

# Final Report

## Destination **PARKS**

ALPARC 2019

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# 1. Preparing the Grounds

The project's aim was to find common grounds on how to develop and promote a shared vision, strategy and implementation of sustainable forms of tourism in the Alpine protected areas. This report sums up the discussions and exchanges between the participating parties and tries to develop a scenario for ways ahead in this shared journey. One of the objectives is to identify common success factors, to compile information on good practices and lighthouse products and share those between the interested parties.

Part one will summarise the basic definitions and general findings on sustainable tourism in the Alpine parks.

Part two will focus on the common strategy of the Alpine Parks to adopt in order to pursue the development of sustainable tourism which contributes to the manifold objectives of protected area management. It will propose a common vision for the development of a sustainable tourism strategy to lay the foundation for future cooperation on this topic.

Part three develops on good practice examples from several regions throughout the Alpine arc in order to provide a collection of inspiring ideas for park managers seeking to follow this path.

Part four builds on the previous findings and will present an outlook and ideas on how to continue to pursue a common vision and strategy of Alpine parks and their tourism. How can we support exchange of knowledge, experience and lessons learned? An exchange platform is proposed to link park managers and other interested parties to enable this process.

The methodology of this project report used several standard techniques in order to collect and analyse information. Based on the staff experience, informal stakeholder exchanges and an exhaustive literature review a general framework and project concept was established. During the project implementation several meetings were organised:

- Kick-off meeting, 21 February 2018, Bern, Switzerland
- First online steering meeting, 6 April 2018
- Second meeting, 9 October 2018, Arvieux, France
- Third meeting, 3-5 December 2018, Admont/Villach, Austria
- Final meeting, 11 September 2019, Bern, Switzerland

## 1.1. Sustainable Tourism

Eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, nature-based tourism, nature tourism, etc., there are many different theories, methodologies, and approaches around the topic of an alternative kind of tourism as opposed to mass tourism and its negative impacts.<sup>1</sup> It is neither the claim nor the aim of this report to dive deeper into this discussion. During the project, several key features of the wanted tourism became clear and included the following: aspects of community development, financial returns for local communities, community involvement and participation, the balance between conservation and use of natural resources, as well as the general principles of sustainability. Therefore, we consider the vision of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, which includes all these characteristics, as our guiding principle:

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of the terminology refer for instance to (Siegrist, et al., 2015, pp. 24-27).

*“Sustainable Tourism in European Protected Areas provides a meaningful quality experience, safeguards natural and cultural values, supports local livelihoods and quality of life and is economically viable.” (Europarc, 2019)*

Further aspects are cited in the mission of EUROPARC, which underlines amongst others the importance of international cooperation:

*“...EUROPARC seeks to safeguard cultural and natural values by stimulating quality sustainable tourism, engendering partnerships to support local livelihoods, increase awareness of the need for sustainability, and promote international cooperation.” (Europarc, 2019)*

The definition by the World Tourism Organisation goes into the very same direction: *“Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”*<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2. Why Promoting this Approach?

The Alps being a major tourist destination, classical tourism approaches show their negative impacts on the environmental, social and cultural aspects as well as distorting economic effects within the receiving regions. Nevertheless, revenues generated through tourism are a major economic pillar for many communities. Developing sustainable forms of tourism is, therefore, an imperative in order to reconcile the different claims of the diverging stakeholder groups.

Protected areas and tourism have a very special relationship which must be reinvented in order to align the different objectives of these areas. First and foremost, the conservation or restoration of biodiversity must be given priority, but education and awareness-raising, space for recreation and outdoor activities and other touristic functionalities have to be considered in the management planning and activities. The acceptance of protected areas by the local population and public authorities depends to a high degree on the economic benefits linked to tourism attributed to their existence. In order to achieve both of the above-mentioned objectives protected areas need to engage themselves actively in the development of sustainable tourism.

Parks can use the promotion of sustainable tourism as a marketing tool in order to establish themselves as a tourist destination of its own. They can thus become a brand that people will connect to a certain standard of quality tourism all along the touristic value chain. They will know what they can expect when they choose a park as destination: attractive environment, pristine and preserved nature, good and local food, family style accommodation, well-thought and guided activities, well-marked trail network and so forth. If well managed this kind of tourism can provide a good visitor experience and at the same time foster local and regional development in a sustainable way, thus enhancing the parks acceptance and its options for conservation measures.

## 1.3. How Favouring It?

There are many ways of supporting the development of sustainable tourism and each protected area must find the appropriate means respecting the local realities and the resources at hand. Nevertheless, there are several factors that can be identified as a general framework for the development of sustainable tourism in and around parks.

Sanu et al. (2011) identify the following success factors:

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<sup>2</sup> [sdt.unwto.org/en/content/about-us-5](https://sdt.unwto.org/en/content/about-us-5)

- Uniqueness and authenticity
- Focus on events and experiences/adventure
- Clear positioning of the destination
- High quality of products and services
- Sustainability and fairness of the offer

A major challenge of sustainable tourism is the generation of added value for a given region. As many of the offered activities are inherently freely accessible, innovative ways of income generation must be developed and deployed. The main sources of added values from sustainable tourism are the following:

- entrance and user fees
- accommodation
- catering
- concessions and licences
- sale of (agricultural and handcrafted) products
- services such as guided tours and excursions
- public transport

These can be promoted and sold individually or combined in a package, which can be advantageous for planning purposes and financial turnover. It is important that a cross-sectoral cooperation between the concerned actors is established in order to maximise synergetic effects and to create a maximum of financial returns through activities. This will also help to develop local or regional integrated economic cycles and structures in order to avoid the income to be deviated to external service providers (Siegrist, et al., 2015). The inclusion of the different stakeholders will furthermore help to develop visitor management and thus maximising revenues and minimising negative environmental and social impacts. The establishment of packages which include several to all of the above-mentioned chain links and potential sources of income generation can be a good solution for the parks, the service providers, and the tourists. In chapter 3 we will present some examples of such packages.

Given that tourism is not necessarily the core task or competence of a park there are several guides available which can help park management finding the right approach. One good example is the UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit which guides through the essential steps of the development of a tourism strategy (UNESCO WHC, n.d.). Furthermore, the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism provides useful information and guidance on how to establish and improve sustainable forms of tourism in protected areas (Europarc, 2019).

The Alpine Convention dedicated its fourth report on the status of the Alps to sustainable tourism (Alpine Convention, 2013). Chapter F, “Promote sustainable tourism in the Alps”, provides an overview of the important aspects and explicitly aims to support sustainable tourism planning:

*“The different options for intervention linked to the identified main challenges of Alpine tourism are collected in order to stimulate stakeholders to find ways for a more sustainable tourism. The wide range of fields of action within the sustainability triangle as well as the cross-sectoral tasks offer to all actors in Alpine tourism the possibility of improving its sustainability.” (Alpine Convention, 2013, p. 121)*

This report will contribute its part to provide park managers with inspiration and ideas. In chapter 3.3 we will present the identified success factors of the presented lighthouse products and offers. The concepts developed in chapter four aim at providing further guidance on these aspects.

## 2. A Common Strategy for Fostering and Promoting Sustainable Tourism in Alpine Parks

### 2.1. Vision

Based on the exchanges during this project and on a literature review on this topic we propose the following vision. It is broad enough to fit in the different kind of protected areas with its special needs and realities, still specific enough to provide clear guidance on future development of tourism.

