



# **“ Mediterranean Experience of Eco-Tourism “ project**

## **Advisory Panel on Ecotourism 1<sup>st</sup> Workshop**

**Montpellier 12-13 June 2014**

### **Ecotourism, a lever for local development in Mediterranean protected areas**



**Seminar proceedings**

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# 1. Participant list

Organisation - Position	
Name	
Claudio Salvalaggio	Associazione Italiana Guide Ambientali Escursionistiche (AIGAE) Board Member - Italy
Eric Raulet	L'association DEFISMED - Coordinator France
Luca Santarossa	Federparchi - Italy
David Solano Grima	Forest Science of Catalonia. International Affairs Director
Ingrid Heindich	Global Footprint Network
Lluís Balager	Government of Catalonia - Communication Manager
Samira Ouhabi	High Commission for Water, Forests and Combatting Desertification - Morocco
Julia Steiner	Le réseau des parcs du Massif-Central (IPAMAC) - France
Mathilde Pruvost	Le réseau des parcs du Massif-Central (IPAMAC) - France
Pierre Torrente	Institut Supérieur du Tourisme de l'Hôtellerie et de l'Alimentation de l'Université de Toulouse- France
Carla Danelutti	International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN )Mediterranea
Ziad Samaha	International Union for Conservation of Nature ROWA Programme Manager, Marine & Coastal Zone Management
Marianne Lang	Network of marine protected area managers in the mediterranean(MedPAN) – Project Officer
Chloë Webster	Network of marine protected area managers in the mediterranean (MedPAN )– Scientific Officer
Slaheddine Gannouni	Ministry of Equipment, Planning and Sustainable Development - Natural Habitats Assistant Director - Tunisia
Zeina Haddad	Ministry of Tourism – Ecotourism activities - Lebanon
Anne L'Epine	National Parks of France – International Relations Project Officer
Laurence Chabanis	National Parks of France – Tourism & Countryside Access Project Officer
Michel Sommier	National Parks of France - Director
Véronique Boussou	National Parks of France – Ressource Centre Service Manager

Béatrice Duthu	National Parks of France - Intern
Bruno Daversin	Cevennes National Park - France
Lydie Defos du Rau	Alpilles Regional Nature Park- Tourism Project Officer - France
Capucine Ser	Camargue Regional Nature Park- Tourism Project Officer - France
Laure Reynaud	Luberon Regional Nature Park- France
Ferdinando Rossi	Lazio Regional Council - Italy
Filippo Belisario	Lazio Regional Council - Italy
Raffaella Marracino	Lazio Regional Council - Italy
Alaa Mujahed	Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature - Jordan
Yehya Shehadeh	Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature - Jordan
Andy Drumm	World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA)
<i>Christine Le Gargasson</i>	<i>MaHoC (consultant)</i>
<i>Marie Lootvoet</i>	<i>MaHoC (consultant)</i>
<i>Jean-Pierre Lavaill</i>	<i>IO Agency (consultant)</i>

## 2. Reminder of seminar context and objectives

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The Mediterranean Experience of Eco-Tourism (MEET) project's mission is to boost cooperation between protected areas in the Mediterranean in order to defend sustainable management methods for ecotourism activities and provide members with support in understanding and promoting ecotourism, especially through training and partnerships with the private sector as a tool for conservation and sustainable development.

3 seminars will be organised during the MEET project in which associated members and the Advisory Panel on Ecotourism (APE)<sup>o</sup> will contribute to producing a Mediterranean strategy for the development of ecotourism as a reference framework for the protected areas concerned.

The first working seminar was organised by National Parks of France (*Parcs Nationaux de France*) and held in Montpellier on 12 and 13 June 2014.

Using personal accounts from those working in the field as well as critical feedback, participants worked together to highlight and discuss methods, tools and good practice to be fostered for the sustainable development of ecotourism throughout the Mediterranean basin. The purpose of the discussions was to jointly validate desirable and realistic guidelines for all the partners.

The seminar was held over two days; a day of work on 12 June 2014 and a day of field trips on 13 June 2014.

The work meeting on 12 June included a morning plenary session and an afternoon of 3 round table discussions for thought and debate.

