

From February to June 2016, the Verband Deutscher Naturparke visited numerous parks, park associations, responsible ministries and park partners in 11 countries throughout Europe. We were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and commitment with which people in Nature-, Regional-, and Landscape Parks work for the development of their parks, for nature conservation, innovative cooperation projects, nature friendly tourism and exiting educational offers.

You can find below the reports we published on <http://www.facebook.com/naturparke> during our study tours:



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

14. Februar

VDN goes Europe!

Our project "Nature-, Regional and Landscape Parks" is moving to the next stage: from February to June 2016 we will visit parks and park associations across Europe to exchange knowledge, foster cooperation and bring together good practice examples!

The project seeks to strengthen European Nature-, Regional-, and Landscape Parks by gathering knowledge on their work, successes and challenges, supplying this information to all participating countries and promoting the park's value towards political decision-makers.

The project is supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with funds from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety and realized in cooperation with EUROPARC Federation. You can find more information at www.european-parks.org

Anmerkung in Deutsch: die Beiträge zu unseren Europareisen werden in Englischer Sprache veröffentlicht, damit alle Länder daran teilhaben können. Informationen über das Projekt in deutscher Sprache finden Sie regelmäßig in unserem Newsletter, Projektbeschreibungen schicken wir Ihnen auch gerne auf Anfrage zu!



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

15. Februar



Austria and Hungary - here we come!!

Austria: Verband der Naturparke Österreichs



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

15. Februar

Today we met Franz Handler from the Association of Austrian Nature Parks (Verband der Naturparke Österreichs, www.naturparke.at) and Bernhard Stejskal from the Styrian Nature Parks (www.naturparke-steiermark.at) and learned a lot about Nature-Park-Schools, Nature-Park-Kindergardens and the Biodiversity Strategy of Austrian Nature Parks - 'Landschaften voller Leben'!



Together with Franz Handler in front of the Association of Austrian Nature Parks.

Austria: Naturpark Pöllauer Tal



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

1. Juli

Today Franz Grabenhofer from the Naturpark Pöllauer Tal welcomed us in the beautiful open-air classroom, where the children of the 6 Nature Park Schools learn about nature in the outdoors. We also discovered how the “Hirschbirne”, a specific regional pear variety, perfectly unifies the different areas of work of Nature-, Regional- and Landscape Parks: the orchards of the pear tree, who only bears fruits after 15 years, are of great conservational value and the marketing of the regional pear specialities strengthens the regional development. The beautiful orchards stand for the value of sustainable farming and make the region an admired destination ...and the Hirschbirnen-chocolate, -juice and – schnaps is simply delicious!



Together with Franz Grabenhofer (left) in the open-air classroom of the Nature Park Pöllauer Tal

Austria: Naturpark Pöllauer Tal



"Experience diversity. Conceive diversity. Conserve diversity." (c) by Nature Park Pöllauer Tal



... romantic view from the open-air classroom!



"Hirschbirne" - a very special type of pear!



Louis Pörtl, grower of the Hirschbirne (centre), shows us the pear-specialities and other products from the Nature Park Pöllauer Tal in a local shop Bauernladen Pöllau. Together with Franz Grabenhofer (Naturpark Pöllauer Tal, left) and Franz Handler (Association of Austrian Nature Parks, right).

Austria: Nature Parks of the Burgenland



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

17. Februar

Our last day in Austria was amazing! The Nature Park Schools of three different Nature Parks of the Burgenland showed us great examples on how the children learn about beekeeping, flowering meadows and the production of grape seed oil. In a very informative roundtable discussion with the education board, regional management and teacher training college Burgenland and headmasters of different Nature Park Schools, we got to know how in the Burgenland Nature Park Schools are integrated and supported by the official school system.

Thank you for this great day, the precious information and the many impressions to:

- The headmasters, teachers and pupils of the Nature Park Schools:
 - Volksschule St. Martin <http://www.vs-stmartin-raab.schulweb.at>
 - Neue Mittelschule Josefinum Eberau <http://www.josefinum-eberau.at>
 - Volksschule Rechnitz <http://www.vs-rechnitz.at>
 - Neue Mittelschule Rechnitz <http://www.nms-rechnitz.at>
- Mag. Heinz Zitz (president of the education board Burgenland)
- Harald Horvath and Andrea Sedlatschek (Regionalmanagement Burgenland)
 - Weinidylle, Geschriebenstein/Írottktő and many others!



<http://www.vs-stmartin-raab.schulweb.at/>

Austria: Nature Parks of the Burgenland



Little beekeepers at the Nature Park School St. Martin/Raab



The management, teachers and partners of the Nature Park School St. Martin/Raab together with the Regionalmanagement Burgenland

Austria: Nature Parks of the Burgenland



Grape harvest, building of herb spirals, raised flower beds and insect hotels in the Nature Park School Josefinum Eberau

<http://www.josefinum-eberau.at/>



The children of the Volksschule Rechnitz presenting their brilliant "Nature-Park-rap" - it was not easy to remain seated! ;)

<http://www.vs-rechnitz.at/>

Austria: Nature Parks of the Burgenland



Discussion group "Nature Park Schools in the perspective of ..." Education board Burgenland, Regional management Burgenland, Teacher training college Burgenland, Management of the Nature Park Schools VS Rechnitz and NMS Rechnitz, Nature Park Geschriebenstein/Írottköz and partners

Hungary: Nature Park Vértesi/ Herman Ottó Institute



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

18. Februar

We started our trip through Hungary together with Béla Básthy from the Association of Hungarian Nature Parks (<http://www.naturparkok.hu>). In a very fruitful meeting with the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and the Herman Ottó Institute (a government agency) we learned how Nature Parks encourage communities and their partners to support local nature conservation activities and help in strengthening the identification of the population with the landscape of their home region.