*The awareness about and the appreciation of Alpine protected areas and their values by visitors, local populations and other stakeholders is high. Knowledge, experience and education help establishing another, more sustainable type of travel and tourism in the Alps. It is respectful of biodiversity conservation, it strengthens local and regional economic development, it improves the overall social wellbeing and helps preserving cultural characteristics. The concerned stakeholders are motivated and enabled to easily exchange on good practice and experience and profit from a common understanding of the (strategic) role that protected areas can play in tourism and regional development.*

### 2.2. Mission

In order to pursue this vision multiple steps are necessary, both on park level and on regional and transboundary levels. Until now, there are many parks and regions which develop their own strategies, including tourism development and marketing. There are also several regional or national umbrella organisations which offer common strategies to develop and promote their respective groups of parks through labels and brands. These are valuable examples and generally consider the particular realities of their members. What is missing though, is a unified Alpine approach that would allow to support the parks in putting forward their shared values and help them develop a common strategy to contribute to regional, sustainable touristic development.

This project underlined the need of and laid the foundation for the development of such an initiative. The purpose would explicitly not be to replace any of the existing structures or programs, but to complement them. Based on the subsidiarity principle a future body could collect, combine, complete and promote the knowledge and actions already being realised. It should provide a broader framework to analyse the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats underlying the future development of sustainable tourism in Alpine protected areas. Similarities must be extracted, and practical information must be shared in order to provide real gains for the parks. Additional to existing publicity strategies a common strategy to promote Alpine parks as places of sustainable tourism within Alpine tourism would be helpful.

## 3. Examples from the Alpine Arc

We compiled a set of best practices for destinations and lighthouse projects for products or services, from different regions across the Alpine arc in order to provide park managers with practical examples. Furthermore, this compilation might help to provide the base for and inspire an alpine wide strategy or body if it were to be established through a future project. This list is not

aiming to being exhaustive, but rather to showcase to which extend it can be helpful to create a well-structured database, where practitioners can easily access sources for inspiration, exchange, cooperation and support. The chosen examples try to cover different aspects of tourism in Alpine protected areas to give an idea of the wide range of possibilities.

When it comes to the definition of criteria for destinations or lighthouse projects, we do not intent to define any new ones, there exist already plenty for the mentioned labels. We just want to show how we selected the examples and that we based our decisions on the outcomes of the discussions throughout the project (see figure 1 below). All examples chosen, fulfil these criteria.

The presented cases cover various geographical levels, ranging from very focused examples on village level to the park or national level. They consider different segments of the value chain. There are on the one hand some lighthouse projects that represent a specific product or offer such as 'Business of the Month' or 'Food Trails' and on the other hand more complex concepts for a destination such as a park or a region like 'Valeurs Parc' or the 'Region of Carinthia'.

<p>Definition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ready-to-book tourism offers provided by the park destinations tourism stakeholders (territorial approach)</li><li>• Offers which are based on the principles of sustainable tourism and have outstanding success due to specific characteristics such as<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ creation of a competitive advantage for the region</li><li>○ active cooperation between tourism stakeholders and parks</li><li>○ and promotion of the whole region as sustainable tourism destination (part of a successful development strategy)</li></ul></li></ul> <p>Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High environmental quality, low impact</li><li>• Target groups with high environmental awareness</li><li>• Participation of local stakeholders</li><li>• Strong relation to nature, clear separation from fun tourism/activities (“Aufstiegserlebnis”)</li><li>• Combination of different services in a package</li><li>• Contribution to regional economy/jobs</li><li>• Creativity in the product, uniqueness</li><li>• Strong relation to regional history and culture</li><li>• Enables human encounter</li><li>• Socially responsible</li><li>• Awareness of tour operators on sustainable tourism</li></ul>
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### 3.1. Examples of Regional Dynamics

#### 3.1.1. National Parks Austria



National parks Austria was founded in 2015 and is the umbrella organisation which bundles all national parks of the country. One of its objectives is to implement the national strategy for national parks. The latest version dates from 2018 and drafts a common vision and shared values. It serves as a framework within which the parks can adapt their own strategy based on their natural assets, cultural heritage and touristic resources (Bundesministerium für Nachhaltigkeit und Tourismus, 2018). The document comprises six fields of action englobing 12 objectives and concrete measures. One of the aspects, which goes hand in hand with cooperation and biodiversity conservation, is of particular interest for this report, namely the focus on a common and professional communication and PR strategy:

*“The focus is on the increased approval of a non-human-influenced development in accordance with the IUCN guidelines, the conservation of biodiversity, the use of synergies between the national parks and the professional*

*presentation to the outside world under the "National Parks Austria" brand." (Bundesministerium für Nachhaltigkeit und Tourismus, 2018, p. 6)*

Several objectives of the vision are of special interest within our work, namely objectives 3, 4 and 7 (see figure 1 below) as they touch the topics of tourism, communication and cooperation on diverse geographical levels.

Objective 3 states that nationwide cooperation for better communication is to be achieved in order to improve awareness amongst the population. A special focus should be on cooperation with actors from the tourism sector and other economic actors. The brand National parks Austria shall be strengthened and be established as a recognised label for quality and reliability, with a strong unifying aspect for the participating parks.

Objective 4 emphasises the different roles that tourism in close contact with nature can play. Awareness-raising on environmental issues, with a particular focus on young people and the provision of space for recreation and resourcing for visitors, are the main points. On the base of the existing trail systems and mountain shelters, a dedicated program for this kind of tourism is to be developed in close cooperation with the actors from the tourism sector. Conflicts between the diverging objectives of tourism development and conservation goals are to be openly addressed and solutions to be developed together.

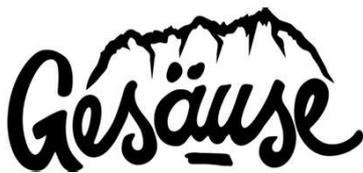
Objective 7 underlines the importance of cooperation between the parks across provincial and international borders. Formal agreements on cooperation are encouraged, fostering cooperation in strategic and operative ways. An active role of National parks Austria in international networks is explicitly mentioned and expected.

We have chosen this example because it provides clear guidance for the national parks on the national level. This allows the individual parks to orient themselves and to develop their management and tourism strategy accordingly. It furthermore underlines the importance of the cooperation between the parks as well as between the parks, other stakeholders from the tourism industry and other protected areas in Austria and on a transboundary level.

Figure 2: Fields of action and objective of the Austrian National Parks vision. Source: (Bundesministerium für Nachhaltigkeit und Tourismus, 2018, p. 5)

<p><b>Field of action: Natural space management and biodiversity*</b></p> <p>Objective 1: Natural development in the nature zone in accordance with IUCN guidelines Objective 2: Species and habitats are protected as best as possible</p> <p><b>Field of action: Awareness raising and nature experience</b></p> <p>Objective 3: Awareness and acceptance of national parks are high Objective 4: Nature experience offers are varied</p> <p><b>Field of action: Research and monitoring</b></p> <p>Objective 5: Scientific knowledge on the status and trends of biodiversity is improved</p> <p><b>Field of action: Regional, national and international cooperation</b></p> <p>Objective 6: The objectives of national parks are increasingly taken into account in the region Objective 7: Institutionalising national and international cooperation</p> <p><b>Field of action: Organization and operation</b></p> <p>Objective 8: Management plans are available for all national parks and are being implemented Objective 9: National park employees are highly motivated and qualified</p> <p><b>Field of action: Legal framework and financing</b></p> <p>Objective 10: Relevant legislation is harmonised with the objectives of the national parks Objective 11: Funding is ensured Objective 12: National park areas and nature conservation services are secured in the long-term</p> <p><small>*Translations have been supported by <a href="http://www.DeepL.com/translator">www.DeepL.com/translator</a></small></p>
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### 3.1.1.1. Gesäuse and Gesäuse Partners



In 2014 the region national park Gesäuse was facing considerable problems in financial and managerial aspects. There was no common marketing strategy or planning and the general acceptance of the park in the region was low. The relations between the different actors were rather conflictual and no common vision was established. Formerly a tourist destination of high standing with elevated visitor numbers and a wide touristic offer the region faced a serious turndown since the 1980s. A new start was thus necessary in order to stop the decline and establish a dynamic turnaround. Several levels of intervention were identified and taken into consideration for the relaunch. One first and very important step was the establishment of an exchange between the different actors, mainly national park management, nature park management and tourism federation, which in fact turned into cooperation. Under the brand ‘Gesäuse’ the actors work together and promote the whole area including the national park Gesäuse as well as the nature and geopark Steirische Eisenwurzten as a unity. The Gesäuse Tourism Association acts as a licensor for this regional umbrella brand. The relaunch process furthermore included the development of new products and a professional marketing campaign. The products were integrated into their own brand labelled ‘Gesäuse Partner’, which will be described in more detail further below. The marketing campaign decided on a very clear and strong visual language, a set of merchandising

products, a common communication strategy, and a general (online) strategy including video and content production, social media presence, and a modern website. The initiative is a success and visitor numbers are clearly on the rise. We have chosen this example because it shows how the development of a sound PR strategy and a cooperative approach can have a significant impact on the development of tourism in a park region. What is furthermore interesting for our context is that the activities focus on sustainable tourism around activities in nature and awareness rising for responsible tourism in the broadest sense.