**(APE)<sup>o</sup>:** *The Advisory Panel on Ecotourism (APE) is a consultative body, established within the MEET project. The purpose of the APE is the capitalization of MEET results and outputs at institutional level beyond the duration of the project. During the lifetime of the project, the Panel will represent a networking tool between MEET and external relevant institutions at regional, national and international levels. Its members will be continuously kept informed by MEET partners on the project activities and outputs and will be requested to express their view on the issues tackled.*

## 3. Day 1: 12 June

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*International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies, Montpellier*

### 3.1. Plenary session 1 (12 June 2014, 9am-1pm)

**Michel Sommier**, Director of National Parks of France, welcomed and thanked all the seminar participants. He then presented the National Parks of France organisation, its role in the French national parks network and its involvement in the MEET Project. *See Annex 1 for slideshow presentation.*

**Luca Santarossa**, MEET Project Manager, representing Federparchi (Italy), presented the MEET Project and its main objectives. He highlighted the delivery of pilot actions in some twenty protected areas in the project partner countries. These actions are intended to create ecotourism packages using a participatory method in each one of these protected areas with the aim of producing a catalogue for sale to international tour operators. *See Annexes 2a, 2b and 2c for slideshow presentation and additional documents.*

He then gave an in-depth presentation of the report on best practice in ecotourism (Act. 4.1). He also described the database that will be developed to collect examples of good practice in ecotourism and explained how it worked. *See Annex 2d for slideshow presentation.*

**Chloë Webster**, from the MEDPAN Network and sustainable tourism expert for the MEET Project, proposed a definition for “ecotourism” as envisaged by the MEET Project. This definition stems from the thoughts and discussions of a group of experts involved in the project. It expresses their idea of ecotourism and the way the group think it should be approached. She gave a reminder of the definition by the International Ecotourism Society. This specifies that ecotourism is “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”. She also outlined the aspects and principles making up ecotourism. *See Annex 3 for slideshow presentation.*

**Christine Le Gargasson**, Director of the tourism consultancy firm, MaHoC, presented a review of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) in French Mediterranean parks. At the request of the National Parks of France, a team of consultants from MaHoC contacted all the French Mediterranean National Parks and Regional Nature Parks engaged in the ECST to get an update on the implementation of the charter. She gave details about the tourism-related issues faced by those parks contacted and which the ECST must with address. These included social and economic vitality, preservation and controlling tourist flows, improving the quality of the offer, park recognition, acceptance by local residents and awareness-raising. She then emphasised the parks’ main successes and the ECST’s contribution in helping them structure their tourism development and promote their activities to institutional and private sector partners. *See Annex 4 for slideshow presentation.*

### DISCUSSION

***With some parks having started implementing the ECST ten years ago, have any of them measured the tourist flows over this period to see if the ECST has had any effect (volumes, distribution, etc.)? Has this certification tool had an impact of the tourism economy?***

There are visitor numbers in each park for tourist accommodation as well as eco-counters on some sections of footpaths. However, we cannot relate any changes as to whether or not a territory or service provider is a signatory to the ECST. The purpose of the ECST is not necessarily to increase the flow of tourists, but rather to improve the quality of the product and control its impact on the territory.

Furthermore, customers and purchasing advisors are not aware of the ECST's existence as it is not a promotional tool for a tourist destination or service. Parts 1 and 2 are actually internal destination and business management tools for the area. However, Part 3, which is currently being trialled, should enable a link to be made with customers in the future. In addition, it should be remembered that the ECST is a progress-orientated initiative and not a certification process. Part 2, for example, is open to all tourism businesses operating in an ECST signatory natural area that are motivated and willing to progress in sustainable practices. As a result, there is a wide range of "good practice" among the service providers engaged in the initiative. The ECST approach is less of a "customer promise" than an internal management goal.

*Presentation by Luca Santarossa – Photo Anne L'Épine – Parcs nationaux de France*

*Two other presentations followed, providing participants with an external point of view by two international ecotourism experts.*



**Andy Drumm**, protected areas tourism expert for the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), began by presenting the WCPA and TAPAS (Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group), a group of international experts on tourism in protected areas. He invited the seminar participants to join these institutions. He then presented his experience in ecotourism, both as a tour operator and as a consultant promoting the conservation of natural areas. Referring to his experience, he reminded everyone just how important protected areas are for a country's tourism appeal and showed the value of ecotourism for the socio-economic development of local communities as well as the conservation of natural areas. He also outlined the fundamental differences compared to traditional tourism whose benefits are not sustainable. He stressed that the carrying capacity concept widely used to manage visitor numbers in fragile areas, is not a suitable instrument. The quality of the type of tourism does not really depend on visitor numbers, but rather on the capacity of the protected area to control the impacts of these visitor numbers and, as such, the resources allocated to the area to manage this. See *Annex 5 for slideshow presentation*.

**Pierre Torrente**, Deputy Director of ISTHIA, University of Toulouse 2, gave a recap of the fundamentals and key governing principles of tourism to propose a conceptual framework for studying tourism as a factor in the development of a territory over time. He used two examples to show the risks and opportunities of niche tourism, such as ecotourism, for the socio-economic development of a territory. He invited those involved in the MEET Project to consider lessons from the history of tourism (elite



tourism versus mass tourism) to devise a new way forward enabling several forms of tourism to co-exist in a territory in the long-term. He also wanted to reposition social issues related to ecotourism by reiterating that just 15% of the world's population take vacations and that tourism often makes a local contribution to the survival of people experiencing great difficulties. See Annexes 6a and 6b for slideshow presentation and an additional example.

