable development objectives to the public. More and more Regional Nature Parks are also offering education and experiences to people with disabilities and people from socially

disadvantaged backgrounds. Through their numerous activities to promote inclusive and quality education, to protect the climate, to promote sustainable agriculture and to preserve biodiversity, Regional Nature Parks also make an important contribution to the realisation of the United Nations' 17 **Sustainable Development Goals**.

The work and the activities of Regional Nature Parks are presented in detail in the book "Living Landscapes" in nine chapters divided into various thematic areas. As shown in the following illustration, with their activities in these nine theme areas, Regional Nature Parks support

the three dimensions of sustainability – the ecological, economic and social dimension.

The various theme areas and the three dimensions of sustainability are closely connected in the work of Regional Nature Parks and are partly overlapping. For example, extensive grazing with cattle or sheep and the regional marketing of high-quality meats contribute to sustainable agriculture and the development of rural areas, the preservation of biodiversity, the preservation of the cultural and recreational value of the landscape and to climate protection, hereby supporting ecological, social and economic sustainability.



Services of European Regional Nature Parks
(presented in detail in the book "Living Landscapes")

What characterises Regional Nature Parks?

The special benefits and strengths of Regional Nature Parks lies in their structures (see next chapter) and their unique functioning, as shown below.

Integrative character:

Regional Nature Parks combine conservational and educational objectives for sustainable development with the objectives of rural development and sustainable tourism. Their focus is the interests of both nature and humans. Regional Nature Parks are integrative protected areas, which pursue the goals of sustainable regional development in the three sustainability dimensions – ecological, economic, and social – rather than segregative protected areas in which only the protection of nature is in the foreground. Regional Nature Parks correspond with the Management Category V of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources).

Combination of municipal, state and regional levels:

Regional Nature Parks work closely with the municipal and state levels and, if present in the states, also with the intermediate regional level, connecting these various levels. In doing so, Regional Nature Parks can translate state policy objectives and state action into practice-oriented, regionally adapted action. Additionally, Regional Nature Parks often combine the interests of municipalities and carry out projects that benefit all municipalities.

Cooperation with the region and formation of a regional platform:

Regional Nature Parks work closely with communities, land users, businesses, numerous stakeholders and the population in their region. They provide a common platform for regional development.

Flexibility:

Based on close coordination with municipalities and the actors of the regions, Regional Nature Parks work to meet the needs and requirements that are currently relevant in the region.

Acceptance among the local population:

Regional Nature Parks are broadly accepted by the public. Their work contributes to human quality of life on a local level.

Preservation and development of values:

Regional Nature Parks are oriented towards the common good and work toward the preservation and further development of social values: Nature, landscape and biodiversity; culture, tradition and regional knowledge; identification and engagement of people with their region; regional value creation, valorisation of natural and cultural heritage as well as sustainable development of the region.

Efficient allocation of resources:

Regional Nature Parks are strong and reliable partners of the European Union, the Member States and municipalities in implementing their objectives in rural areas and contributing to the focused, efficient and effective use of public funds in coordination with local partners.

Europe's Regional Nature Parks

Country	Name of relevant parks (original name and English translation)	Number of parks*
Austria	Naturparke (Nature Parks)	48
Belgium (Flanders)	Regionale Landschappen (Regional Landscapes)	17
Belgium (Wallonia)	Parcs naturels (Nature Parks)	10
Bulgaria	природни паркове (Nature Parks)	11
Croatia	Parkovi prirode, parkovi regionalni (Nature Parks, Regional Parks)	13
Czech Republic	Chráněná krajinná oblast – CHKO (Protected Landscape Areas)	26
Denmark	Naturparker (Nature Parks)	9
France	Parcs naturels régionaux (Regional Nature Parks)	51
Germany	Naturparke (Nature Parks)	103
Hungary	Natúrparkok (Nature Parks)	9
Italy	Parchi regionali (Regional Parks)	134
Latvia	Dabas parki, Aizsargājamo ainavu apvidi (Nature Parks, Protected Landscape Areas)	42
Lithuania	Regioniniai parkai (Regional Parks)	30
Luxembourg	Naturparke/parcs naturels (Nature Parks)	3
Norway	Regionalparker (Regional parks)	5
Poland	Parki krajobrazowe (Landscape Parks)	121
Portugal	Parques naturais (Nature Parks)	15
Romania	Parcuri naturale (Nature Parks)	16
Slovakia	Chránené krajinné oblasti – CHKO (Protected Landscape Areas)	14
Slovenia	Krajinski parki, regijski parki (Landscape/Nature Parks, Regional Parks)	10
Spain	Parques naturales, parques regionales, parques rurales (Nature Parks, Regional Parks, Rural Parks)	149
Switzerland	Regionale Naturpärke (Regional Nature Parks)	15
United Kingdom (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - AONBs	46
United Kingdom (Scotland)	Regional Parks	3