Since 2006, the network of National Park partner companies has been established. The partner network unites different branches. From farmer direct marketers to guesthouses and excursion providers to commercial enterprises and associations, leading companies in the region are gathered. Partner companies are interested in cooperation (together instead of lonely) and stand fully behind the values of the national park.

In 2017 the Gesäuse national park together with nature and geopark Steirische Eisenwurzten reformed this network which is now labelled “Gesäuse Partner” (partners of Gesäuse). Under the label regional providers of locally produced food, crafts, accommodation, excursion and other goods and services offer the complete set of touristic activities.

Gesäuse partners stand for regionality and sustainability and meet strict quality criteria. The partners define themselves on the subject of esteem: esteem for the region, nature conservation and the people and their identity. The network thrives on the partners who feel they belong to this network and help shape life in the region on a daily basis. They are all linked by a common, positive idea for the future (Nationalpark Gesäuse 2019).

The approach seems to seamlessly integrate all kinds of touristic activities and help tourists to choose from a wide range of offers, that are all following a certain standard. This can be a good example of the integrative role of a protected area in the field of tourism and even regional development.

The website is well done and includes many options and information for the visitor, including an interactive map for the planning of activities, destinations and accommodation.<sup>3</sup> Different services including guided excursions, cultural and culinary activities are proposed and nicely presented, including information on prices, how and where to book.

In terms of sustainable means of transportation, a collective Taxi service can be ordered at a fair price to any location in the park. There is a proactive advertisement for visiting the park without a car and using other modes of transportation. Since this year (2019) the label awards an innovation prize to any private individual, business, association or school based in the region. Through a rather informal procedure, ideas will be rated on the base of four criteria: degree of innovation, economic or social relevance, regional relevance, and sustainability.<sup>4</sup>

The described approach proves successful and can be seen as a lighthouse product. It is included in the report as it managed to improve the overall performance of tourism while respecting ecological and social impacts.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.gesaeuse.at/tourenplaner/](http://www.gesaeuse.at/tourenplaner/)

<sup>4</sup> [partner.gesaeuse.at/innovationspreis/](http://partner.gesaeuse.at/innovationspreis/)

### 3.1.1.2. National Park Region Hohe Tauern and Kriml Waterfall



The Hohe Tauern national region established itself as a recognised sustainable tourism destination. It spreads over three Länder Salzburg, Tyrol and Carinthia, who coordinate their respective activities and offers and share a common platform for public relations and advertisement. The offer puts conservation issues and awareness-raising as well as training in the centre of the development of all touristic activities and along the touristic value chain, including food and accommodation, transportation as well as goods and services. Nevertheless, one of the regional highlights, the Großglockner high Alpine road, sticks out from this concept, as it is an activity which focuses on the act of driving in a scenic landscape, as it passes right through the core zone of the park. The access to the road is subject to a fee for all users, thus generating income, with an estimated number of single users approaching one million per year. This is somewhat countering the definitions of sustainable tourism as discussed in this report.

*“The Hohe Tauern mountains, which are part of the largest national park in the Alpine region, have become a model of sustainable tourism. In 2009, the Länder Carinthia, Salzburg and Tyrol – together with their municipalities within the national park as well as the Großglockner Hochalpenstraßen AG and different marketing units - developed a joint trademark: Hohe Tauern - Die Nationalpark-Region (Hohe Tauern – the national park region).”* (Permanent secretariat of the Alpine Convention 2013, 42)

Another highlight of the region is the Krimml waterfalls, located within the national park. Being the highest waterfalls in Europe and the 5<sup>th</sup> highest in the world they attract about 400.000 visitors per year. In order to manage such a high visitor flux, several facilities have been put in place. The main amenities are the four-kilometre long waterfall trail, which is equipped with several viewing platforms and is partially accessible by wheelchair, and the visitor centre “Wasserwelten” (Wondrous Worlds of Water), located just at the parking lot for the waterfall trail.

There is an entrance fee for both the trail and the visitor centre, which can be purchased either for the trail alone or as a combined ticket for both attractions. An explanation of how the collected money will be used to maintain the touristic infrastructure is given on the website. The site is accessible by car, train and public transport (normal trains, nostalgic train and bus services). In order to further promote the site and to broaden the target group of visitors, prolong the stay in the region and thus enhance the generated revenues, the communication strategy includes health aspects and a health centred tourism connected with the waterfalls. The Hohe Tauern Health therapy consists in a daily aerosol-inhalation-session of an hour for a period of 7, 14 or 21 days. Embedded in a holistic program with allergen reduced accommodation, health information and suggestions for sports activities the therapy aims at a clientele with allergies and asthma.

This example stands out and was chosen as an example mainly for two reasons, namely the management of the very high numbers of visitors and the generation of significant economic benefits for the region through entrance fees. It is also remarkable that the tourist is informed about the fact that his fees go towards the maintenance of the very facility that he is using. Overall this is an interesting approach of visitor management for a highly frequented site.

### 3.1.2. Nature Parks Austria



The nature parks Austria developed a catalogue of projects which aim to refine their approach and to strengthen the four pillars of their *raison d'être*: conservation, recreation, education, and regional development. Through their work, they try to lead by example and become model regions for sustainable development in rural areas. The project categories include employment, environmental education (including model nature park schools and kindergartens), research funding, nature park of the year award, and nature park speciality label. Below we will pick the Nature park label as an example, which we briefly describe as it is closely related to touristic promotion and development. Furthermore, we will describe the region of Kärnten as well as one of its nature parks, namely the nature park Dobratsch and its reorientation as tourist destination. We have chosen this example because it is complementary to the National parks Austria label described above. The approaches resemble each other but are adapted to the objectives and roles of the respective protected area category and thus together they form a nation-wide strategy.

#### 3.1.2.1. Nature Park Austria Speciality Label



The nature parks Austria developed a label named 'nature park Austria speciality'. The two main criteria to obtain the label is that the merchandise must be produced within the nature park and that it supports the conservation of the cultural landscape of the park. The adherence procedure is relatively simple and is negotiated between the respective park and the applicant (Verband der Naturparke Österreichs, 2012). In order to promote the labelled farms, there is a dedicated website<sup>5</sup> and a concept that highlights one of its more than 200 nature park Austria speciality farms each month (Betriebe des Monats / Farm of the month).<sup>6</sup> The platform allows the farms to present their philosophy, working methods and products. This helps promoting their approach, inspire followers and raise awareness amongst the general public, other producers and visitors to the respective region (Verband der Naturparke Österreichs 2019).

There is no common branding of the label in terms of sharing a logo or a claim. The existing logo is not used by most of the partners. The label takes only food and beverages into account, other touristic offers, such as activities or accommodation are not eligible.