## DISCUSSION

*The issue of visitor numbers and methods to calculate flows generates numerous questions and different opinions. For example, is ecotourism, or must eco-tourism be, a niche product? Does a protected area necessarily involve a small number of visitors? Does opening-up an area for ecotourism always precede the arrival of undesirable mass tourism?*

Firstly, it appears that **the simple notion of carrying capacity can no longer be considered as key instrument to manage visitor numbers in protected areas**. This approach is frequent source of tension between profit-seeking private sector stakeholders and conservationists. This is particularly true in many, already densely populated, Mediterranean (coastal) regions where tourism pressure is intense. It is actually **management capacity**, broken down into human and financial resources, technical skills, regulatory framework and the ability to facilitate and coordinate, which makes the difference. The more you can control visitor behaviour, the more tourists you can take (and therefore generate more income).

Secondly, **awareness-raising and educating local stakeholders and tourists are prerequisites** to controlling behaviour. The evolution of tourism in some countries, from a well-managed business in specific areas (like holiday resorts) to unlimited visitor numbers in open spaces, make this type of education particularly necessary.

The question also arises of **the value of ecotourism compared to other forms of tourism**. From an economic standpoint, developing ecotourism products does not necessarily mean that a park cannot also develop tourism products for larger numbers and respect sustainable tourism development principles. A distinction must be made between levels of tourism activity in different countries, i.e. it can be difficult to develop ecotourism in a country where there is currently no tourism.

Finally, **maintaining the access of local communities to protected areas and tourism products** should not be neglected (e.g. applying a surcharge for non-residents?). The trick is in finding the right balance between using attractive prices geared to a broad public and controlling impacts as ecotourism does not always remain a niche product for well-off people.

Ultimately, careful consideration should be given to what you wish for the territory and its population. Any number of tourists will have an impact and it must be jointly decided what level of impact is acceptable. The best way to address the risk of predatory tourism is to **collectively determine a vision and objectives for the territory**.

***The question of proximity was also raised. Should we not focus on local tourism, or even rapidly expanding domestic tourism?***

Tourists travelling to their holiday destination and tourist transport in general, generates considerable global impacts. Ecotourism mostly focuses on the issue of local impacts, whether environmental, cultural, or socio-economic. However, encouraging domestic and local markets must remain a target for all forms of tourism.



## 3.2. Round tables (12 June, 2.30pm – 5pm)

Three round-table discussions were organised so that participants could work in groups on three separate themes:

1. Local governance through dialogue
1. Ecotourism as a lever for local vitality with the integration of traditional economic sectors
2. Promoting protected areas for tourism and developing ecotourism products

### *i. Round table N°1: Local governance through dialogue*

*Facilitator: Marie Lootvoet – Reporter: Ingrid Heinrich*

**Bruno DAVERSIN** (Cevennes National Park, France) – presented the organisational process for a network of footpaths in the Cevennes National Park and the importance of dialogue in this process.

#### ► Background:

Following the creation of the National Park, an unregulated footpath network developed on the initiative of various stakeholders (individuals, municipalities, Department, etc.) with wide-ranging levels of maintenance, signage and information.

The National Park therefore decided to take the lead in coordinating this by bringing groups of municipalities and local authorities together to create an offer of organised and standardised heritage discovery trails.

#### ► Results:

1 walking guide per district (currently 20 walking guides with 15 walking trails per guide, or 300 in total).

The groups of municipalities have become contracting authorities with 40% funding from the National Park and 40% from the Departmental Council.

20 years on: the territory is unable to maintain the walking trails (damaged or broken posts, etc.), the offer has significantly changed in terms of quality and people are getting lost, etc.

To resolve this:

- ☞ assessment and reorganisation (with the Departmental Council) of the walking trail offer using a new walking trail quality chart (no more than 20% paved) with 3 years to review all the walking trails individually.
- ☞ willingness of the NP and the EPCI's (Public Inter-Municipal Cooperation Establishments) to sign an agreement for walking trail maintenance. This includes the creation of a technical committee dedicated to walking trails maintenance which must meet once a year to make the groups of municipalities aware of their responsibility to maintain the walking trails

#### ► Lessons learned:

The governance began at the start of the project and it is now being revised following an appraisal of this experience.

The distribution of roles: the person opening the dialogue and bringing the different stakeholders around the table is subsequently not alone in delivering the project. The purpose of the dialogue is also to arrange shared responsibilities between the various parties.

The time-based concept of dialogue: dialogue does not stop once the facilities have been installed, or the documents produced, etc. How can a collective process be sustained in the long-term to allow maintenance (of facilities) and updates (of documents and walking guides, etc.)?

The added value of the protected area for the walking trail network: its ability to bring all the stakeholders to the table, the wealth of subject matter which distinguishes a territory, controlling visitor numbers using the trails (controlling impacts on the countryside, habitats and species) and local pride among the population.