*as in 2016





NORWAY

DENMARK

LATVIA

LITHUANIA

POLAND

GERMANY

BELGIUM

LUXEMBOURG

CZECH REPUBLIC

SLOVAKIA

FRANCE

AUSTRIA

HUNGARY

ROMANIA

SWITZERLAND

SLOVENIA

CROATIA

ITALY

BULGARIA

Structures and Framework Conditions for Successful Regional Nature Park Work

Regional Nature Parks need specific conditions and structures to work successfully. Below, we will describe relevant framework conditions and structures derived from the experience and results of the project. They will provide a starting point and must, of course, be adapted to the respective situations of the individual European states.

Legislative basis, tasks and goals

The Regional Nature Parks involved in the project “Europe’s Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks” are designated based on legislation whereby the sections relevant to Regional Nature Parks in the various states are differentiated. Exceptions are Norway and Denmark, where there is (still) no legislative basis for Regional Nature Parks. In Norway, Regional Parks pursue the goal of being anchored in a single law. In Denmark, recognition of Nature Parks by the umbrella organisation Friluftsrådet has its own unique perspective.

In supplementation to the legal principles, the tasks are also partially determined in the designation procedure of a Nature Park and confirmed, for example, in a regulation. Of great importance for the tasks and objectives of a Regional Nature Park are the definitions in the management plan, which in some cases is an essential part of the designation process. Also important are the specifications of the Regional Nature Park supporting organisation on a state or municipal level, guidelines within the framework of funding programs, and the coordination of Regional Nature Park management with the municipalities and other partners in the region in the daily work of the Regional Nature Park.

Recommendation:

The development of Regional Nature Parks in a state requires that the tasks and objectives be

regulated in legislation at a national and/or regional level.

Designation process, management plan and spatial planning

The initiative for the designation of new Regional Nature Parks is usually the domain of politicians or actors of a region, less often that of state institutions. Frequently, a feasibility study first determines whether a region is suitable for a Regional Nature Park. The discussion and coordination process in a region can take several years.

For the official procedure for state recognition and designation of a Regional Nature Park in accordance with legal requirements, in many states a planning document must be prepared which is called, for example, a management plan, a Regional Nature Park plan or a Charter. This plan shows what concrete development goals are envisaged to be achieved through the work of the Regional Nature Park in the years after the drawing up of the plan.

The formation of this plan involves regional actors to varying degrees. In France, for example, and subsequently also in Wallonia (Belgium), Switzerland and Luxembourg, the municipalities of a region have worked together with regional and state institutions to develop the plan. In France, a Regional Nature Park based on this plan, known here as the Charter, is currently being funded for a 15-year period to implement the plan’s objectives. A precondition is that all municipalities in the area have accepted the Charter.

The survey on the project found that the compilation of Regional Nature Park management plans is compulsory in nine countries. The recognition of a Regional Nature Park is

permanent in 15 states and limited in terms of time in seven states. A revocation of the designation is possible in eight of the fifteen states.

Recommendation:

There should be state designation or recognition as a Regional Nature Park. The Regional Nature Park should include near-natural landscapes and represent the regionally significant ecosystems. Regional Nature Parks are large-scale protected areas. The size of the area should be adapted to the landscape and structural and administrative conditions in each state. It is important that the creation and designation process commence in close coordination with the communities and in consultation with key regional actors and stakeholders and, if possible, also include the involvement of the public.