We have chosen this example as it shows on how to integrate local businesses into the touristic value chain, how to strengthen regional identity, how to value the efforts of local businesses, and how to set incentives for businesses to engage in sustainable regional economic development.

<sup>5</sup> [www.naturparke.at/spezialitaeten/ueberblick/](http://www.naturparke.at/spezialitaeten/ueberblick/)

<sup>6</sup> [www.naturparke.at/spezialitaeten/betriebe-des-monats/](http://www.naturparke.at/spezialitaeten/betriebe-des-monats/)

### 3.1.2.1. Region of Carinthia



Seven protected areas, eight touristic regions, 91 touristic businesses, and the Kärnten Werbung PR agency joined forces in order to develop a common development and promotion strategy for a sustainable destination Carinthia. The approach focuses on a high quality of goods and services and promotes natural, regional and cultural experiences.

There is a wide range of services offered all along the touristic value chain. The categories include transportation, accommodation, gastronomy, and touristic activities such as guided tours.

In terms of transportation the “Touristische Mobilitätszentrale Kärnten” (touristic mobility centre Carinthia) bundles the activities.<sup>7</sup> The concrete measures include a bus shuttle service between train stations and accommodations, to cover the infamous last-mile.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, there are shuttlebuses for skiing, hiking, biking etc., an bike rental with over 50 stations all over Carinthia<sup>9</sup>, and a trial phase for an e-scooter rental scheme is being implemented. While each of these offers already improve the potential for soft mobility, it is the combination that makes it powerful. The project covers all mobility needs of the tourists, thus making it attractive to travel to Kärnten without your car.

For partner accommodation the label “Natur Aktiv”<sup>10</sup> (nature active) bundles small hotels, pensions and other mostly family run businesses that are all specialised in nature experience, hiking and cycling.

The “Magische Momente”<sup>11</sup> (magic moments) brand comprises guided hiking, trekking, canoe, game-watching and other tours. So far there are 20 different tours on offer which all take conservation issues into account. The tours are led by specially trained guides, the “Natur Aktiv Guides” which assure not only technical guidance and safety, but who act furthermore as ambassadors for culture and nature related awareness raising. Seven bivouacs allow the tourists to adapt their booked trip in order to spend a night underneath the stars.

Regional gastronomy is being featured under the label of “Kärnten Küche” (Carinthian cuisine).<sup>12</sup> It promotes many aspects of culinary tradition through typical recipes, regional products and shops, restaurants specialised in regional food, markets, and interestingly the first slow food travel region in the world. The point is clear, consume locally, discover the region with its traditions and its culture. The tours, the accommodation and certain regional agricultural products are labelled to show their affiliation with a park.

We have chosen this example, as it shows how a whole region can be included in a concept, that brings together all or at least most relevant stakeholders including different kinds of protected areas, that covers most touristic activities, that values regional identity, and that boosts regional

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<sup>7</sup> [www.region-villach.plus/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Factsheet\\_Mobilit%C3%A4tszentrale.pdf](http://www.region-villach.plus/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Factsheet_Mobilit%C3%A4tszentrale.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [www.bahnhofshuttle.at/en](http://www.bahnhofshuttle.at/en)

<sup>9</sup> [www.kaernten-rent-ebike.at](http://www.kaernten-rent-ebike.at) or [kaernten.papinsport.at/](http://kaernten.papinsport.at/)

<sup>10</sup> [www.berglust.at/unterkuenfte](http://www.berglust.at/unterkuenfte)

<sup>11</sup> [www.berglust.at/magische-momente](http://www.berglust.at/magische-momente)

<sup>12</sup> [www.genusslust.info/](http://www.genusslust.info/)

economic turnover. The parks are embedded in a broader approach but have a significant input as the whole strategy is based on conservation and sustainable development.

### 3.1.2.2. Nature Park Dobratsch



The nature park Dobratsch, located in Carinthia, is an example of how a park successfully accomplished to change the way that tourism is managed. Until the 1970s Dobratsch was a successful ski destination but was facing growing problems of lacking snow. The decision was to either equip the area with snow-making machines or to give up the ski activities. The latter option was retained, as the area serves as watershed for the town of Villach and the two uses would not necessarily have been compatible. Today the parc focuses on other, softer forms of tourism in winter and summer. The mountain offers a wide range of attractions and activities such as the relatively new circular hiking trail which tries to incorporate the villages located in the valley into the touristic circuits. Former ski slopes have been turned into grazing lands during summer. In winter these areas are now appreciated by backcountry ski tourers and helps keeping them in this area and out of more sensitive areas of the mountain. This example was chosen for its reorientation as tourist destination and the diversification of activities.

### 3.1.3. Esprit Parc National (France)



The brand Esprit parc national unites the ten French national parks in order to promote their values, which are commitment, authenticity, respect, sharing, and vitality. It was created under the auspicious of the French agency for biodiversity (Agence française pour la biodiversité). Since its foundation in 2015, its main objective is promoting the products and services offered by the economic actors of the respective parc territories in order to support the development of more sustainable forms of tourism. The brand shall furthermore bring the different actors within a park and its adjacent areas together. This includes park managers, local populations, local authorities, economic players and visitors. The idea is to raise awareness amongst these groups about preservation but also about the cultural values and the economic benefits of the protected areas. From the provider side it can strengthen the pride of belonging and the cohesion of the region. It provides the actors with the strength of speaking with one voice and to promote the shared values as a group.

For the consumer side, that is tourists, it helps choosing sustainable options all along the journey, from accommodation, to activities, and catering. So far, the offer comprises just over 500 partners representing more than 900 products in the following categories:

- Accommodation
- Guided tours and excursions
- Crafts
- Products from grazing herds
- Products from apiculture (Agence Française de la Biodiversité 2019a)

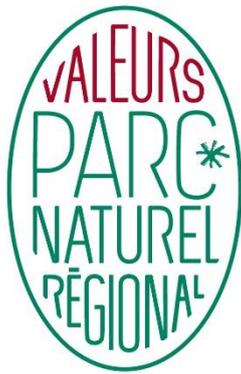
Thereby it helps to preserve biodiversity, but also cultural values and social structures of the respective regions. In order to join the network, any enterprise located on the park's territory simply

has to submit a formal request to its hosting parc, stating that it will adhere to the values and rules of the brand and the parc.

There are three French national parks located in the Alps, which all adhere to the label and commit to the values. Further below we will describe the activities of the Mercantour national park, as it is an outstanding example of transboundary cooperation.

The approach was selected for this report as it shows how a centralised approach can create a label that can be recognised in a whole country. It integrates the national parks and local businesses to the advantage of those two groups and tourists alike. It is an easy way to guide the choices of the latter.

#### 3.1.4. Valeurs Parc (France)



The brand « valeurs Parc » is a network of regional natural parks in France, which was created in 2016, replacing 51 single brands of the respective regional parks. So far there are 45 of the 54 existing parks associated and more than 2000 establishments and 300 products and services are bundled under the label. The three core values (valeurs) are:

- Respect for the environment and the cultural heritage
- Estimation of human and social dimensions
- Expression of territorial attachment

For enterprises to adhere to the brand, they must commit to these core values and furthermore show a particular way of organising the business and structuring all of its activities. Together this makes four categories which all contain five obligations which need to be obeyed and which are regularly controlled by the park.<sup>13</sup> A yearly monetary contribution from the partnering enterprises must be paid towards the organisation. This fee amounts to 50 to 300 € depending on the number of employees.

*« Engagés ensemble pour la préservation de l'environnement, pour le bien-être des femmes et des hommes ainsi que pour l'économie locale, les Parcs naturels régionaux s'attachent à la valorisation des ressources naturelles et culturelles propres à chaque territoire. »* (Fédération des Parcs Naturels Régionaux de France 2019)

The general idea is very close to that of Esprit parc national, but open to a wider range of product types. The main objective is guiding tourism towards more sustainable ways and a stronger contribution to local and regional economic development. This is the reason for its inclusion in this report.

