

# Centralparks

**Building management capacities  
of Carpathian protected areas  
for the integration and harmonization  
of biodiversity protection and local  
socio-economic development**

*FINAL PROJECT RESULTS*





## Building management capacities of Carpathian protected areas

**T**he Carpathians form a natural bridge between Western and Eastern Europe, stretching across eight European countries and holding tremendous ecological value. They contain a variety of valuable ecosystems and landscapes and are home to many native and endemic species. Carpathian protected areas harbour valuable forest, mountain, grass- and wetland habitats, as well as unique geological and geomorphological features. They also provide many services local communities benefit from and are important areas for local sustainable development.

In the 21st century effective management of protected areas poses a key challenge for biodiversity conservation in Europe and globally. Despite varying conditions, protected areas face similar threats, many of which can only efficiently be tackled through transnational cooperation. Global environmental processes, such as climate change, invasive species, and various anthropogenic threats strongly pressure the Carpathian ecoregion.

The Centralparks project presents an integrated approach to harmonize biodiversity conservation with sustainable local socio-economic development and to build capacities for effective protected area management. Centralparks also aims to support, facilitate, and enhance the implementation of the



**Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians** and its thematic Protocols. As a result of project implementation for the last three years, local pilot actions and Carpathian-wide strategies delivered and still deliver important findings to support long-term sustainable development in the Carpathians and beyond.

8 Project partners

7 Countries

14 Outputs

1.3 Million Euro ERDF

1.6 Million Euro project budget

04.19-03.22 Project duration



## Working together – Thematic Transnational Task Forces

Since implementation started in 2019 Centralparks has led an enriching cooperation between partners from Austria, Czechia, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. The project built on cross-sectoral collaboration, involving various interest groups, stakeholders, and the local public. The support of the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention further anchored the strategic approach of Centralparks also at policy level, actively working together with national environmental ministries of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention.

**Four Thematic Transnational Task Forces** were set up, involving national experts and protected area managers from the Carpathian region. Their task was to develop strategic policy documents and tools that support the Carpathian region in the long term.

Finally, several pilot trainings and workshops were carried out to illustrate the practical relevance of the Centralparks outputs, and to make them accessible and useful for the Carpathian stakeholders. Furthermore, the results could also inspire and encourage similar audiences in other mountain regions of Central Europe, and beyond.



## Thematic Transnational Task Forces

### Focus: key pressures driving biodiversity loss in the Carpathians

- infrastructure development threatening ecological connectivity and quality of landscapes
- tourism pressure
- degradation, fragmentation and destruction of habitats

## OUTPUTS

Strategy for enhancing biodiversity and landscape conservation outside and inside protected areas

Strategy for local sustainable tourism development based on natural and cultural heritage

Guidelines on communication between protected areas and local communities

Carpathian Ecosystem Services Toolkit

These outputs were developed in support of the implementation of the Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity and the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians at local and regional level, according to the priority of the current Presidency of the Convention.



## Biodiversity and landscape conservation

**P**rotecting natural areas from human destruction is the most important step to safeguard intact ecosystems. However, most protected areas in Europe are too small to protect entire mountain ecosystems and habitats. Hence, effective landscape and biodiversity conservation must also include areas outside of existing, often relatively small protected areas.

Therefore, Centralparks brought together a Thematic Transnational Task Force to jointly address issues concerning biodiversity and landscape conservation in the Carpathians. The Task Force developed the **Carpathian strategy for enhancing biodiversity and landscape conservation outside and inside Carpathian protected areas.**

The strategy addresses challenges and specific measures related to preservation, protection, restoration and sustainable use of species, natural and semi-natural habitats, as well as landscapes within protected areas and their surroundings. It aims to ensure ecological connectivity and to strengthen the ecological network in the Carpathian region.

In 2021 the strategy was implemented with two pilot actions in Poland and Hungary, involving two Carpathian protected areas (Pieniny National Park, Duna-Ipoly National Park) and



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surrounding local communities. These pilot actions facilitated the dialogue between the national park administrations and the authorities of local communities within the buffer zones. Only in this way is it possible to ensure the integrity of natural habitats and preserve the threatened ecological connectivity between nearby protected areas through appropriate management of the surrounding areas.



*Protected areas in the Carpathians are often part of a broader mosaic of human-altered landscapes.*



## Local sustainable tourism

**P**rotected areas are one of the main tourist attractions in the Carpathians. Therefore, they play an important role in raising awareness about environmental issues, with special attention drawn to tourists and local communities. However, overtourism threatens fragile mountain ecosystems, habitats, and species.