A qualified management plan or Charter should form the basis for the work of a Regional Nature Park. If this plan is not prescribed for the designation of the Regional Nature Park, it should be worked out as soon as possible after the designation. The plan should describe the development goals of the Regional Nature Park and contain statements about all areas of activity of the Regional Nature Park. Work should be done in collaboration with municipalities, the relevant responsible state authorities and regional stakeholders. Whenever possible, the public should be involved in the development of the plan. The plan should be updated at least every 10 -15 years and be integrated into the national system of spatial, regional and local planning. As a result, the statements in the plan not only guide Regional Nature Park management, but must also be considered in the preparation of municipal or regional planning.

It is also important that the work and objectives of Regional Nature Parks are also incorporated into regional, national and European development concepts and programs. Additionally, it is advisable for the Regional Nature Park management to be asked for its opinion

regarding larger plans or building projects in the region, so that the interests of Regional Nature Park development are considered in these projects.

Evaluation

It is useful to carry out regular evaluations as to what extent the requirements in the management plan or the tasks and objectives defined by legislation or other statutes are realised.

The project has shown that, for example, there are compulsory evaluations in France, Lithuania, Switzerland and The Czech Republic; voluntary quality control takes place in another five states.

In France, for example, in a Regional Nature Park currently recognised and funded for a 15-year period, in the context of a reorganisation of the Charter it is being evaluated whether the goals in the former Charter have been achieved. An evaluation on a voluntary basis is carried out e.g. in Germany with the "Nature Park Quality Campaign" of the Association of German Nature Parks. So far, about 75% of Regional Nature Parks participate in a process every five years in which an extensive online questionnaire on the work of a Regional Nature Park is filled out and in which the Regional Nature Park receives an on-site inspection and advisory visit from a special "quality scout".

Recommendation:

Depending on national framework conditions, the work of a Regional Nature Park should be evaluated approximately every 5–15 years, ideally by a system that applies to all Regional Nature Parks in a country. The award of a quality label and qualified feedback on its work can be an important incentive for participation of Regional Nature Parks in countries where evaluation is voluntary.

Supporting structure, management, personnel and financial resources

Every Regional Nature Park has a politically and legally responsible supporting organisation which is responsible for the content and structural and financial framework conditions of the work of that Park – in the context of legislative and other statutory specifications.

Different structural models have evolved for this in the individual states, in which the state, the regions and the municipalities are integrated into the supporting organisations in the respective states depending on the framework conditions.

In such countries as the United Kingdom, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Hungary and Norway, the supporting structure of Regional Nature Parks is predominantly formed by local authorities. In Switzerland, for example, a “park contract” is concluded between the municipalities and the supporting organisation. In Spain and Italy, the choice is usually to organise Regional Nature Parks under the direct responsibility and support of the regions. Regional Nature Parks are largely state-supported in many Eastern European countries and in the eastern federal states in Germany. In France, Luxembourg and Wallonia (Belgium), support is provided by a *syndicat mixte*, in which both municipalities and state authorities are represented.

The supporting organisation establishes a park management body and employs personnel for the management of the Regional Nature Park, which assumes the operational work on the implementation of Regional Nature Park activities. According to the results of a survey carried out in the project, the work of Regional Nature Parks is mainly financed by the state, the regions and the municipalities. In most of the participating states, the financing of Regional Nature Park activities through European Union funding is of particular importance, particularly from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Regional Develop-

ment Fund (ERDF) and the funding programs LIFE, LEADER and INTERREG.