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<sup>13</sup> [www.parc-naturels-regionaux.fr/consommer-parc/article/criteres-dobtention-de-la-marque-valeurs-parc-naturel-regional](http://www.parc-naturels-regionaux.fr/consommer-parc/article/criteres-dobtention-de-la-marque-valeurs-parc-naturel-regional)

#### 3.1.4.1. Regional Nature Park Queyras



Le parc naturel régional du Queyras dédie le développement touristique vers « un tourisme de qualité à taille humaine et respectueux de l'environnement ». (Parc naturel régional du Queyras, 2016) The concept is embedded into a regional approach that includes the eight regional nature parks of the region Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, putting forward nature-based tourism.

The tourism concept develops around three axes, which decline into 15 concrete actions including an action plan for each:

- Capitalize on collective intelligence to unite around the ecotourism and outdoor destination
- Support the structuring of a differentiating offer around ecotourism, making it possible to stand out in the reception of customers
- Recognize in each of the actors a vector for the promotion of the ecotourism destination (Parc naturel régional du Queyras, 2016)

One of the strong points is the rehabilitation and presentation of the trail system; A dedicated website helps the visitor to easily find an activity or accommodation.<sup>14</sup> This goes hand in hand with the development of tourism in nature while preserving the sites. Several publications have been developed in order to reach out to tourists.<sup>15</sup> There is also a blog which discovers several activities proposed by the parc, thus enhancing visibility for the offer.

Together with the parco del Monviso in Italy there is a transboundary collaboration which culminated in the trans frontier UNESCO Biospherereserve of Mont Viso.

What makes this example stand out even more is the long-standing history of cooperation between the park and actors from the tourism industry. This long-term collaboration and coordination bear their fruits today as the actors work hand in hand and share a common vision on how to reconcile tourism and conservation.

#### 3.1.5. Network Swiss Parks / Park of National Importance / Swiss Parks Product



The Swiss label for Parks of National Importance covers the Swiss National Park as well as the Regional Nature Parks and the Nature Discovery Parks. Any of these must meet certain criteria which are based on sustainability, environmental protection, participation, etc. Each park certified with this label can furthermore use the label Swiss parks Product, which can be attributed to goods and services with a strong relation to the park territory.<sup>16</sup>

There is a national and a park level for the label. The national level sets the framework and the park level allows to adapt to local realities within these parameters. The criteria for the Products label are the following:

<sup>14</sup> [www.cheminsdesparcs.fr/](http://www.cheminsdesparcs.fr/)

<sup>15</sup> [www.pnr-queyras.fr/ecmedias/2017/10/Montagne\\_Astuces.pdf](http://www.pnr-queyras.fr/ecmedias/2017/10/Montagne_Astuces.pdf)  
[www.pnr-queyras.fr/ecmedias/2017/10/Traces-douces-Queyras-2010.pdf](http://www.pnr-queyras.fr/ecmedias/2017/10/Traces-douces-Queyras-2010.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> For more detailed information on the criteria and the underlying values please refer to (BAFU 2013)

- The production process takes place mainly in the park
- The production process promotes the objectives of the park
- Food products must comply with the standards of the Swiss regional brands

The focus is not specifically laid upon tourism and its development, but upon the general promotion of goods and services and the strengthening of regional ties between the park and other actors. Thereby, it seems to attract a broad range of actors from different industries around the parks. The general product categories are the following:

- Food
- Crafted non-food products
- Animation services, leisure activities, excursions, environmental education
- Catering



In order to value the products and help visitors discover them the project FoodTrails was established under the Swiss parks label. It allows tourists to follow the whole value chain of regional products and thus discover the region from a whole new perspective. The visits include the farms producing the raw materials and the processing facilities. It provides insights and understanding, raises awareness, creates links and puts visitors, local farmers and producers in direct contact. It is

basically a hike through the park, with several riddles and stations, where food and beverage samples are offered alongside information on the park and its partners.<sup>17</sup> So far there are seven different trails in Swiss parks.

The online GIS of the network is also worth being mentioned as it is a good example of how to organise information in a way that is well-arranged, easily accessible and highly informative.<sup>18</sup>

The example was selected for this report for its organisational structure on two levels, namely the national and the park level. It thus provides a harmonised framework on national level, which leaves enough flexibility for the individual parks to adapt the concept to their needs.

*“This label is an instrument that is made available to every park of national importance so that it can expand its economic activities in its area and enhance its specific potential. At the same time, it contributes to achieving the nature and landscape objectives set out in the park's charter.*

*The product label is an invigorating instrument. It promotes dialogue between the park authorities and the economic actors and organisations in the park area. The product label stands for the common will of the park as well as the persons and companies to achieve the goals set out in the park's own charter.” (translated from (BAFU, 2013, p. 9)*

<sup>17</sup> [www.parks.swiss/de/paerke\\_entdecken/essen\\_trinken/foodtrails.php](http://www.parks.swiss/de/paerke_entdecken/essen_trinken/foodtrails.php)

<sup>18</sup> [www.parks.swiss/de/karte.php](http://www.parks.swiss/de/karte.php)

## 3.2. Examples of Transboundary Networks

### 3.2.1. EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme and Sustainable Tourism Destinations



Europarc's transboundary parks program TransParkNet, sustains the cooperation of existing parks across national borders. It has a certification system composed of four elements which ensure a high-quality standard for members.

This includes a review process every five years in order to assure a perduring high performance. It furthermore analyses the progress in cooperation and provides a platform for exchange of best practice examples. So far there are 23 parks being certified into 10 transboundary parks under this program; the Julian Alps Transboundary Ecoregion being the only one located in the Alps. Having started as a certifications system TransParkNet evolved into a capacity building system that assists the members in addressing a broad range of management issues related to cooperation and information exchange. It furthermore helps to raise awareness on the importance of transboundary cooperation. Two important ways of implementing these objectives are permanent peer exchanges and the annual meeting of the TransParkNet.



Together with the European Charta for Sustainable Tourism, parks have strong tools at hand to develop sustainable tourism activities in their region. So far 13 parks in the Alps have joined the network, four of which joined to establish two

transboundary sustainable destinations (which is different from the designation as a transboundary park). In relation to Alpine parks it has to be stated that the Charta is a broad framework, not taking Alpine specifics into account, it is not the claim either.

*“The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is a practical management tool that enables Protected Areas, their communities and businesses, working together to develop tourism sustainably.” (Europarc n.d.)*

Figure 3: Sustainable Destinations Europarc in the Alps

Country	Park	Date of award
France	Mercantour National Park	2006, 2012, 2017
	Queyras Regional Nature Park	2010, 2017
	Vercors Regional Nature Park	2003, 2010, 2016
Italy	Adamello Brenta Nature Park	2006, 2012, 2018
	Val Grande National Park	2013, 2018
	Dolomiti Bellunesi National Park	2015
	Aree protette dell'Ossola: Alpe Veglia e Alpe Devero Nature Park	2013, 2018
	Paneveggio-Pale S. Martino Nature Park	2015
	Reti di Riserve del Trentino	2017
France/Italy (transboundary)	Parco naturale Alpi Marittime (Italy) and Parc National du Mercantour (France)	2017
Slovenia/Italy (transboundary)	Julian Alps (Triglav National Park, Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve [Slovenia] and Prealpi Giulie Nature Park [Italy])	2016

### 3.2.1.1. Julian Alps Transboundary Ecoregion



The Julian Alps Transboundary Region consists of the Prealpi Giulie Nature Park (Italy), the Triglav National Park (Slovenia) and the Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve (MAB, Slovenia). It is the first Alpine site having received the two Europarc labels mentioned above and thus being the first certified Transboundary Parc (certified in 2009 and re-evaluated in 2014) holding the certificate as a Sustainable Tourism Destination (2016). This lies a strong foundation for the development of a common, cross-border tourism strategy which is one of its main objectives and is the reason to be included in this report.<sup>19</sup> So far, tourism activities concentrate much more on the Slovenian side of the park, but a common approach to set incentives to tourists to discover transboundary activities is established.