Consequently, Centralparks experts developed the **Strategy for local sustainable tourism development based on the natural and cultural heritage of the Carpathians**. To prevent and mitigate the negative impact of tourism on protected areas, the spatial concentration of visitors in the most vulnerable areas should be dispersed and channelled to nearby, ecologically less sensitive areas which can absorb and accommodate part of the tourism flows. This strategy addresses protection, sustainable use and awareness-raising of nature, landscape, and cultural heritage. At the same time, it aims to mitigate tourism pressure and reduce the impact on fragile mountain ecosystems and disparities in socio-economic development across the Carpathian region, supporting local economies through local tourism and local products.

Five workshops and a consultative meeting were conducted in and around Magura National Park (Poland) focusing on the natural and cultural value of the national park and its surroundings. As





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a part of testing the solutions proposed in the Strategy, a local partnership was established with the National Park and seven surrounding municipalities. Based on these workshops, a Local Community Strategy for the Magura region was developed, and can now be integrated into the new local development strategies for the period 2022-2030, to be adopted by the local municipalities.

Based on the strategy, a pilot workshop was organized in the Gemer region (Slovakia), discussing future development plans of nature- and culture-based local tourism. Another sustainable tourism pilot action was carried out in the Czech microregion of Hornácko. Moreover, five cross-border Czech-Slovak pilot workshops for authorities, NGOs, citizens, and local guides were held to share experiences and knowledge gained through the Centralparks project.



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The elaborated Strategy for local sustainable tourism development helps us to appropriately adjust local strategies supporting tourism, while also respecting the needs of communities and nature protection.

*Marie Petru*

*Director of Education and information centre Bílé Karpaty*



## Communication with local communities

**B**ringing together protected area managers and local communities is vital for the conservation of the Carpathians. Effective communication can increase local stakeholders' support for biodiversity and landscape diversity conservation, as well as facilitate integration of nature protection within local socio-economic development.

However, many Carpathian protected areas have limited capacities to efficiently communicate with local communities and stakeholders, mostly due to the absence of staff trained specifically in communication techniques. This results in lacking support of local communities and stakeholders for protected area operations, which is quite a common challenge in protected area management.

Cooperation with regional and local authorities as well as relevant stakeholders is essential to foster protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians. Also, to ensure the wellbeing of current and future generations in the region. That is why Centralparks developed the **Guidelines for communication between protected areas and local communities in the Carpathians**. These guidelines aim to bridge communication gaps between the two sides and to build strong partnerships for joint actions which benefit nature and local inhabitants.



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Furthermore, two communication trainings were held in Poland for protected area administrations and other public sector entities. The trainings aimed at improving the participants' stakeholder-engagement and communication skills with local communities.



*Training on effective communication between protected areas and local communities.*



## Innovative nature conservation management

Currently, nature conservation lacks in human resources and expert capacities, which also poses a difficult challenge for long-term planning. Old-fashioned habitat mapping methods are currently used, which require special expertise and extensive resources. Nature conservation management planning currently lacks effective, integrated, and science-based information. Because of that, the development and introduction of innovative tools and methods is needed.

Centralparks aims to address and share best practice examples in biodiversity and site management. The basis for a new habitat management planning approach was developed by exchanging innovative tools and methodologies for habitat mapping and evaluation. During the project, a forest assessment methodology was introduced as innovative technique to serve the multifaceted evaluation of forests. In addition, a new evaluation method for grassland was developed and tested for management planning.

To showcase innovative tools, Centralparks tested LiDAR, which is a light detection and ranging tool to monitor topography, species, and habitat diversity. Based on LiDAR scans, more effective and long-term nature conservation planning could be achieved. LiDAR was utilized in two habitats – in a mountainous area and a river valley in the Börzsöny Mountains of Duna-Ipoly



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National Park (Hungary). The experts for innovative nature conservation management evaluated the tested methods and lessons learnt. Jointly they developed an Integrated nature conservation management plan as well as the **Guidelines for proper integrated nature conservation planning**, to maintain long-lasting effective biodiversity protection in the Carpathian region.



*The nature of the Carpathian Mountains plays a very important role in the protection of many species of plants and animals, such as the Rosalia longicorn beetle.*



## Carpathian Ecosystem Services Toolkit

**E**cosystem Services, generally described as natural capital, contribute to environmental sustainability and social viability. They are the “benefits of nature directly or indirectly used by humans”, in particular:

- basic resources provided by ecosystems (e.g. food, freshwater, raw materials)
- benefits from regulation of ecosystem processes (e.g. climate regulation, air quality, water quality, pollination, carbon storage, flood control, erosion prevention)
- socio-cultural services (e.g. relaxation, recreation, education, spiritual values, artistic inspiration)
- factors necessary for producing ecosystem services (water cycle, nutrient cycle, soil formation, photosynthesis, biodiversity)

Within the Centralparks project, Carpathian experts developed the **Carpathian Ecosystem Services Toolkit**, which serves as guide for evidence-based decision-making. Together with a **Step-by-step guidance document**, the Toolkit provides a practical set of procedures to understand what might be gained or lost from a specific management choice and its social repercussions. It can



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help managers to better understand and address potential issues as well as avoid or reduce conflicts in the Carpathian region and beyond.