Recommendation:

For each Regional Nature Park, a separate office or administration should be set up where, in addition to the managing director, enough qualified specialists work according to the size and tasks of a Regional Nature Park. The park office should be located within the Regional Nature Park. The financing of the office or administration, the personnel and the projects of the Regional Nature Park should be shared by the state, the regions (in states where there is this level of government such as federal states in Germany, *Régions* in France or *Comunidades Autónomas* in Spain) and the municipalities. However, depending on the experience gained in the project, the municipalities may only be responsible for a smaller portion of the financing. Because, in most cases, Regional Nature Parks assume tasks prescribed by national law, they should also receive state support to carry out the legally stipulated tasks. For functioning Regional Nature Park management, it is important to be able to work based on a regular and sufficient basic budget for personnel, material and project costs.

Governance and cooperation

“Governance” is a complex term. Here, governance refers to how and by whom the management of a Regional Nature Park is carried out, with consideration of decision-making processes (“who makes these decisions and how”) and in relation to all phases in the creation and existence of a Regional Nature Park. This includes the role that government, the private sector and civil society play in the decision-making and management process of a Regional Nature Park.

The management deals with the operational work for the implementation of Regional Nature Park tasks and the resources, plans and tasks toward becoming active in a certain location or a situation.

The supporting structures of Regional Nature Parks described in the previous chapter and, accordingly, the governance models, are different in various European states. Central actors in the decision-making structures of Regional Nature Park supporting organisations are generally the states, regions and municipalities – in different ways in each state. In the survey of the project, the “inclusion of the population in the development of parks” was rated as an important work area, demonstrating the significance of the involvement of local residents in Regional Nature Park work. This involvement is effected, for example, through representation in advisory councils, the exchange of information and surveys of the population during the Regional Nature Park designation, and regular networking and coordination with regional actors. According to the survey, the “networking of stakeholders on Regional Nature Park themes” is also a key aspect of Regional Nature Park work in most states.

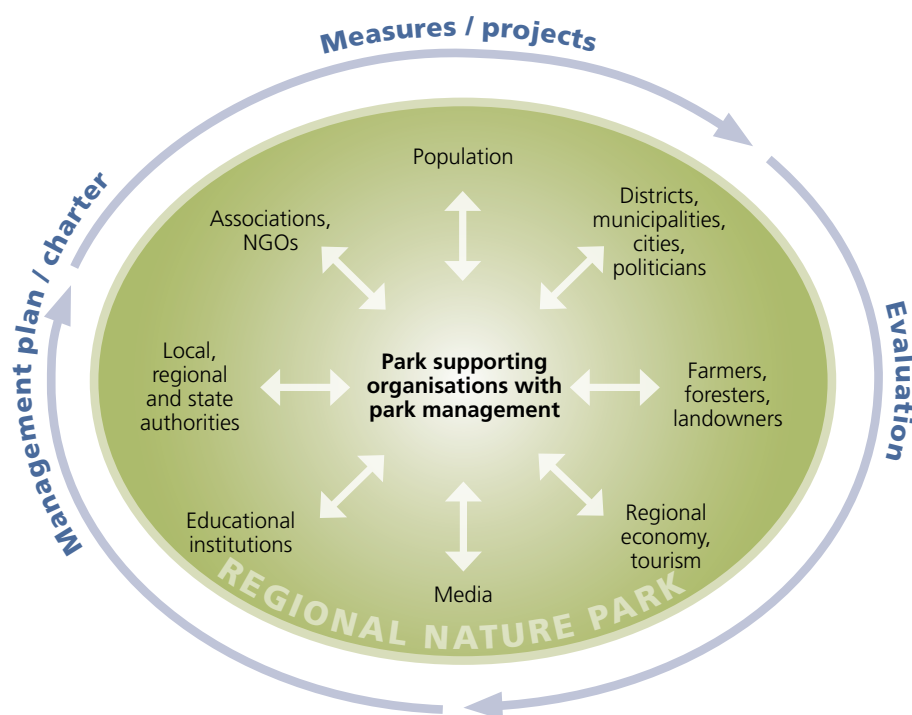
Regional Nature Parks pursue the integration of a wide range of interests and pursue the preservation of nature and landscape as it does

the sustainable use of natural resources and the development of rural areas. This work can only be done with the help of cooperating partners. It is therefore important to define the form of cooperation between actors. The most important cooperation partners of Regional Nature Parks are municipalities (districts, cities and municipalities), followed by farmers, foresters and other landowners. Municipalities are often also integrated into the Regional Nature Park supporting structures. The partner network of a Regional Nature Park is shown in the figure below.