Later on Levente Viszló from the nature conservation foundation ProVertes showed us the amazing landscape of the Nature Park Vértesi <http://www.provertes.hu> (see pictures).



The foundation ProVertes manages the Nature Park Vertesi and supports nature conservation and regional development with its herds of Hungarian grey cattle and water buffalos, a visitor centre, a forest school and many other activities.

<http://www.provertes.hu/>

Hungary: Nature Park Vértesi/ Herman Ottó Institute



Levente Viszló, president of the ProVertes foundation with a certificate documenting the ecological value of the Nature Park Vertesi

Hungary: Nature Park Vértesi/ Herman Ottó Institute



Discussing the bottom-up approach of Hungarian Nature Parks together with the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture, the Herman Ottó Institute and the Association of Hungarian Nature Parks.



Meeting in Budapest with the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture, the Herman Ottó Institute and the Association of Hungarian Nature Parks



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

19. Februar

Today, we visited the beautiful karstic springs “Fényes-Forrás” with their swamp forests and characteristic biodiversity in the Nature Park Gerecse (www.gerecsenaturpark.eu). The park director Laszlo Musicz explained that in the 70's and 80's the groundwater level had decline by 80 meters due to coalmining. Now the groundwater level has been partly recovered and the springs are active again.

In Írottö Nature Park (www.naturpark.hu) we met the chairman György Bakos who showed us the EDEN award on “tourism and protected areas”, the park received in 2009.

Later in the day we took part in a meeting of the Management of Írottö Nature Park, the mayor of Köszeg, different members of the park advisory board (nature conservation organizations, the National Park Órségi, the tourism association and citizens) and the Association of Hungarian Nature Parks where the new development concept for Hungarian Nature Parks dealing with future challenges and opportunities for Nature Parks in Hungary was discussed.



The mystic karstic springs “Fényes-Forrás” at the Gerecse Nature Park.
<http://www.tataifenyestanosveny.hu/>



Laszlo Musicz from the Gerecse Nature Park explains that the drying up marsh meadows near the springs are home to endangered plant species as the groundsel-species *Senecio umbrosus*. We also had the luck to catch a glimpse at some of the rare pygmy cormorants (*Microcarbo pygmeus*) at the swamp forest.



Now that the coalmining in Tata stopped and the Öreg-Tó lake has been partly restored, thousands of migrating wild geese as the bean goose, white fronted goose and graylag goose are resting again at the lake in autumn and spring.



Together with (from 3rd left to right) Béla Báthy (Association of Hungarian Nature Parks), Zsolt Szilvacsku, (Corvinus University of Budapest), Gábor Kíss (Herman Ottó Institute), Laszlo Musicz (Gerecse Nature Park) and Bolbás Csilla (information centre) at the karstic springs "Fényes-Forrás".

Hungary: Nature Parks Gerecse and Irottkő / Association of Hungarian Nature Parks



Írottkő Nature Park has been awarded as "European destination of excellence" in "tourism and protected areas" in 2009. www.naturpark.hu



Discussing the new development concept of Hungarian Nature Parks together with the management of Írottkő Nature Park, members of the park advisory board, the municipality Kőszeg, the Association of Hungarian Nature Parks and others.

Switzerland: Swiss Parks Network



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

24. Februar

Third destination of our study trips: Switzerland! Today, I met Tina Müller and Christian Stauffer from the Swiss Parks Network (www.paerke.ch) in Bern and learned a lot about the exciting story of success of the parks in Switzerland: the first Regional Nature Park has been designated in 2008 – since then, 15 Regional Nature Parks have seen the light of day in Switzerland!

In the last eight years, many exciting projects and approaches have been developed. For instance, innovative tourism offers are developed together with experts in pilot parks, before they are adopted by other parks of the network. Moreover, the “Swiss Parks App”, which is based on a complex geo data system, offers visitors an overview on hiking, cycling and E-bike trails and informs about cultural and natural highlights of the region.



Together with Tina Müller at the Swiss Parks Network. The Swiss Parks Network is the umbrella organisation of the 15 Regional Nature Parks, 3 National Parks and the one Periurban Park in Switzerland.

Switzerland: Swiss Parks Network



Together with Christian Stauffer, director of the Swiss Parks Network.

Switzerland: Parc régional Chasseral



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

25. Februar

A Nature Park community role play for pupils, constructing dry stone walls together with asylum seekers and an architectural competition for students – the working areas of the Regional Park Chasseral (www.parcchasseral.ch) are many and varied. Common to all is the goal to get the people interested in the natural and built heritage of their region, to make visible historical and scenic particularities and to offer residents a vivid landscape accompanied by a good quality of life. A very inspiring day with a lot of new insights – many thanks to the team of the Regional Park Chasseral!



„Together with the director, Fabien Vogelsperger, and the park team in the beautiful snowy landscape of the Regional Park Chasseral.“

Switzerland: Parc régional Chasseral



„I just arrived in time to see one of the role plays, the park organizes for pupils where the children can slip into the role of a community representative and discuss about the construction of a new sports centre in their village. Exciting new approaches in the Parc régional Chasseral!“



„In an architectural competition, students of the technical college of Bern try to find solutions for the development of village centres to create highly liveable places and keep land consumption outside villages to a minimum.“

<http://vivre-architecture.ch/>

<http://www.jointmaster.ch/jma/ch/DE-CH/index.cfm>”

Switzerland: Parc régional Chasseral



The dry stone wall project helps in preserving and revitalizing the particularities of the cultural landscape, supports the inclusion of longtime-unemployed, asylum-seekers and other socially disadvantaged people and safeguards the high diversity of small mammals, reptiles and insects living between the stones.