**Laure REYNAUD** (Luberon Regional Nature Park (PNR), France) – presented the example of a successful public-private partnership on cycling activities in the Luberon.

► Background:

In the 1980's and 90's, the PNR developed cycle routes in the park area. This included building tracks, installing a network of information panels, acquiring dedicated cycle lanes to avoid road junctions, the creation of Service Information Points (SIP) providing information and tourist maps, and the development of themed circuits, etc.

In 1996, 13 dedicated service providers created the Vélo Loisir en Luberon Association (VLL), but they were exclusively accommodation providers. The association bought and rented out bikes and the opportunity to cycle in the Luberon quickly established itself following a national and European trend for cycling).

Today, VLL is tourism business group (125 members representing 10 different professions in 2014) working together around the "Accueil Vélo" label to provide services to cycle tourists.

There are 450km of cycle routes throughout the Luberon which use small, quiet, paved country roads signposted in both directions.

The association's budget amounts to €300,000, 45% of which comes from self-financing (services and membership) while the remainder is covered by local authorities (the Regional Council, Departmental Councils of the Alpes de Haute-Provence and the Vaucluse, inter-municipal associations), Europe and the Park (1%).

► Lessons learned:

The VLL Association is responsible for coordinating the sector while the PNR plays the 'developer' role. The two organisations operate within their fields of expertise and are linked by a partnership agreement.

Delivering facilities and service offers at the same time reassures cycle tourists (particularly travellers) and is critical for the region's image.

The development process benefits the entire area.

The developer/user interface guarantees the quality of facilities and is the driving force behind the offer.

**Carla DANELUTTI** (IUCN Med) – presented the implementation of a forum using the ECST approach in Morocco and Tunisia, together with necessary adjustments to the method.

► **Background:**

Cooperation stakeholders: the UICN's (UICN-Med) Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, the Spanish National Agency for International Cooperation and Development (AECID), the Tunisian Ministry of the Environment and the Moroccan High Commission for Water, Forests and Combatting Desertification.

The project (2011 – 2012): to improve the decision-making process and management capacities of ecotourism activities in and around protected areas in both countries. The aim was to produce a strategy and action plan for ecotourism in protected natural areas of the Maghreb and to define implementation guidelines to deliver them.

Two pilot areas: the Talassemtane National Park in Morocco and the Jebel Zaghouan National Park in Tunisia.

The ECST was selected as the model and the methodology was adapted to take into account each country's specific context (legislative and institutional framework).

A national and inter-ministerial steering committee was set up in each country.

► **Lessons learned:**

The meaning of ecotourism and its objectives must be clarified to avoid any misunderstandings between the private sector and those involved in conservation activities. National authorities and NGO's have an important role to play in this.

The local forum helps clarify national park-related issues and the constraints it can impose on local communities as well as the benefits (socio-economic) that they can gain from it.

It is complicated to include local stakeholders in decision-making about the park area. Entrusting the Park Management with coordinating and managing the consultation process enables it to keep track of the activities undertaken in the park and to work with local partners when appropriate.

Establishing and maintaining national dialogue and institutional cooperation between the tourism, environmental and agricultural sectors is vital.

The lack of funding, and occasionally decision-making structures, in the park area can lead to insufficient management capacities and a non-operational management plan within the protected area. These are, however, prerequisites for the virtuous and coordinated development of ecotourism.

Capitalising on methods tested in pilot projects is often limited. Participants at both local and national levels need to be asked to maintain methods and procedures introduced during the project.

**Ingrid HEINRICH** (Global Footprint Network) – presented the ecological footprint as a potential tool for multi-stakeholder dialogue.

► **Background:**

The ecological footprint was created by the NGO, Global Footprint Network, to help governments measure society's demand for natural resources and ecological services. It is an accounting tool for resources that allows countries to understand their ecological footprint and provides them with data to better manage their resources and preserve their future.

In less than 50 years' time, the number of people living in the Mediterranean basin will have almost tripled their consumption of natural resources and ecological services, and all countries will be in ecological deficit.

The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) objectives include, among others, better management of natural resources by a pressure generated by tourism activities in fragile areas and better management of tourist numbers.

► *Lessons learned:*

There could be a study to introduce an ecological footprint tool applied to tourism for the whole of the Mediterranean involving partners such as the IUCN Med.

Measuring the pressure from tourism on natural and cultural resources in protected areas involves mobilising stakeholders at different levels, from an environmental protection background as well as the local development, tourism and cultural sectors.

The value is in bringing people together around the same table with different points of view and reasoning on subjects such as enhancement/ conservation and protection/ development paradigms.