Regional Nature Parks in Switzerland place special emphasis on public involvement. This corresponds to the general political structure in Switzerland.

Recommendation:

Irrespective of whether the supporting organisations and governance models in the individual countries have more of a state or municipal character and which other actors are involved, it is important that there be clear decision-making structures. This makes it transparent



A Regional Nature Park and its partner network

which decisions are taken in which committees, which persons and institutions are involved in the decisions and according to which rules committees are comprised. At the same time, Regional Nature Parks should communicate their work in the region broadly, and coordinate with regional actors.

It is recommended that – depending on the supporting model, in different forms – representatives of municipalities and regionally important institutions, especially in the areas of activity of Regional Nature Parks, as well as public authorities be involved in the supporting structure or co-determination committees or the decision-making processes. The public should also be involved in the work of a Regional Nature Park.

This can be done, for example, by involvement in the establishment of a management plan or by active participation in such projects as volunteering activities. The following overview lists several aspects and questions the consideration of which may be useful to achieve good governance and a good cooperative structure.

Coordination at national level

In 15 of the 22 participating states, there are national umbrella organisations of Regional Nature Parks; in 7 states, the work of Regional Nature Parks is brought together by a national authority or a ministry. In Poland, each of the 16 provinces has its own Regional Nature Park umbrella

Important aspects in governance and cooperation

- **Regional Nature Park designation:** Who is involved? Who makes decisions and how?
- **Establishment of a Regional Nature Park management plan:** Who is involved? Who makes decisions and how?
- **Committees and structure:** What committees exist? What structures are there in the Regional Nature Park, such as a park office/administration or a supporters' association? Which tasks and which competencies do the committees or other structures have?
- **Decision-making and advice:** Who, which institutions, which committees make decisions? Who is involved? According to which rules are decisions made?
- **Implementation:** Who implements the decisions? Who has which competencies? Who is involved?
- **Control/evaluation:** Who controls or evaluates the work in general or the work of the various committees? How are the results of the evaluation considered in the further work?
- **Identify important partners (stakeholder analysis):** Who are the important partners in general and in the individual areas of activity? How are these partners involved in the decision-making process and work, e.g. when drawing up a management plan or in projects? How is the work of the Regional Nature Park communicated to them?
- **Analysis of interfaces:** How does the work of the Regional Nature Park overlap or complement the activities of these partners or other organisations?
- **Involvement of the public:** How are the projects and offers of the Regional Nature Park communicated to the public? How can the public actively participate in the work of the Regional Nature Park, e.g. in volunteer activities?



organisation. The project has identified numerous national programs and projects implemented by the umbrella organisations or competent authorities or ministries which provide considerable support for Regional Nature Parks in the individual countries. Some examples of these are the 'Naturparkschule' concept developed by the Association of Austrian Nature Parks, continuing education subsequent to Natura 2000 offered by Europarc España, the Regional Nature Parks Development Concept developed by the Association of Hungarian Nature Parks, the management effectiveness tool developed by the Croatian Ministry of the Environment, the brand for parc products 'Valeurs Parc Naturel Régional' developed by the French Federation of Regional Nature Parks, the landscape analysis tool developed by the Norwegian umbrella organisation and the 'Nature Park Quality Campaign' developed by the Association of German Nature Parks. Numerous other examples can be found in the chapters about Regional Nature Parks in individual states in the book "Living Landscapes".

Recommendation:

There should be a national organisation for the coordination and support of Regional Nature Park organisations. This facilitates a more coherent approach as well as continuous improvement of the work, governance and management effectiveness of Regional Nature Parks. The national organisation should have sufficient human and financial resources to do its job correctly.