Beautiful dry stone walls in the winter landscape of the Regional Park Chasseral!

Switzerland: Biosphere Reserve Entlebuch



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

28. Februar

Designated as UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2001 and as Regional Nature Park in 2008, Entlebuch is always seeking new challenges and approaches to combine the conservation of its natural treasures as the numerous marshes with the further development of the region and attractive touristic offers (see pictures).

Entlebuch was the last destination of my visit to Switzerland. To experience the fresh and young spirit of the Nature Park and Biosphere Reserve, you should check the very funny promotion stunt, where Entlebuch sends a message to the space to attract extraterrestrial tourists. Thank you to Annette Schmid-Hofer and Christian Ineichen for the very interesting discussions and the great practical examples of the work in Entlebuch!

<http://www.biosphaere.ch/de/> (Homepage)

<http://entlebuchmessage.tumblr.com/post/80253572176/we-are-sending-an-invitation-into-outer-space> ("The Entlebuch Message" - short teaser in English)

<http://entlebuchmessage.tumblr.com/post/88462764558/au%C3%9Ferirdische-willkommen-endlich-fertig-die> ("The Entlebuch Message" - casefilm in German)



View from the "Brienzer Rothorn" (2350m). The skiing area Sörenberg belongs to the Biosphere Reserve Entlebuch and is a popular destination for people from the surrounding villages and the city Luzern.

Thanks to strict no-hunting areas, the population of the alpine ibex at the Brienzer Rothorn counts more than 150 individuals today again.

Switzerland: Biosphere Reserve Entlebuch



This Kneipp facility in Entlebuch is a great example of recreational offers in the field of health and wellness in Nature Parks. After having passed the barefoot trail and Kneipp-basins, visitors can try some of the regional herbs in the Kneipp-Garden.



Regional products, but different - in her shop, which is a "partner business" of the Biosphere Reserve Entlebuch, Silvia Limacher sells self-made herbal balms, bath salts and skin oils. The herbs for the cosmetic products are collected in nearby gardens.

www.chruetlimacher.ch

Switzerland: Biosphere Reserve Entlebuch



Together with Dr. Annette Schmid Hofer, research associate and Christian Ineichen, Regional Manager and deputy director of the Biosphere Reserve/Nature Park Entlebuch.

Luxembourg: Nature Parks Our, Obersauer and Mellerdall



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

10. März

All the Nature Parks of one country in just two days – that's only possible in Luxembourg! But these two days were packing a punch! In Luxembourg, Nature Parks act as qualified service providers to their communities – advising communities and citizens on energy saving issues, providing a powerful geo information tool to municipalities, counselling farmers on nature conservation aspects and much more.

Together with Christian Kayser, director of the Nature Park Our, Christine Lutgen, director of the Nature Park Öwersauer and Claude Petit, director of the Nature Park Mëllerdall I got to know the many facets and some of the exciting projects of the Luxembourgian Nature Parks (see pictures!).



I started my tour in the Nature Park Our, where I visited the “Cité de l'image” Clervaux (city of paintings”). The communities of the Nature Park chose creative themes for their cities to give them unmistakable identities (cité de l'image Clervaux, cité littéraire Vianden, cite du sons Hoscheid and others).



Together with Christian Kayser (director of the Nature Park Our, left) and Alain Klein in the ecological centre of the Nature Park Our (www.naturpark-our.lu).

Luxembourg: Nature Parks Our, Obersauer and Mellerdall



Claude Petit, director of the Nature Park Mëllderdall (www.naturpark-mellerdall.lu) showed me the unique sand stone landscape of the youngest of the Luxembourgian Nature Parks. After elaborating a complex preparatory study and collecting experiences in various projects, the park is expecting to get its official recognition as a Nature Park in the very close future.



A large proportion of the Nature Park Mëllderdall is covered by forest. To communicate citizens the value of the wood resources of their home region, the park developed creative offers where citizens can harvest a tree in the forest together with a forester, assist in its processing and later construct their own wooden furniture. A very cool project – looking forward to the many which are still to come!

Luxembourg: Nature Parks Our, Obersauer and Mellerdall



In the Nature Park Öwersauer (www.naturpark-sure.lu/) I met the director Christine Lutgen and had a look at the production of wool bags, scarfs and blankets which are produced in the still active weaving mill in the Nature Park centre.



A large part of the Nature Park Öwersauer is covered by the Öwersauer Lake, which stores most of the region's drinking water supplies. The Nature Park advises communities and farmers on how to avoid the use of pesticides and thereby protecting the soil, ground water and animal and plant diversity.

Italy: Federparchi



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

14. März

Today was the first day of our tour through bella Italia! We started in Rome, together with Stefania Petrosillo, who will accompany us on our journey through Italy. At our meeting with the Italian park association Federparchi (<http://www.federparchi.it/>) we learned a lot about the close collaboration of Federparchi with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the important role of Italian Regional Parks for species conservation (as of the osprey or brown bear) and the participation of Italian Parks in the Charter of Sustainable Tourism. Federparchi is the association of over 160 protected areas including nature reserves, marine protected areas, national and regional parks.