## *DISCUSSION*

The participants firstly expressed the need to agree on what they meant by consultation-based local governance. They clarified their understanding of the theme by proposing a certain number of essential components to define governance:

- a shared project, a joint strategy,
- the organisation of stakeholders,
- the distribution of roles between the stakeholders to make decisions and deliver actions,
- the definition of responsibilities,
- the distribution of benefits,
- arrangements to inform stakeholders and let them have their say.

These aspects must be defined by giving due consideration to the following factors:

- the legal framework,
- the various stakeholders' technical skills and ability to deliver,
- the financial capabilities of the stakeholders,
- the willingness of the various stakeholders.

Based on these first two examples, participants raised the possibility of transferring the practices presented here to other countries.

The example of Tunisia helped show that differences in institutional set-ups and governance models between Mediterranean countries can complicate the transfer of experiences between countries.

As a result, discussions mainly focused on countries where consultation, such as it is understood in European countries where the ECST is applied, is not an established routine in various practices.

Several points came out of this:

- Introducing new forms of dialogue, consultation and governance takes time. It is a long and gradual process that must be followed.
- Informing and raising the awareness of local communities to the advantages of protected areas and the socio-economic value of ecotourism (compared to other forms of tourism) is a vital step that must not be neglected to help establish this dialogue.
- Local consultation does not prevent national authorities participating in both discussions and the implementation of strategies and projects.
- Project (cooperation supported by NGO's and donors, etc.) can contribute to changing national legal frameworks, particularly if national authorities have been involved from the outset of the project.

## *ii. Round table N°2: Ecotourism as a lever for local vitality with the integration of traditional economic sectors*

*Facilitator: Christine Le Gargasson – Reporter: Ziad Samaha*

The purpose of this round table discussion was to identify mechanisms and strategies that help boost the contribution of ecotourism to the socio-economic development of protected areas in the Mediterranean and to maintain local business activities, jobs and outstanding heritage. Ecotourism has considerable pulling power on other local economic sectors, some of which are guarantors of occasionally threatened know-how and traditional ways of life (arts and crafts, farming, fishing, etc.). In addition to these 'traditional' sectors, ecotourism also offers local communities new perspectives in terms of occupations, jobs and business activities, which raises the question of local capacity building.

## *PERSONAL ACCOUNTS*

**Lydie Defos du Rau** (Alpilles Regional Nature Park, France) – Local agricultural products as a building block for an ecotourism product.

### Background:

As a rural area within one hour's drive from large Mediterranean cities, the Alpilles PNR features the dual characteristic of having strong agricultural traditions and a large number of visitors. Agriculture is a long-standing industry and is still very much present in the park area. It consists mainly of vines and olive and almond trees. It plays a major role in structuring the countryside, producing its landscapes and in the vitality of its economic development. However, the Alpilles Park is also an area under considerable pressure from tourism. Agriculture and tourism are two worlds that have remained separate for a long time.

Among the activities that the park wants to implement as part of the ECST, promoting agri-tourism has become a vital project. Agricultural production is seen as a key source of the area's appeal and an integral part of the tourism offer. The Park is now convinced that tourism helps maintain local certified production in the Alpilles which contributes to its identity (The Park brand has enabled agricultural products to progress in terms of quality and promotion).

### Lessons learned:

The Park team has implemented several activities, often in partnership with other local stakeholders (Chamber of Agriculture, Chamber of Commerce, etc.). These include:

- A specialised inventory of locally available agricultural products.

- Production of a tourist map promoting local produce and farmers welcoming the public for sales and tasting local products. Some of them have gone as far as developing an educational approach.
- Organisation of “fam trip” for tourism professionals to establish a link between producers and tourism businesses engaged in part 2 of the ECST. This helps forge special on-farm relationships and enables the worlds of tourism and agriculture to join forces and establish lasting contacts.
- Introduction of an information and awareness-raising campaign for local people and visitors on flavour, nutrition and the quality of local products (the “Rendez-vous du Goût”).
- Development of on-farm facilities for camper vans.

**Zeina Haddad** (Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, responsible for ecotourism activities) – The contribution of an event, the “Lebanon Mountain Trail”, to the economy of villages located inside nature reserves.

► **Background:**

The population of Lebanon is 4 million and current tourism policy is striving to encourage domestic tourism.

The Lebanon Mountain Trail (LMT) illustrates an ecotourism concept that has been developed in this country since 2007. It is a 470km-long hiking trail, 100km of which crosses the Al-Shouf Cedar Nature Reserve. It also runs through about 80 villages and contributes to rural development. These villages possess outstanding heritage but also have high rates of poverty.

An association for the hiking trail was created and deals with building work, signage and maintenance. Every year, the association organises a month-long event of activities bringing the trail to life. Participants can reserve accommodation and meals with the association (website) for however long they want and they hike in stages of 10-25km per day. For the rest of the year, people can access the contact details of accommodation providers on the website, buy maps for different sections of the trail and request local guides. It should be noted that there is a charge for access to the reserve.