### 3.2.1.2. European Park Alpi Marittime-Mercantour



The collaboration between the two parks, parc national du Mercantour (France) and nature park Alpi Marittime (Italy), dates back to 1987. Amongst other fields of cooperation, such as the management and protection of fauna and flora, the development of sustainable tourism is at the centre of the cooperation.

The multilevel transboundary cooperation includes a shared and integrated trail network, a common signpost system, a common strategy and action plan, and a common website. This web page has been established to promote transboundary itineraries, guided activities, accommodation, and local products. For the hikes there are useful information and downloads of the GPS tracks, 3D-visualisation etc. Guided tours, treks and further offers are seamlessly integrated into this web application, thus facilitating the willing customer to easily find and book them.<sup>20</sup> This is helpful for the visitor, makes the park more attractive, and helps service providers to sell their offer.

Both sites are certified by Europarc as sustainable tourism destinations and the transboundary parc is cited on panorama solutions for outstanding examples on management aspects and the establishment of a common juridical management structure.<sup>21</sup>

This transboundary cooperation is remarkable, and the online integration of the offers makes it truly a good example for this report.

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<sup>19</sup> [www.europarc.org/news/2019/07/italian-julian-alps-mab/](http://www.europarc.org/news/2019/07/italian-julian-alps-mab/)

<sup>20</sup> [rando.marittimemercantour.eu/?categories=T](http://rando.marittimemercantour.eu/?categories=T)

<sup>21</sup> [portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2016-081.pdf#Panorama%20Brochure-](http://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2016-081.pdf#Panorama%20Brochure-)

[V02B.indd%3A.14506%3A16 ; panorama.solutions/en/solution/european-park-maritime-mercantour-how-long-term-transboundary-conservation-can-lead](#)

### 3.2.2. Nature Park Nagelfluhkette



The nature park Nagelfluhkette is the first transboundary nature park between Germany and Austria. The two main objectives are the conservation and improvement of biodiversity and the development of sustainable development processes. The strong point is the integration of conservation and use of the natural and cultural heritage. The fields of action are:

- Education for cooperative nature conservation
- Visitor management and awareness raising
- Recreation and nature-based tourism
- Cooperative conservation and landscape preservation

The whole management process is inclusive and integrates relevant stakeholders as much as possible from the planning stage to implementation. Tourism planning puts the preservation of the natural environment in the centre of the attention, alongside with a pleasurable touristic experience and the inclusion of service providers such as accommodation, gastronomy and guides. The idea is to allow tourism to develop, but to set clear guidelines and rules that prevent these activities to



disturb the maintenance and development of natural processes. The park coordinates the efforts of actors from the tourism sector, environmental protection groups, local and regional authorities, agriculture, and forestry. It furthermore keeps on providing permanent awareness raising campaigns with and for all the mentioned stakeholders. The development of activities is proactive and tries to channel tourists in a way that is least disturbing.

A tourism management and sensitisation initiative, involving all relevant actors is the core of the development of a sustainable tourism. It consists of two main fields of activities:

- Adapted touristic offer
- Transmission of information through
  - a) Signposts
  - b) Direct contact with tourists (rangers, etc.)
  - c) Printed publication (media, flyers, brochures, etc.)
  - d) Training of tour operators
  - e) Communication with actors shaping the landscape (hunters, foresters, farmers, etc.)
  - f) Integration of proposed tours into guides (on and offline)
  - g) Integration into the educational concept

It is important to remark that the park extends the promotion of its tour offers even towards online sites for tours, where GPS tracks can be downloaded.<sup>22</sup> Tour operators that offer guided tours in the park are informed regularly in order to design their tours in accordance with the latest research outcomes. The development of back country ski tours through areas that avoid nesting grounds for black grouse or other winter habitats of game species is one important example. Rangers, alongside other caretakers on the ground (such as hunters, foresters, etc.), are an important link to

<sup>22</sup> [www.alpenvereinaktiv.com/de/tourenplaner/](http://www.alpenvereinaktiv.com/de/tourenplaner/)

the tourists in the park, extending advice, awareness raising and guidance. The design of protective areas is based on objective criteria concerning conservation needs. The park is the first nature park in the region to directly employ rangers, currently three. This is a privilege, thanks to external funding, which is often reserved to national parks with adequate funding.

A common concept for communication of these aspects has been launched and several promotion elements have been developed.<sup>23</sup> The campaign has been named “Dein Freiraum. Mein Lebensraum.” (Your free Space. My living Space.) and is including the German “Natürlich auf Tour” (Naturally on Tour) and the Austrian “Respektiere deine Grenzen” (Respect your Limits) in order to establish one common strategy. The initiators underline that this campaign favours awareness raising and explanations while avoiding interdictions. The fundamental assumption is that it is perfectly possible to freely live its ambitions if it is done in a respectful way which allows for an integration of use and conservation.



Under the partner program, the member businesses are not simply awarded a label. Furthermore, regular meetings and trainings of the members allow to go beyond that, enabling them to pass the park’s philosophy on to tourists, and thus broadening the base for visitor sensitisation and management. (Naturpark Nagelfluhkette e.V., 2019)

The success factors for the visitor management, which made us include this example into the report, are the cooperative approach, the campaign design, the acceptance of the park as neutral agent, the awareness-raising amongst the tourism service providers (which in fact often turns them into park ambassadors), and the “boots on the ground” (rangers, hunters, foresters) which allow the direct contact between the park and the visitors.

### 3.2.3. Mountaineering Villages / Bergsteigerdörfer



**BERGSTEIGER  
DÖRFER**

The initiative Mountaineering Villages is a project of several Alpine clubs from Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia. So far, it comprises 28 villages who commit to focus their touristic offer around mountaineering activities in summer and winter. The philosophy of the Mountaineering Villages explicitly embraces the objectives of the Alpine Convention and focuses on the development of a slow and respective kind of tourism, sustainable in all ways: ecologically, economically, socially, and culturally.

*“The philosophy of tourism, visual impact and Alpine charm, mountain farming and forestry, nature and landscape conservation, environmentally-friendly mobility/transport, good communications and the exchange of information. Strict criteria apply when new municipalities wish to join.*

*Intimacy but with respect; Enjoyment with no worries; Independent mobility; Stimulation without all the hustle and bustle; A lively atmosphere but without the noise” (Bergsteigerdörfer n.d.)*

<sup>23</sup> [www.freiraum-lebensraum.info/](http://www.freiraum-lebensraum.info/)  
[www.nagelfluhkette.info/fileadmin/user\\_upload/downloads\\_new/FR.LR.Flyer\\_Winter\\_Druck2\\_kl.pdf](http://www.nagelfluhkette.info/fileadmin/user_upload/downloads_new/FR.LR.Flyer_Winter_Druck2_kl.pdf)

The adhering villages commit to a series of criteria which are grouped in three sections:<sup>24</sup>

- Base criteria
  - Adapted touristic infrastructure
  - Alpine landscape character
  - Village character
  - Minimal distance to mayor traffic axes
- Compulsory criteria
  - Quality tourism
  - Alpine competence
  - Quality of village character
  - Landscape quality
  - Mountaineering oriented mobility concept
  - Quality of cooperation
- Target criteria
  - Quality tourism
  - Cultural and regional specialities
  - Alpine competence
  - Landscape Quality

The list of approved and proposed activities is quite long and shows that a broad range of touristic activities in harmony with nature is possible (see figure 2 below).