Together with Stefania Petrosillo (advisor and expert for protected areas), Francesco Carlucci (director of Federparchi) and Corrado Teofili (IUCN committee coordinator at Federparchi) (from centre to right)

Italy: Regional Parks of Lazio



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

16. März

What are the challenges and opportunities of Nature-, or Regional Parks close to big cities? In a very exiting meeting with representatives of the Regional Park Agency of Lazio and two Regional Parks – Appia Antica and Veio – we learned about the numerous LIFE-projects of the parks in Lazio and how citizens can be included in biodiversity monitoring. Other inspiring approaches were the “City of Children” project and the GENS-program which aim at strengthening the rights of children (e.g. to go to school alone by developing safe school routes) and enabling their active involvement in the development of the park (children as park-guides!). The afternoon was dedicated to some practical experience – a guided biking tour through the Regional Park Appia Antica. Herds of sheep in front of city buildings, bird watching stations near gravesites of the ancient Romans, beautiful grasslands with streams and fountains – a day full of impressions and exiting insights into the great work of the Regional Parks of Lazio!

Regional Park Agency of Lazio: www.arplazio.it/english_introduction.htm

Regional Park Appia Antica: www.parcoappiaantica.it

Regional Park Veio: www.parcodiveio.it



Landscape preservation in action - herd of sheep in front of the city of Rome

Italy: Regional Parks of Lazio



Meeting with the members of the Regional Park Agency of Lazio http://www.arplazio.it/english_introduction.htm, the Regional Park Appia Antica <http://www.parcappiaantica.it/> and the Regional Park Veio <http://www.parcodiveio.it/> - thank you for the many exciting presentations and discussions!



Accessible nature information panel at the tomb of Annia Regilla near Rome. When you push the button, the calls of the pictured birds are played - this makes the panel more exciting to all visitors and in addition accessible to people with visual disabilities. The informative text is printed in relief and in Braille.

Italy: Regional Parks of Lazio



The cultural heritage within the Regional Park Appia Antica is overwhelming - you can see here the Nyphaeum and the spring of Egeria.

Italy: Regional Parks of Ossola



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

18. März

From the summerish Rome to the snowy mountains of the Piedmont! The last destination of our journey was the Nature Park Veglia Devero which is managed by the Aree Protette dell'Ossola (www.areeprotetteossola.it). Together with the president Paolo Crosa Lenz, the director Ivano Negri and the protected area manager Radames Bionda we discovered the very impressive wildlife monitoring activities of the park, the various activities within the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism and the magic and enchanting landscape of the Ossola mountains (see pictures).



Radames Bionda, protected area manager of the Ossola parks (left) presented the very impressive and extensive scientific monitoring work on the population development of endangered alpine bird species like the black grouse or rock ptarmigan and many other bird and mammal species. The results of the monitoring and the negative effect of human disturbance (e.g. by freeriding skiing) and climate change on population trends are published in several scientific papers.

www.areeprotetteossola.it

Italy: Regional Parks of Ossola



The mountain village Alpe Devero - a winter-wonderland!

Italy: Regional Parks of Ossola



Ivano de Negri, director of the Protected Areas of Ossola (black jacket) and Paolo Crosa Lenz, president of the Protected Areas of Ossola (red jacket) were the best park guides you could imagine! During our snowshoe tour, we discussed about the necessity to inform visitors about the impact of sporting activities on wildlife, the importance to include farmers and tourism providers in the development of the park and the advantages of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. We totally agree with the Paolo and Ivano: one day in the park is like a whole life!



The Agriturismo Alpe Crampio (www.agriturismoalpecrampio.it) is partner of the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism. Crampio is only accessible by foot or with particular snowmobiles – but once you are there you are rewarded with the delicious Bettelmatt cheese, which is produced only in selected Alps over 2,000 meters!

You can find more information on the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism at: www.european-charter.org

Croatia: Croatian Ministry of Environment



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

19. April

The sixth destination on our tour throughout Europe is Croatia! Today we visited the Croatian Ministry for Environmental and Nature Protection, which takes care of the protected areas in Croatia, including the 11 Nature Parks and 2 Regional Parks. Together with the Agency for Environment and Nature, the Ministry sets a very good structured framework for the parks and acts as powerful service provider, offering a variety of training workshops to park employees and advising them on the park's management. To support the parks in continuously improving their management effectiveness, a self-assessment tool was developed, which helps the parks in identifying strength and weaknesses. The beautiful new website on Croatian Parks (www.parkovihrvatske.hr) gives you an impression of the diversity of natural landscapes in Croatia, ranging from the snowy mountains of the Dinaric Alps to the Mediterranean coastline and the unique flood plains of the Mura, Drava and Sava.



Meeting at the Ministry of Environment in Zagreb with Mila Preradović (Ministry for Environmental and Nature Protection, left) and Karla Fabio Čubrić (Agency for Environment and Nature) and four other colleagues (not on the picture).

Croatia: Nature Park Lonjsko Polje



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

20. April

Today we visited the Nature Park Lonjsko Polje with its beautiful Sava wetlands, unique diversity of birds and lovely traditional wooden houses. The area of the park serves as natural flood prevention – if the level of the Sava River gets too high, floodgates are opened and the water floods the wetlands of the Nature Park, changing the landscape into a single sheet of water. Unusual challenges call for unusual solutions – the Turopolje pig, an old breed of pig, endemic to the region, can dive and feeds on fishes and mussels! A day full of new discoveries and insights!

www.pp-lonjsko-polje.hr



Eduard Bogovic from the Nature Park Lonjsko Polje (right) told us about the particularities of the park landscape, the challenge to prevent the ongoing emigration of young people and the chance of sustainable tourism for the development of the region. Mila Preradović (Ministry for Environmental and Nature Protection, second from the left) accompanies and assists us on our visits to the Croatian parks.