The villages are supported by the LMT association, NGO’s and international donors through training courses, workshops and renovation work to guest houses, etc.

► **Lessons learned:**

In 2013, the event generated an estimated US\$ 32,000 of revenue for the villages concerned. These economic benefits directly contribute to helping local people continue living in these villages. The concept of ‘travelling’ is vital as it enables a better spread of the LMT’s economic impact in the area.

The key to success of this venture lies in the association’s drive and determination, the production of detailed maps, support provided by sponsors (banks), the marketing tools introduced (25% of the budget is invested in marketing activities such as a website, social networks and a smartphone app) and in training for local guides, especially in foreign languages.

**Andy Drumm** (World Commission on Protected Areas - WCPA - TAPAS) – Some examples of economic benefits from ecotourism for the local economy.

► **Background:**

Andy Drumm’s presentation recalled the importance of horizontal integration in the tourism value chain to create wealth in different areas. He placed particular emphasis on the role of management

tools and methods in protected areas. Sound management clearly offers considerable economic development perspectives for local communities and he mentioned several examples worldwide.

► *Lessons learned:*

Some key success factors were mentioned:

- A local representative: some communities have opted to nominate a community correspondent to facilitate the management of ecotourism. This applies to the HIMA<sup>1</sup> system in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, or even the Huaorani Ecolodge in Equator.
- Natural and cultural attractions: these must be of sufficient enough quality, accessible and sustainably managed.
- Conservation objectives must be clearly explained, understood and shared by all stakeholders.
- Local communities must be actively involved in planning and managing the ecotourism project.

The issue of funding ecotourism projects was highlighted and there are sources of additional revenue that can be tapped into:

- Admission fees to sites
- Transit fees
- Co-funding marketing operations
- Public-private partnerships: leasing out communal land for accommodation facilities, admission fees for community activities, concessions, joint commercial ventures in a geographical network.

## *SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS*

Based on these three accounts, several questions arose and were discussed. They focused, in particular, on the following points:

- The question of events management and guides: it is vital that protected areas invest in training local guides as an employment initiative, a source of quality concerning the destination and as a tool to manage visitor numbers.
- Recognition of quality is also important such as the certification of tourist services and destinations which is very useful in the case of a crisis to preserve economic benefits generated by ecotourism. It guarantees a level of quality for the visitor who has to make choices.
- Admission fees are a source of funding which must not be overlooked. They can be used to help build facilities in the protected area, but also to improve local living conditions. The perception of these admission fees and more generally, financial flows linked to ecotourism, must be done in a transparent way. This is an important stipulation to foster the acceptance of tourism by, sometimes, reticent local people. It is also a good way of connecting the added value from tourism to the well-being of local people.

<sup>1</sup> HIMA means Protected Area in Arabic. This concept is taken from international organisations such as the UICN and is based on a traditional native system of managing and conserving sites, species and habitats, biodiversity and natural resources which has been in place for 1,500 years in the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent regions.



- The new occupations linked to the growth of ecotourism such as collecting and recycling objects, guiding/events management, etc. The emergence of these new occupations must be accompanied by the transfer of expertise instead of purely direct funding.

Finally, to meet the objectives set by the round table, the group wanted to note some priority guidelines:

Make tourism a driver for all types of economic activities, particularly to maintain traditional industries, but not exclusively. Several types of work priorities were mentioned to develop the contribution of tourism to rejuvenate the local economic fabric:

- Boost local consumption:
  - by developing local products and artisanal trades and by promoting fair trade;
  - by the qualifying, even certifying, local products to develop their competitive appeal faced with tourists who are increasingly selective in their purchases;
  - by supporting the creation of tourist products that are by-products of their initial function (for example, souvenirs made from fish nets);
  - organising visits to production sites such as vineyards, plantations and traditional crafts processing facilities.
- promoting the access of local people to tourism jobs. The participants reiterated the importance of activating legal mechanisms that recognise and promote local skills in the practice of new tourism-related occupations, like, for example, the title of “local guide” which promotes knowledge about the area without requiring a higher education qualification.

Ensure that economic benefits go to people living in the area and promote local entrepreneurship:

- promotion of local stakeholder-based governance methods in protected areas;
- importance of associating the most marginalised populations, or the smallest villages (spreading the benefits);
- support for micro-entrepreneurs: micro-credit schemes, tailored training programmes;
- research local project funding mechanisms: admission fees, visitor donations and sponsors, % of turnover from private companies, etc.;
- sharing local ways of life with visitors: what to eat, how to take care of yourself, etc.

### *iii. Round table N°3: Promoting protected areas and developing ecotourism products*

*Facilitator: Jean-Pierre Lavaill – Reporter: Eric Raulet*

#### *CONTRIBUTIONS AND DISCUSSION*

**Capucine SER** – (Camargue Regional Nature Park - France), presented the product introduced on the Ilot du Fangassier to observe flamingos in an outstanding protected area where the birds congregate and also nest.