During the study trips carried out in this project, the authors became familiar with numerous examples of how Regional Nature Park umbrella organisations or responsible ministries support

the work of their Regional Nature Parks. Some good examples of this are the following:

- Substantive and innovative further development of the goals and work of Regional Nature Parks
- Framework for the development and coordination of Regional Nature Park management plans
- Evaluation of the work of Regional Nature Park offices
- Further education/training for employees of Regional Nature Parks
- Lobbying at national and regional level
- Transregional communication of Regional Nature Parks to the public
- Advice on individual Regional Nature Parks
- Regular meetings and exchange of employees of Regional Nature Parks

In many countries, it has proven useful for this national coordination to be in the hands of a national umbrella organisation. The umbrella organisation should be in constant exchange with the Regional Nature Parks and work in close collaboration with the responsible national authorities.



Appeal of Regional Nature Parks to the European Union and its Member States.

At the First European Summit of Regional Nature Parks in Brussels on 21 June 2017, Regional Nature Park representatives from 20 states signed a joint declaration outlining the achievements of Regional Nature Parks for a strong Europe and including an appeal to the European Union and its Member States.

In the declaration, Regional Nature Park representatives call on the European Union and its Member States to make even greater use of Regional Nature Parks for the implementation of an integrated and sustainable approach to a future-oriented Europe.

The fact that representatives of Regional Nature Parks from 20 states join forces in this declaration demonstrates significant support for collaboration at a European level. The declaration communicates joint action while simultaneously demonstrating the desire for support for Regional Nature Parks by the European Union and its Member States.

This declaration is reproduced below.

Regional Nature Parks – Working for Europe

European Regional Nature Parks Declaration

Europe needs Regional Nature Parks: Strong parks – strong rural areas

Europe's rural areas provide the life support system of our continent. They are the locus of the management of our natural resources, in terms of agriculture and forestry, water management and nature conservation. It is clear that the long-term viability of rural areas needs an integrated, visionary approach. Europe's Regional Nature Parks make a significant contribution to the sustainable development of rural areas. Having strong parks means having strong rural areas.

Regional Nature Parks exist in many European countries. In total, there are almost 900 Regional Nature Parks in Europe, covering a total area of over 370,000 km² or 8% of the total surface area of the EU-28, Switzerland and Norway. Regional Nature Parks contribute to nature conservation, sustainable agriculture and rural development, and they promote sustainable tourism and environmental education. While preserving the beauty, biological diversity and cultural heritage of rural areas, they also provide spaces for recreation for all segments of society, as well as promoting public health.

Regional Nature Parks are model regions for integrative nature conservation and sustainable agriculture

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

Regional Nature Parks – a driving force behind regional development

Regional Nature parks stimulate tourism, economic diversification, job creation and sustainable food production, strengthening rural communities. Working with farmers, parks promote local markets and short marketing chains. In Regional Nature Parks, region-level solutions are being developed for global challenges, such as climate change and demographic change in rural areas. Regional Nature Parks coordinate their development objectives in the region with a wide range of stakeholders, providing a structure that facilitates a commitment to the future-oriented development of the region from multiple interests.

Regional Nature Parks support Education for Sustainable Development

Regional Nature Parks provide many educational offers and raise the awareness of citizens, especially of young people, about nature conservation and the sustainable development of their region. They promote the involvement of citizens through volunteer work, and they support European youth exchange programmes. They are strong partners for schools and other public educational institutions in implementing Education for Sustainable Development programmes.



Regional Nature Parks connect the European Union to its citizens

Regional Nature Parks act as partners to governments in developing rural areas across Europe, as they attempt to reconcile efforts in the conservation of biological diversity with efforts in sustainable land use, spatial planning and job creation. Regional Nature Parks cooperate closely with regional stakeholders and municipalities, and are widely accepted by the population. They are therefore able to implement measures in a particularly effective way, and are perfectly suited to connect the European Union to stakeholders in rural areas and to citizens in general.

Regional Nature Parks support the goals and strategies of the European Union

Regional Nature Parks already support a number of goals and strategies of the European Union and its Member States, most notably in the areas of

- Sustainable development of rural areas and sustainable agriculture
- Nature conservation and landscape protection
- Education for Sustainable Development and connecting citizens to their region

Regional Nature Parks are important partners for the European Union and its Member States and a benefit to their region: they serve as models for sustainable rural areas, integrating sustainability's natural, economic and social aspects, and thus fostering the region's development and quality of life.