Croatia: Nature Park Lonjsko Polje



The diversity of birds in the Sava wetlands makes the hearts of birders leap for joy! On the picture you can see a colony of hundreds of grey herons, night herons and endangered spoonbills – the latter being the symbol species for the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park.



A young fellow of the Turopolje pig breed, which can swim and dive and stays outside in the swamps all year round! Its long hair and thick layer of fat help him to resist even the coldest Croatian winter. Lonjsko Polje is keeping its own herd of pigs to help to save this old original breed from extinction and prevent hybridisation with other pig breeds.

Croatia: Nature Park Lonjsko Polje



Our last destination in the Nature Park was the stork village Cigoc with its traditional architecture and a lot of stork nests on the roofs. A beautiful place and a popular destination for tourists.

Croatia: Regional Park Mura Drava



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

22. April

Our last destination in Croatia was the Regional Park Mura Drava which is situated along the Mura and Drava rivers at the northern country border and spans five Croatian counties. Unlike Nature Parks which are organised on state level, Croatian Regional Parks are managed on county level. Siniša Golub and Mihaela Mesarić (director and conservation manager of the Public Institution for Nature Conservation of Medimurje county) work with great commitment to devise educational and tourism offers for the five-year-old park, manage nature conservation activities and discuss the park's development with politicians, hunters, fishermen, the national water managing institution, tourism organisations and many other stakeholders. To get an impression of the beauty of the Mura River, which is still meandering in its natural river bed, you have to have a look at the pictures!

<http://www.medjimurska-priroda.info> (Public Institution for Nature Conservation of Medimurje county)



Bridge over the Mura River

Croatia: Regional Park Mura Drava



The Regional Park Mura Drava was designated in 2011 to protect the Mura River against the building of hydropower plants. Hydropower plants are threatening the biodiversity of many rivers in the Balkans. Several nature conservation NGO's are active to preserve the unique ecosystem of the Balkan rivers: [Save the Blue Heart of Europe](#), [EuroNatur](#), [WWF Adria](#) und [Amazon of Europe](#).



From left to right: Ulrich Köster (VDN); Martina Vidakovic, Marijana Juric and Mila Preradović (Ministry for Environmental and Nature Protection); Mihaela Mesarić (conservation manager at the Regional Park Mura Drava); Katharina Denkinger (VDN) and Siniša Golub (director of the Regional Park Mura Drava).

Croatia: Regional Park Mura Drava



Discussing the challenges and successes of the Mura-Drava Regional Park together with the park director, conservation manager, project manager and representatives of the Ministry of Environment.



A school class exploring the Mura River at a guided tour at the bird watching tower of the Regional Park.

Croatia: Regional Park Mura Drava



The Regional Park keeps eight Medimurje horses, an old coldblooded horse breed of the Medimurje county, which can be visited by school classes and the public.

Intermediate status of the study visits



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

10. Mai

Halftime for our study trips! Here you can see which countries we already visited (red) and which are about to come (light green). Looking forward to many new discoveries!



Norway: Norske Parker



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

10. Mai

We started our trip through Norway together with Kristian Bjørnstad, director of the park association “Norske Parker” (www.norskeparker.no) with this beautiful view over the Fjords from the Stegastein outlook. Together with Kristian we will travel from the western fjords over the mountains until the east boarder of Norway, visiting 3 of the 5 Norwegian Regional Parks. These “living landscapes”, how the parks are called, have a strong bottom-up approach, including local partners, municipalities and the local community in the parks’ development.



Norway: Naeroyfjorden World Heritage Park



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

11. Mai

The first destination in Norway was the Nærøyfjorden World Heritage Park (en.naroyfjorden.no). Together with Life Inge, co-chair and Hanne Lykkja, visitor manager of the Nærøyfjorden World Heritage Park we discovered the breath-taking beauty of the Norwegian Fjords and the challenges the Fjord villages are facing.



From left to right:

Kristian Bjørnstad, director of Norske Parker

Life Inge, co-chair of Nærøyfjorden World Heritage Park

Kaharina Denkinger, VDN

Hanne Lykkja, visitor manager at the Nærøyfjorden World Heritage Park

Ulrich Köster, VDN

Kristine Krumberga, phd-student from Latvia

Norway: Naeroyfjorden World Heritage Park



To improve the value creation through tourism, the park, together with local communities, identifies the particularities of each Fjord village and works out development potentials.



Life Inge, co-chair of Nærøfjorden World Heritage Park with the symbol of the village of Undredal. Undredal produces the famous brown cheese, which is made by caramelised milk and whey, and very tasty goat salami.

Norway: Naeroyfjorden World Heritage Park



Breathtaking nature at the World Heritage Park Nærøfjorden



The Aurland River Lodge www.292aurland.com is a park partner of the Naeroyfjorden Regional Park. In this beautiful lodge, the love for the historic past of the place is combined with modern lifestyle and local high quality products. A very creative approach which goes together very well with the concept of Nature-, Regional-, and Landscape Parks.

Norway: Valdres Nature- and Culture Park



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

11. Mai

From the fjords to the mountains – the Valdres Nature and Culture Park crew presenting their park logo, which was inspired by the wood carvings at the famous medieval stave churches of the region. A logo, which goes straight to the heart and was adapted with a lot of enthusiasm by the local community! Today we learned a lot about the summer mountain farming in Valdres, the famous fish festivals in the region and innovative publicity and outreach work of the park.