► *Background:*

Over 4 million people visit the region of Arles – Camargue every year.

The 60-hectare Pont de Gau ornithological park receives more than 100,000 visitors and has an admission fee of €7.50.

The product comprising nature guide-accompanied visits offered by the Park was introduced in 2009 and attracts 3,000 visitors.

► *Lessons learned:*

The Ilot du Fangassier bird observation product is publicised from April to October by tourist offices in the area at a charge of €11 per person for a half-day visit with a limit of 20 people. Today, it appears to have exhausted its potential despite its exceptional character and, in doing so, a certain number of conclusions can be drawn from it.

The issue of visitor numbers: although the Ilot du Fangassier cannot tolerate too many visitors, the experiment trialled by the accompanying product shows that it is still far from this threshold due to a certain number of reasons mentioned hereafter.

The issue of time: visitors want to see something quickly and easily. This is what the ornithological park offers but not necessarily in the accompanying product which requires learning about observation and greater attention spans.

The issue of location: The Ilot du Fangassier is not located on the main roads in the Camargue and must be reached on foot.

The issue of communication and dissemination: the Park pays for leaflets while the tourist offices and guides are meant to promote and distribute products. Capucine Ser points out that the effectiveness of the promotion is very variable according to tourist office officials who are in contact with customers. These differences demonstrate just how important the motivation of people in charge of welcoming and informing tourists actually is, but also their knowledge of ecotourism offers in the area and as such, part 2 of the ECST.

The issue of governance: the fact that tourist office officials do not display the same efficiency in promoting and disseminating ornithological products might be explained by the fact that the Park is not a member of the tourist offices that the officials prioritise.

**Claudio SALVALAGGIO** – AIGAE (Association of Italian Nature Guides) presented his association comprising 3,000 members, equally distributed throughout all the regions of Italy.

► Background:

By primarily offering access to grouped insurance contracts for guides as well as their customers, the association also seeks to improve the quality of service of its national members.

Analysing the accompanied-customer structure reveals the importance of the guides' educational role. 40% of products sold are geared to school children while 30% are environmental education products for adults and children. These offers are products delivered either on-site or in the form of workshops in schools and private companies.

As a niche business activity, Claudio showed that the market is growing in Italy and that it generates good returns on investment.

There is a clear direct link between guiding and protected areas. This equates to 85% in protected areas and 15% outside these zones.

Customers are mostly local: 95% Italian, 5% foreign.

► Lessons learned:

The following points emerged from his presentation and the ensuing discussion:

- The importance of stakeholder groups so that the offer proposed is as consistent as possible and of the highest quality.
- The association provides a useful statutory framework to enable training, improve the quality of the offer and group purchases (particularly insurance).
- Economic cooperation between private companies and the Park must enable progress to be made in giving both visibility and power to distribute themed products and product ranges (school children, the disabled, the elderly and sports products like cycling, kayaking, hiking, trekking, and orienteering, etc.). This cooperation is also required to develop events and shared displays linked to activities in the area. In this context and faced with the crisis, guides need support from institutions and less of a short-term vision from politicians.
- Activities undertaken by local residents (greeters, couch surfing, etc.) must not be considered as competition but, on the contrary, encouraged because they are complementary to promoting the area.

**Julia STEINER** – IPAMAC (Inter Parcs Massif Central) presented an ongoing experiment in Part 3 of the ECST and its connections to parts 1 and 2.

► Background:

Since 2010, the 10 Nature Parks in the Massif Central belong to an association called IPAMAC. Its purpose is to share a territorial sustainable development project in the Massif Central by pooling resources for concrete and innovative actions.

In 2012, the association decided to produce a working method to deliver Part 3 of the ECST. It chose a participatory approach and invited other French ECST signatory protected areas and willing tour operators to take part. 30 tour operators spontaneously signed up the process, or were identified and invited by the Park.

The method was perfected in late 2012 although it is still experimental. It provides for a three-stage process (identification, accreditation and collaboration) based on the tour operators' personal and declared commitment. The accreditation committee, which assesses the tour operators' applications, is made up of Park representatives, members of the press specialising in tourism, consumer representatives and business people, etc. The first accreditations were awarded this spring. 7 operators were approved for a period of 3 years.

Once the tour operator has their accreditation, they are then committed to developing holidays with the Park (the collaboration stage) by promoting the region's offer which is already part of the ECST. This includes, in particular, accommodation providers and guides involved in Part 2. The tour operators can also offer joint ventures with other ECST signatory protected areas in France and Europe which is particularly appealing in a period of crisis.