We picked this example because it underlines the importance of the natural and cultural character of the villages. It helps thus preserving important heritage while focusing on specific target groups. The concept is complete and counters the developments that are happening in many parts of the Alps, thereby creating save spaces for nature, but also for humans seeking quiet and peace.

*Figure 4: Main activities proposed in the Mountaineering Villages*

Summer activities:	Winter activities
• Hiking	• Snow-shoe hiking
• Trekking	• Backcountry skiing
• High altitude trips	• Cross-country skiing
• Climbing	• Ice climbing
• Via Ferrata	• Ice skating
• Bouldering	
• Mountain biking	

### 3.3. Success Factors of Lighthouse Products and Offers

The definition and criteria developed during the meetings of the project can be confirmed by the analysis of this report. The selected examples described above fulfil these criteria listed in figure 1 in chapter 3. Nevertheless, it showed that in the context of this project the definition of success factors has to be completed by criteria that include the communication and promotion strategy of

<sup>24</sup> [www.bergsteigerdoerfer.org/files/kriterien-fuer-bergsteigerdoerfer-2014.pdf](http://www.bergsteigerdoerfer.org/files/kriterien-fuer-bergsteigerdoerfer-2014.pdf)

the respective parks and/or products. The criteria which seem to have a positive impact on the successful promotion of developed touristic offers can be grouped as follows (see also figure 1):

- Offer development
- Territorial embeddedness
- Cooperation with stakeholders

We propose further criteria focussing on the communication strategy:

- Development of a coherent promotion strategy including different forms of print and online materials and physical presence on the ground through public offices, park rangers, etc.
- Development of a website that:
  - is visually appealing
  - allows for easy access to relevant information (e.g. accommodation, products, services, packages, etc.)
  - highlights the particularities of the destination or the product
  - provides the possibility or links to book the required service right away
  - prepares the ground for awareness on sustainable tourism
  - directs tourism in the desired direction
  - incites tourists to book or realise sustainable offers
  - provides up-to-date information

In order to establish, analyse or to improve a sustainable tourism concept for a protected area a structured approach is necessary. We consider it as helpful if guidelines for Alpine protected areas on this topic could be developed. Questions such as: how can a park influence the development of tourism? Which should be the general role of parks? How to train rangers as ambassadors for sustainable tourism? How to raise awareness amongst tour operators and destination marketing organisations (DMOs)? How to imply local and regional politics and policies? How to imply local population as ambassadors? How to shape visitor management?

This can also be helpful to assist in structuring the support for the parks. There are numerous approaches to the development of sustainable tourism. We propose a structure based on a modified version, adapted to the realities of the Alps, of the one provided by European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas et al., 2015; Europarc, 2019) to help to guide parks in the development of new concepts. In the case of existing analytical tools, it should be checked to which extend they match with this approach and how to streamline the two in order to strive for the most adapted structure for Alpine parks.

Figure 5: Analytical framework for sustainable tourism in the Alps. Adapted after (Europarc, 2019)

- A permanent Sustainable Tourism Forum
  - This body should provide the base for the engagement of the relevant stakeholders and ensure a participative and inclusive approach. It should comprise at least the protected area authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organisations as well as representatives of tourism businesses
- A Strategy and Action Plan
  - This plan should include the following three components:
    - Assessment of the current situation
    - Strategic direction
    - Practical action plan
- Partnership and Communication
- Monitoring and evaluation
  - The establishment of an ongoing monitoring and a periodical evaluation process is important to identify strength and weaknesses, thus enabling the parties to adapt and improve their activities.

## 4. Conclusion

After the successful completion of the "Destination Parks" project, the participants agreed that it was very desirable to continue working on this complex of topics. It was decided to draft a project proposal that would consider the results of the work carried out so far as well as the ideas developed during the preparation of the final report and the final conference. A lot of work and organisation still needs to be done in this respect. The general idea has to develop into a clear vision, which is translated into concrete steps and work packages, outcomes and outputs need to be clarified and the project partners are to be identified. In this chapter we present the general ideas of such a potential future project. These would have to be validated or modified together with the project partners during the preparation of a future project concept.

It became clear that the flow of information on innovative approaches in park management concerning the development and promotion of sustainable forms of tourism is not adequate and thus not satisfying for parks trying to improve their approach. Conceptual ideas on how to improve the exchange of information, knowledge and experiences between the parks for mutual learning will be presented in the following sub-chapters. Prior to this, the core questions concerning the role of Alpine Protected areas in tourism development, identified throughout the project are presented:

- What role can, do and want Alpine protected areas play in tourism management?
- How can they position themselves between tourism professionals and other actors involved?
- How can Alpine protected areas successfully place and implement their agenda?
- What role can tourism play in protected areas for sustainable regional development?
- Where lay potential synergy effects for cooperation between parks and how can these be identified and used?
- What are the specific features of tourism in Alpine protected areas?
- How can a common value system of the parks regarding tourism be developed?
- How can the role and contributions of parks to sustainable tourism be effectively communicated?
- How can ecological and social trends be anticipated in order to develop a future-oriented approach to Alpine protected area tourism?

These questions arise for parks in general and become increasingly relevant against the background of current trends in tourism development. The main objective of a future collaboration would be to systematically address these questions and to provide the parks with concrete support in their daily work and strategic orientation by answering them. Innovative solutions are to be developed or identified and relevant information made available to the parks via a suitable platform. The continuous and systematic exchange between the different parks is an important element here. The particularities of the different park categories, regions and other important aspects will have to be considered. The project partners agreed that a new project would be a good framework to address these issues. But such a project will only be successful, if the parks contribute with staff that is responsible or experienced in the park's touristic activities.

The thematic field is very broad and future cooperation should concentrate on some themes in order to be able to penetrate them thematically more deeply and to enable concrete answers. The proposed topics are:

- Cooperation with other actors (tourism, politics, administration, agriculture, etc.) and legal obligation that enforce this cooperation
- Contribution of protected area tourism to regional development
- Destination conversion to year-round, sustainable forms and offers of tourism
- Cooperation and exchange among Alpine protected areas

First, a comprehensive stakeholder map can provide an overview of who should be considered in these matters. An analysis of the positioning of the identified actors is also necessary in order to identify commonalities and potential for cooperation, but also conflicts of interest and objectives.

Furthermore, the contribution of park tourism to sustainable regional development should be addressed. The possibilities and limits should be realistically presented in order to fully exploit the potential and at the same time keep expectations objective. Here the integration of the parks into the existing regional economic network plays an important role.

The conversion of certain forms of tourism to more sustainable offers, paired with a broader timeframe ideally including all four seasons, is an important task. One example is the transformation of ski resorts in regional nature parks at medium altitudes into more diversified destinations, which will become increasingly necessary in the near future.

A key aspect of a project would be the cooperation between the parks. The experience gained in various ways and at different levels with regard to the complex of topics should be made available to other protected areas in the best possible way. The organisational and technical implementation of this idea should therefore be an elementary component of the project proposal.

As mentioned above we developed ideas on how to improve this latter point and how to push this idea forward, establishing stepping-stones towards a more harmonised approach. Three potential, complementary tools are at the centre of the outcomes of these reflections and are described below:

- An online exchange platform on best practices
- A working group on regional development and sustainable tourism in Alpine protected areas
- Common communication and promotion strategy

#### 4.1. Online Exchange Platform on Good Practices

In order to incite a permanent exchange and to boost mutual inspiration, we propose the establishment of an exchange platform easily accessible by every interested party. For the purpose to install an effective workflow and to design this process in a participative way we suggest the following.