<http://new.valdres.no>



Proudly presenting the park logo - Katharina Sparstadt, Henning Wangsnes (Valdres Nature and Culture Park, left) and Guri Grønolen (Oppland County Government, third from right).

Norway: Valdres Nature- and Culture Park



A poster advertising the annual Rakfiskfestival of Valdres – a great example on how exceptional and fancy the publicity for local products and events can be! The original “rakfisk” is a speciality made out of fermented trout, which is only produced in Valdres. Up to 30,000 visitors are coming to the festival each year in November.

(c) by Valdres Nature and Culture Park



Valdres is famous for its summer mountain farms – a transhumance, in which the cows are taken up to the mountain pastures for grazing during summer. This traditional farming practice diminished by almost 50% in the last decades and the park is trying to stop this negative trend by supporting the farmers in the promotion of the Stølskmjølk (milk from mountain farms) and other milk products and in the fight for an adequate income.

Picture taken at the open-air museum of Valdres.

Norway: Valdres Nature- and Culture Park



Together with Eivind Brenna (second from the right), chair of Norske Parker and board member of the Valdres Nature and Culture Park

Norway: Norske Parker Conference, National Park Fulufjället



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

12. Mai

“Regional Parks cross borders and create value” – this was the message of the springtime meeting of the Norwegian Regional Parks. A very interesting seminar, which gave us the chance to experience the Norwegian park movement at first hand. Besides the 5 established parks, there are 5 park candidates and 4 park projects which hope to get the park status in the coming years.

...and at our fieldtrip to the Fulufjällets National Park we even met some very special guests! (see pictures ;)



„Norske Parker Meeting in Trysil“

Norway: Norske Parker Conference, National Park Fulufjället



The destination of the conference field trip was the Swedish part of the transnational Fulufjället National Park. Together with Norwegian Regional Park experts at a frozen waterfall close to the swamp forests.
<http://www.sverigesnationalparker.se/en/choose-park---list/fulufjallet-national-park/>



The special guests for the German friends from the south: two elk, which we could catch a glimpse of from the bus! With their smooth movements and gentle nature, these animals are real beauties!

Norway: Norske Parker Conference, National Park Fulufjället



Fulufjället National Park



Fulufjället visitor centre (naturum)

Norway: Finnskogen Nature - and Culture Park



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

13. Mai

The last destination of our study trip through Norway was the Finnskogen Nature & Culture Park. The Norwegian-Swedish transnational park has a joint management for both countries. The park's identity is closely linked to the Finnish immigrants who moved to this region 350 years ago and started farming in the middle of the deep forest.

[Finnskogen Natur & kulturpark](#)



The Finnish shamanic traditions are still alive in Finnskogen. This tree stump is said to heal injuries and diseases when being touched.



Finnskogen Nature and Culture Park

Norway: Finnskogen Nature - and Culture Park



Today, Vestigarn, a small scale family farm and nice coffeehouse in Trysil community, signed a partnership declaration with the Finnskogen Nature & Culture Park.



On the picture you see, alongside the representatives of the Norwegian Regional Parks:

Ingunn and Kristofer from Vestigarn, Herdis Bragelien and Suzanne Palmqvist, Norwegian and Swedish directors of Finnskogen Nature and Culture Park, Dag Raaberg, director of the Norsk Skofinsk Museum in Finnskogen

Ola Elvestuen, Committee on Energy and the Environment, Parliament of Norway

France: Fédération des parcs naturels régionaux de France



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

24. Mai

Today, together with Olaf Holm, director of the Regional Nature Park Montagne de Reims, we visited the Federation of Regional Nature Parks of France in Paris. Pierre Weick (middle), director of the Federation and Katy Monier, person in charge of international relations told us a lot about the charter, a strong instrument for the planning, quality monitoring and development of the French Regional Nature Parks. We also got to know the responsibilities of the 51 French Regional Parks in the field of land-use planning and the great concept of the new national park brand for regional products. A very interesting day with a lot of new impulses!

[Parcs naturels régionaux de France](#)



France: Parc naturel régional de la Montagne de Reims



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

25. Mai

An excellent landscape for an exceptional wine – this is the slogan of the Regional Nature Park Montagne de Reims, which is characterised by its Champagne vineyards and includes a part of the new UNESCO World Heritage site “Coteaux, caves et maisons de Champagne”. By advising the communities on typical local architecture and energy saving and with its numerous cultural and educational events, the park plays an important role for the sustainable development of the region and regional identity.

[Parc naturel régional de la Montagne de Reims](#)



The team of the Regional Nature Park Montagne de Reims, together with the parc director Olaf Holm (second from the left).

France: Parc naturel régional de la Montagne de Reims



Arnaud Beaufort, vice president of the park and winegrower gave us an insight into the art of Champagne-production. The park supports the preservation of the remaining vine huts, which disappeared gradually during the last decades but represent an important cultural heritage of the region.



The landscape of the park Montagne de Reims is characterised by wine yards and forest.

France: Parc naturel régional de la Montagne de Reims



Working for the preservation of the typical village architecture – Olaf Holm, park director, Sabine Delon, person in charge of landscape and village planning and the park architect Caroline Feneuil (not on the picture).



Dominique Levêque, president of the Regional Nature Park Montagne de Reims and mayor of the park community Ay (2nd from the right), told us how his community profits from the advice and expertise of the park in the field of landscape planning, village development and energy saving.

France: Parc naturel régional de la Montagne de Reims



“Last stop before « la fête du parc » “. In 3 weeks the park celebrates his 40th anniversary!