A training for applying the Carpathian Ecosystem Services Toolkit was conducted among Czech, Hungarian, and Slovak stakeholders. Participants expressed the urgent need for data availability and ecosystem service assessments to comprehensively evaluate of the benefits of ecosystem services in their countries. They welcomed the Toolkit as valuable support for mapping and assessing ecosystem services in the Carpathians.



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The CEST in its chapters provides an overview of the concept of ecosystem services, its use in the Carpathian countries and a number of case studies. The user will find there a step-by-step procedure for the assessment of ecosystem services, which will help in realizing the value of the Carpathian nature.

*Radoslav Považan*  
*Civic Association Pronatur (Slovakia), CEST Editor & Co-author*



## Ingredients of good communication

Communication and dissemination of results is a crucial part of projects. It is vital to reach stakeholders that play a key role regarding the future of Carpathian protected areas. Centralparks aimed at providing a platform for knowledge and experience exchange among various stakeholders. We engaged local communities of all ages to raise awareness about the value of the areas around them. Furthermore, we encouraged them to engage in nature protection and sustainable tourism initiatives in their region and to understand and support transnational cooperation regarding natural and cultural heritage protection.

The Centralparks consortium established strong cooperation between the Interreg DTP projects ConnectGREEN and SaveGREEN, with the common goal to strengthen the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA). Together with the Carpathian Convention, the three projects organised two interactive sessions at the European Week of Cities and Regions and the European Green Week. Centralparks collaborated with the projects DaRe to Connect and LIFE SWiPE, as well as discussed synergies with the Interreg projects Connect2CE, CEETO and BEECH POWER.





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In September 2021 Centralparks organised two online roundtable-sessions of the CNPA, as well as the in-person 3rd CNPA Conference in Visegrád (Hungary). Moreover, the project established cooperation with other European protected area networks, such as DANUBEPARKS, ALPARC, and Parks Dinarides, to strengthen the strategic cooperation and substantiate common actions towards ecological connectivity among these regions.

Various awareness-raising activities included the development of Carpathian youth posters, leaflets and explanatory scribble videos, to communicate the project results in a visually engaging way. Partners also launched a Carpathian quiz, promoting the geographical and biological aspects of the Carpathians and disseminating information regarding Centralparks' activities and outcomes. Through these activities and the partners' presence at various public events, the general public was able to obtain important information on the essence of Centralparks, our objectives and work.



## Together for the future of the Carpathians

**T**he Centralparks outputs will be relevant for implementing the Protocol on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity (Bucharest, 2008) and the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism (Bratislava, 2011) to the Carpathian Convention (Kyiv, 2003), as well as to foster the objective-achievement of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 “Bringing nature back into our lives”.

Centralparks closely worked together with the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention. Partners participated in the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee (CCIC) meetings, the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP6), the Working Group Biodiversity and Working Group Sustainable Tourism. The project was endorsed in the COP6 Decisions linked to conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity as well as sustainable tourism, and encouraged to further contribute to natural and cultural heritage protection in the Carpathians. The recommendations of the 12th CCIC Meeting also encouraged the Parties to consider implementation of the relevant outcomes of the Centralparks project. Following the last three years of collaboration, the Centralparks partnership expressed strong commitment to further intensify the cooperation for joint Carpathian natural and cultural heritage, with the involvement of the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA).



The outcomes of the 6th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention, show that the CNPA needs to tackle important future tasks. These encompass especially biodiversity protection in the Carpathians and at a global scale, as well as contributing to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Therefore, it was a priority of Centralparks to activate the CNPA, facilitate knowledge exchange and encourage the CNPA to become a new leading example of a fruitful protected area network, not just in Europe but all around the world.



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The Carpathian Convention provides a framework for cooperation and policy coordination with the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians at its heart. Good practice projects like Centralparks deserve our full attention and support as they significantly contribute to conserving/protecting the natural and cultural heritage in the region.

*Harald Egerer  
Head UNEP Vienna office - Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention*

## Discover more about Centralparks



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## Contact Us

### Project Centralparks

European Academy of Bolzano/Bozen - Eurac Research  
- Lead Partner

✉ [isidoro.debortoli@eurac.edu](mailto:isidoro.debortoli@eurac.edu)

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Photos: Duna-Ipoly National Park Directorate, Education and Information Centre Bílé Karpaty, Ekopsychology Society, European Wilderness Society, Ewa Bujalska, NFA-Romsilva-Piatra Craiului National Park Administration

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