Every protected area that wishes to submit a lighthouse or best practice example for publication on such an exchange platform must go through a short and simple review process. The base will be a brief document including a resumé of the activities in question and a few fields to fill in (e.g. main topic; subtopic; geographical level; target group). Additionally, external links to relevant documents (e.g. background papers, cartography) will be welcomed. The application will be reviewed by volunteer reviewers from within the ALPARC network. We consider this advantageous because of two main reasons: firstly, it will ensure the participation of relevant and motivated members of ALPARC and thus strengthen the link amongst them. Secondly, it will guarantee that the proposal is reviewed by appropriate experts and only truly good, relevant and innovative activities will be listed and promoted. In order to further facilitate an exchange ALPARC offers its service to support this platform as a moderator. The design should be established through an integrative approach, including as many stakeholders as possible, taking example of already existing offers.

The selection criteria for such a compilation might include the following points, which we identified during the analysis of the examples quoted in this report:

- Inclusion of relevant stakeholders through adapted processes
- Regional economic integration
  - Promotion of sustainable forms of economic activities
  - Development of alternative forms of income generation through tourism
- Support for the development of public transport systems/soft mobility concepts
- Steering effect of touristic activities towards more sustainable behaviour
  - Innovative activities
  - Innovative handling of common activities
- Exploitation of a competitive advantage
- Promoting good cooperation between touristic organizations and parks
- Insertion of the offer in the communal or regional development plan
- Integrating education and awareness-raising measures

With the aim of making the gathered information available to all interested parties and to make the exchange platform easily accessible, several forms of presentation are conceivable. The information must be structured according to the selection criteria and easy to find through a simple selection method within a database. More detailed information should be available through links. All kind of documentation can be made available such as project descriptions, maps, contact details of relevant institutions and individuals, weblinks, etc. The collected data could be made available in formats such as structured tables, organised by topic or region for example. Such datasets do often include geographical references and in order to allow for an easy access and a good visualisation GIS can be an adequate solution. There are numerous examples of such instruments, some with clear reference to the Alps, others with a wider geographic perspective.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the export of self-composed tables or maps could be a helpful tool for all parties to support communication, public relation, as well as publishing efforts and duties.

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<sup>25</sup>Examples:  
[map.cipra.org/workspace?language=de&view=projects&subview=4&z=9&c=45.631325,6.429748&categories=11](http://map.cipra.org/workspace?language=de&view=projects&subview=4&z=9&c=45.631325,6.429748&categories=11)  
[webgis.alpconv.org/](http://webgis.alpconv.org/)  
[dopa-explorer.jrc.ec.europa.eu/](http://dopa-explorer.jrc.ec.europa.eu/)  
[www.parks.swiss/de/karte.php](http://www.parks.swiss/de/karte.php)  
[rando.marittimercantour.eu/?categories=T](http://rando.marittimercantour.eu/?categories=T)

The database might include the following topics:

- Different categories of PAs
- Different aspects of tourism management / Lighthouse products
  - Public transport/mobility
  - Accommodation
  - Gastronomy
  - Crafted goods
  - Touristic activities such as guided tours
  - Climate neutral offer
  - Communication strategy
  - Website
  - Participatory approach
  - Cooperation
  - Education
  - Awareness-rising
  - Organisational development

#### 4.2. Working Group on Innovative Regional Development and Nature-Based Tourism in Alpine Protected Areas

Through the abovementioned online exchange platform, the members will already have a potentially easy way of staying in touch and to access information on specific topics. Additionally, meetings on specific tourism-related topics could be organised through the establishment of a permanent working group on sustainable tourism in the Alpine parks. Such a group is foreseen in the draft working program of ALPARC 2020-2022: “Working Group on Innovative Regional Development and Nature-Based Tourism”. The group could examine the topics discussed in this report, and furthermore take a more holistic approach, considering other important questions of the relation between Alpine parks and tourism.

Different kind of events could be realised: seminars, study tours, regional meetings, sub-topic ad-hoc meetings, and formal board meetings. These events should take place in alternating partner parks who are willing to host such an event and who are ideally able to display a lighthouse project or particular engagement. This will give the host the possibility to promote its activities but also to inspire and get inspired by the triggered peer discussions. Regional meetings might also be an option, in order to allow for more participation by cutting out travel time and expenses. Furthermore, such a forum could be a hub for developing new project ideas.

It has to be figured out how to integrate other stakeholders then park managers and staff into the group. As described above it is important to involve all stakeholders in discussions for future development. Nevertheless, this might be detrimental to bringing forward innovative ideas if there are always too many diverging interests around the table. Flexible composition of discussion rounds, depending on the topic and stage of progress could bring a solution. The different types of stakeholders to be generally included in such a group should be:

- Park managers and responsible staff for sustainable tourism
- Regional economic actors (tour operators, accommodation and gastronomy industries, craft, agriculture, transport, etc.)
- Regional and local level political institutions/administration
- Environmental organisations
- Research facilities
- Any other concerned or interested party

### 4.3. Common Communication and Promotion Strategy

The conclusion of this project shows the necessity for more in-depth work on the development of an Alpine wide communication and promotion strategy on parks as extraordinary destinations for sustainable quality tourism. In order to benefit from the first steps taken and the next steps suggested above we propose the joint exploration of the potential for the establishment of an Alpine brand such as “Certified Alpine Park” as long-term outcome. On the national level the Alpine countries have already established such umbrella organisations with their respective communication strategies, labels, etc.<sup>26</sup> It might be interesting to investigate the potential benefits and the feasibility of such an Alpine approach, preferably in coordination with the Alpine Convention.

One idea might be that existing labels on regional and national levels can automatically lead to adherence to such an Alpine label. Therefore, it would be necessary to establish a common set of minimum criteria of these former labels, which in turn would be the set of criteria for adherence to the latter label. The Alpine wide framework could be a general standard which possibly would need to remain rather vague in many aspects in order to accommodate the diverging aspects of tourism and regional conditions. The labels on regional or national levels can then be more detailed and specific, considering the realities of the respective areas. The setup of the Swiss parks Product label with its two-level structure could serve as an example for the institutional setup (BAFU 2013, 12–13)(see also chapter 3.1.5).

It must be simple for the parks to adhere. For instance, parks that are already labelled as sustainable destination through the European Charta on Sustainable Tourism, or any other label such as those described in this report, must be allowed to adhere through a very much simplified procedure or even a simple administrative formality.

Such a label could be used to promote Alpine protected areas in general and as touristic destination more specifically. Therefore, it is necessary to agree on a shared vision and derived standards and indicators which are flexible enough to encompass all parties but clear enough to set a framework for the development of activities. Such a brand and/or label could be used for a common communication strategy and marketing for the Alpine protected areas in general but also for individual parks or specific regions.

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<sup>26</sup> Examples on national level of common branding exist in most Alpine countries: Germany: <http://nationale-naturlandschaften.de/>; Switzerland: <https://www.parks.swiss/de/>; Austria: <https://www.nationalparksaustria.at/en/pages/default.aspx>; France: <https://www.parcs-naturels-regionaux.fr/> and <http://www.parcsnationaux.fr/en>; Italy: <http://www.parks.it/>; Slovenia: <https://www.naravniparkislovenije.si/en>

This is a big idea, this is not for tomorrow, but this is something to explore together. Quite a few questions arise and can lead the future discussion. Is this realistic and feasible? Is this desirable? Where might this lead to? How much time, money and other resources are needed?

One important question that remains is of how to easily integrate labelled parks, products or services into an Alpine label. So far there is a certain heterogeneity, split between different park categories (e.g. national parks vs regional nature parks) and different products and service groups (e.g. food vs non-food products). In order to create a common PR strategy and campaign, including a common logo and a clear visual language it would be necessary to develop a project on European level including this matter, but not limiting itself to this subject. There are many questions on strategic and practical levels to be addressed and the development of the general ideas into concrete products need time and resources.

We must bear in mind that the niche of tourism based on regional specifics, nature etc. is a growing market segment in tourism. The common advertising on the Alpine parks as a destination aimed at this market segment might lead to the healthy growth of tourism in the parks, a better dissemination of the park's messages, enhancing income opportunities and possibly leading a good example for other regions to follow.

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