France: Parc naturel régional du Pilat



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

27. Mai

The last destination in France was the Parc naturel régional du Pilat near Lyon. With numerous initiatives and activities, the park is working for the ecological transition of the region with new mobility solutions, new working concepts, climate friendly living and sustainable farming with short supply chains. A great park team, very innovative approaches – thank you for this inspiring day!



“La ferme du Pilat” is a network of 28 farmers who sell their products in a common shop. We met Laurent Chavas, farmer and founder of the collective farming initiative, who told us, that the short supply chains support not only the regional development and climate protection, but also enable very fair prices for high quality products – ranging from cheese and vegetables to artisanal beer. The project is supported by the European funding program LEADER.

France: Parc naturel régional du Pilat



Most of the citizens of the park drive daily to the big cities in the surroundings to work there. To face this problem, the park, together with the communities, developed the "house of services". Employees and freelancers can use the rooms and office equipment of the house for their daily work, can take part in computer training courses and profit from the exchange with other regional companies.



Together with Pierre Schmelzle, member of the park council, Michèle Perez, park president, Sandrine Gardet, park director and Céline Hausherr, in charge of sustainable economy (from left to right) in front of the "maison du parc".

France: Parc naturel régional du Pilat



Understanding things means smelling, touching, seeing, experiencing... The exhibitions and gardens of the park house are based on this principal and therefore are not only great to experience but also accessible to everyone, including wheelchair-users and persons with a visual impairment.



The Regional Nature Park Pilat advises and informs citizens and communities on energy saving building techniques. The park house itself sets the best example – at the right you can see that the park meeting room is illuminated with captured sunlight! Impressive! :)

UK: National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

1. Juni

[Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty \(AONBs\)](#) – this is the poetic term for the parks in England, Wales and Northern Ireland we are looking for!

Today we assisted the Board Meeting of the National Association for AONBs in Birmingham and met Philip Hygate (Chairman), Howard Davies (Managing Director), Chris Woodley-Stewart (Vice Chairman) and many other members of the Association's Board. In a very inspiring discussion, we got to know how the National Association provides strategic direction and works for a strong network of AONBs – with personal training programs, a communication platform and a variety of other supporting activities!



UK: AONB Shropshire Hills



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

2. Juni

Today we met Phil Holden and his enthusiastic team from the [Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#) and got to know some brilliant examples on how AONBs and other European Nature-, Regional-, and Landscape Parks help to achieve European Union nature conservation goals by supporting the [#Natura2000](#) network. In order to protect threatened freshwater species and the biodiversity of the beautiful upland meadows, the AONB staff establishes long term relationships with farmers and landowners, gives advice on sustainable management practices and funding opportunities and provides regular practical support. After today's field trips we can testify: the Shropshire Hills certainly are an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty!



Phil Holden (director of the Shropshire Hills AONB, 2nd from right) and Joy Howells (Landscape Partnership Scheme Manager, Shropshire Hills AONB, right) together with a meadow manager of the Marches Meadow Group (2nd from left) and Simon Cooter (Natural England).

[Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme](#)

UK: AONB Shropshire Hills



Within the [Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme](#), the AONB established a Marches Meadow Group which counts more than 30 farmers and meadow-managers, one of them being Richard Small (middle). Group members receive advice on management, exchange knowledge, have access to shared hay making machinery and get support in enhancing the diversity of their meadows.



The Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

UK: AONB Shropshire Hills



Together with Alison Jones (responsible for the river Clan project of the AONB Shropshire Hills) and Phil Holden (AONB managing director). The Clan River in the back is home to the endangered Freshwater Pearl Mussel and a Special Area of Conservation within the Natura2000 network.



One of the activities of the AONB is to improve the watercourse crossings of cattle to prevent further erosion of the river bank, which threatens the endangered Freshwater Pearl Mussel and many other river species.

Spain: Parque natural de la Zona Volcanica de la Garrotxa



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

14. Juni

Our study tours are slowly coming to an end – the last but one country on our tour is Spain! We started at the [Parc Natural de la Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa](#) – one of Europe's most important and beautiful volcanic areas. The park was one of the pilot parks awarded with the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism – a tool developed by [The Europarc Federation](#) where parks work in partnership with gastronomy businesses, hotels and other stakeholders to develop a common sustainable tourism strategy. Today we met one of the many park partners – a yoghurt factory with a great social and ecological concept – have a look at the pictures!



The history of the park started back in the 1970's with a nature conservation movement to save the volcanoes from mining activities. At one of the park's four volcanoes, you can see today the traces of the massif destruction the mining caused at these times. The nature conservation movement resulted in the declaration of a Natural Site of National Interest which was reclassified as a Nature Park in 1985.

Spain: Parque natural de la Zona Volcanica de la Garrotxa



One of the park partners within the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism is the yoghurt factory La Fageda, which was founded in the 1980's with the objective to provide job opportunities to people with mental diseases enabling them to maintain a better quality of life. Besides its social commitment, the company is working to improve its ecological sustainability and has an innovative visitor policy – over 60,000 people visit La Fageda each year to have guided tours, see and touch the cows and taste the yoghurt.



In front of the park office with a view on the beautiful Parque Natural de la Garrotxa, together with Xavier Puig, director of the park (second from left) and Josep Prats, former park director (left).

Spain: Parque natural del Montseny



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

15. Juni

Today we visited the Parc Natural del Montseny. Situated only one and a half hours from Barcelona, the many visitors can dive here into a world of highland pastures, holly oak forests and enjoy spectacular views. In the middle of the mountains we encountered the very innovative approaches of the El Bellver park partner which unifies excellent food, a strict environment friendly concept and service centre facilities in one beautiful restored farm house.