Regional Nature Parks call upon the European Union and its Member States

In order to fully utilise the opportunities of Regional Nature Parks in implementing an integrated, far-sighted approach for a sustainable rural Europe, we call on the European Union and its Member States:

- to develop and invest in Regional Nature Parks, following examples of success to create added value and benefits
- to make use of Regional Nature Parks to better implement EU nature conservation directives (the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive) on the ground, to implement the



Water Framework Directive, and to achieve the goals outlined in the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

- to make use of Regional Nature Parks as model regions for the innovative and sustainable development of rural areas and also as partners for sustainable agriculture and sustainable tourism and for Local Action Groups in future LEADER programmes. Regional Nature Parks should also be more closely included in future rural development programmes.
- to foster cooperation between educational institutions, particularly primary and secondary schools and kindergartens, and Regional Nature Parks in the field of the Education for Sustainable Development. Regional Nature Parks should be more closely included in future programmes for education, volunteering commitments and cross-border knowledge exchange.

The Declaration was signed by (sorted by ISO country code):

Mag. Wolfgang Mair, President of the Association of Austrian Nature Parks
Dirk Cuvelier, President of the Flemish Platform for Regional Landscapes
Françoise Erneux, President of the Federation of Nature Parks of Wallonia
Toma Belev, Chairman of the Association of Parks in Bulgaria
Stefan Müller-Altermatt, President of the Swiss Parcs Network
Tomas Ruzicka, Head of Department of External Relations, Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic
Dr. Michael Arndt, President of the Association of German Nature Parks
Helle Stuart, Vice Chairman of the Danish Outdoor Council
Rafael Mata, President of Europarc Spain
Michaël Weber, President of the French Federation of Regional Nature Parks
Howard Davies, Director of the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Béla Básthly, President of the Association of Hungarian Nature Parks
Giampiero Sammuri, President of the Federparchi - Europarc Italia
Albertas Stanislovaitis, Director of the State Service for Protected Areas under the Ministry of Environment
Françine Keiser, Fédération des Parcs Naturels du Luxembourg
Jekabs Dzenis, Head of CITES division, Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia
Kristian Bjørnstad, Director of Norske Parker
Dorota Janicka, Director of the Western Pomerania Regional Landscape Parks
Mircea Verghet, President of the Romanian Association of Natural Protected Areas Administrations
Ing. Milan Boroš, General Director of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic
Bogomil Breznik, Council Member of the Nature Park Association of Slovenia
Ignace Schops, President of the EUROPARC Federation



Outlook

In the “Europe’s Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks” project, Nature Parks, Regional Parks and Landscape Parks in the European states described themselves for the first time as a joint group in protected areas under the name “Regional Nature Parks”.

It became clear that they already play an important role in the integration of nature conservation and sustainable development of rural areas as well as for other tasks in the Member States of the European Union. However, the support of Regional Nature Parks is often insufficient, so that Regional Nature Park supporting organisations and Regional Nature Park managements, with their dedicated efforts, cannot exploit the possibilities and potentials for the reinforcement of rural areas, nature conservation and the available range of environmental education measures.

The project “Europe’s Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks” has contributed to the fact that the protected areas combined here as Regional Nature Parks in the European states

see themselves as a joint group, expanding their collaboration in the future.

The EUROPARC Federation, together with the Association of German Nature Parks and park associations of other European states, will take forward the work undertaken by this project. EUROPARC Federation will strengthen and highlight the work of Europe’s Nature, Regional and Landscape Parks by providing a platform to connect the park associations throughout Europe and promoting the parks’ value towards European decision makers.

In this way, Regional Nature Park representatives from the European states can work together in the coming years to make Regional Nature Parks and the work of their supporting organisations even better known so that they receive the necessary support in their states and on a European level, for the benefit of man and nature.

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