Together with Ignasi Martinez (2nd from left) - cook, mayor of Tagamanent and man of action - at the Bellver farm and restaurant. Ignasi works with the slow food concept and creates marvellous delicious dishes out of old varieties of vegetables and cereals. The old farm is run almost entirely with solar and water power. El Bellver is a park partner within the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.

Spain: Parque natural del Montseny



Lluís Martínez (park engineer), Joana Barber (park director) and Montserrat Cabré (public use technician) (left to right) told us a lot about the many activities of the park, ranging from the cooperation with schools, the maintenance of public trails and visitor management to the close cooperation with farmers and provision of services to the local population.



An ancient shelter for shepherds. In the past the mountains were dotted with farming houses and the grazing of sheep and cows created a very distinctive landscape with its own special biodiversity. Nowadays the park is working to improve the situation for the remaining farmers and helps in the recovery of pastures and restoration of cultural heritage.

Spain: Parque natural del Montseny



The park in the past and today - impressions from the wonderful park information centre in Montseny.

Spain: EUROPARC-España



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

16. Juni

On our last day in Spain we met Marta Múgica, director of [EUROPARC-España](#) – the association of all protected areas in Spain and the Spanish Section of Europarc Federation. Europarc Espana is providing a series of services to the 149 Spanish Nature and Regional Parks and its other members, as e.g. publishing annual reports on the state of Spain's protected areas and offering training courses on the management of Natura2000 sites. With a very productive and interesting meeting in Madrid, our study trip to Spain came to an end.



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Poland: Directorate of the West Pomeranian Landscape Parks



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

27. Juni

The last destination of our study tours was Stettin in Poland, where I met Dorota Janicka (director), Karolina Bloom, Agata Suchta and Igor Szakowski from the Directorate of the West Pomeranian Landscape Parks - [Zespół Parków Krajobrazowych Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego](#). In a very interesting meeting, I've got to know the particularities of the governance system of the 121 Polish Landscape Parks, which are administered and often directly managed by departments of the Marshal offices (the regional self-administration of the voivodships). With a visit to the peri-urban Landscape Park of Stettin, our study tours through the European Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks came to an end.



Together with the directorate of West Pomeranian Landscape Parks - from left to right: Igor Szakowski (senior referee), Dorota Janicka (director), Agata Suchta (specialist for nature conservation, education and tourism) and Karolina Bloom (specialist for nature conservation and international cooperation).

Poland: Directorate of the West Pomeranian Landscape Parks



The “Cristal Lake” in the Landscape Park of Stettin is a popular destination for recreation.



Karolina Bloom (specialist for nature conservation and international cooperation) and Tomasz Cerebież-Tarabicki (park ranger) at the Cristal Lake in the Landscape Park of Stettin.

Final post: Thank you!



Verband Deutscher Naturparke e.V. (VDN)

1. Juli ·

Five months have passed since we started our study tours through the European Nature-, Regional-, and Landscape Parks. Five months full of very exciting discussions, a lot of new discoveries, great meetings and so many fantastic projects!

We were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and commitment our partners work for the development of their parks, for nature conservation, innovative cooperation projects, nature friendly tourism and exiting educational offers.

One thing is certain: European Nature-, Regional-, and Landscape Parks make a vital contribution to a livable, nature friendly and unified Europe!

We are looking forward to our future collaboration! :D

~~ A big THANK YOU to (chronological): ~~



Final post: Thank you!

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Verband der Naturparke Österreichs

Verein Naturparke Steiermark

Naturpark Pöllauer Tal, together with Bauernladen Pöllau

ARGE Naturparke Burgenland, together with the education board Burgenland and the Nature Park Schools of the Burgenland: VS St. Martin, NMS Josefinum Eberau, VS Rechnitz and NMS Rechnitz

Naturpark Geschriebenstein

Magyar Natúrpark Szövetség (Association of Hungarian Nature Parks)

Herman Ottó Intézet

Pro Vértes

Nature Park Gerecse, together with the Fényes Tanösvény Springs

Nature Park Irrotkö (Hungarian part)

Schweizer Pärke / Parcs suisses / Parchi svizzeri

Parc régional Chasseral

Unesco Biosphäre Entlebuch, together with CHRÜTLIMACHER

Naturpark Our

Naturpark Öewersauer

Naturpark Möllerdall

Federparchi Europarc Italia

Regional Park Agency of Lazio with the Parco Regionale dell'Appia Antica and Parco Regionale di Veio

Aree Protette Ossola

The Croatian Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection - Parkovi Hrvatske/Parks of Croatia

Park prirode Lonjsko polje

The Regional Park Mura Drava - Međimurska priroda

Norske Parker - Levende landskap

Nærøyfjorden Verdsarvpark, together with 292 Aurland

Valdres Natur- og Kulturpark

Finnskogen Natur & kulturpark, together with Vestigarn Handleri & Kafé

The National Park Fulufjället - naturum Fulufjället

La Fédération des Parcs naturels régionaux de France

Parc naturel régional de la Montagne de Reims

Parc naturel régional du Pilat with La FERME DU PILAT

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, together with Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country

Landscape Partnership Scheme

North Pennines AONB Partnership

EUROPARC-España

Parc Natural de la Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa, together with La Fageda

Parc Natural del Montseny, together with La CALMA, El Bellver i l'Agustí

Zespół Parków Krajobrazowych Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego (the directorate of West Pomeranian Landscape Parks)