► **Lessons learned:**

The following points emerged from her presentation and the ensuing discussion:

- Similar to Parts 1 and 2, Part 3 of the ECST fits into a progress-orientated approach for tour operators wanting to build on forms of tourism encouraged in the Parks.
- The European dimension of the accreditation and the fact of being able to offer joint ventures in the Europarc network of protected areas is a key argument for leading ecotourism tour operators such as Grand Angle.
- The operators are keen on tourist products/services with protected area recognition. The park serves as a kind of endorsement for the quality aspect of the offer and reassures prospective customers, etc.
- Communication on Europarc and the ECST still needs to be undertaken as both initiatives remain very low-key.

Indeed,

- sustainable development-branded products do not seem to trigger purchases today (apart from customers in northern Europe). The Park brand is still suffering from a lack of clarity in France;
- marketing and communication is still chronically weak in nearly all the parks;
- the products offered are not always organised, both in terms of breadth and depth of product range. Products lack appeal which creates an overall lack of appeal for the different territories;
- to accompany the innovation process and TO networking activities, a programme will be launched for tour operators to develop experiential products. Key to this will be marketing support provided for identified operators.

**Samira OUHABI** – (High Commission for Water, Forests and Combatting Desertification) presented the experience in ecotourism currently underway in the Souss Massa National Park.

► **Background:**

The Soussa Massa National Park lies south of Agadir, in Morocco and covers 33,800 hectares between the estuary of the Souss-Massa River and the Atlantic Ocean. It has 7 Berber villages and is known for the presence of specific bird species.

As a tourist destination in its own right, it receives 300,000 visitors per year, a third of which are foreign. Half-day or day-long products are sold by travel agencies in Agadir for €50 and €80 respectively. The park is open every day except Fridays.

The park is organised around an area geared to the discovery of Saharan fauna and birdlife linked to wetlands. It also seeks to sustain the local population in villages by promoting local agricultural and craft producer cooperatives for products such as couscous, carpets, arts and crafts and aromatic plants, etc.

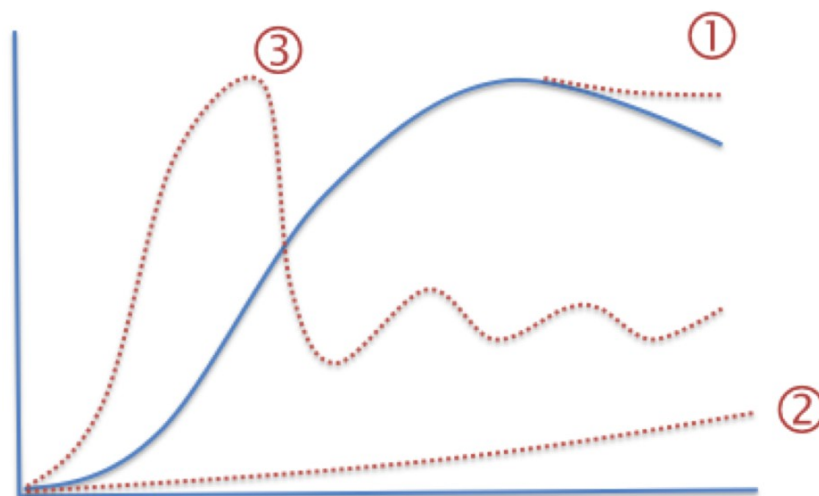
► Lessons learned:

The following points emerged from her presentation and the ensuing discussion:

- The product here, inside the Park, is highly regulated and access to the park is capped at 300,000 visitors.
- Tourists are accompanied by guides and channelled by an intermediary for these two products to 7 different sites. Any potential developments are focused on designing new products.

► Possible development models for the ecotourism offer

Through the presentations made in the morning and the accounts given in the afternoon, there are basically three development models to expand the ecotourism offer in Parks.



1. This is a **new offer** that seeks to (re)launch economic activity and/or activities for the general public in an established Nature Park. (Example: the Camargue PNR)
2. This is a **niche activity** whose growth and perspectives are restricted and directly depend on visibility/clarity/appeal of the Park's brand capital as well as the quality/breadth of the product range on offer.

The production quality of the service and therefore, accompaniment (guides, etc.) is also fundamental. Marketing, communication and distribution are important keys to success (e.g. AIGAE, IPAMAC).

3. This is an activity in a closed space where the carrying capacity has been set beforehand. Naturally, the model displays a starting point generated by the presented project's novelty which

then tends to settle down at a certain level. This level is, of course, based on the managing authority's target number of visitors, but also on their ability to generate satisfaction, to foster loyalty and multiply visits and to sustain marketing using peer groups and social networks (e.g. the Souss Massa National Park).

### 3.3. Plenary session 2 (12 June, 5.15pm – 6pm)

The reporters from each of the round tables presented the content of discussions and the conclusions of their group.

These various contributions, supplemented by statements from experts and feedback from technicians involved in supporting ecotourism initiatives, constitute an important step in highlighting common visions and approaches for the entire Mediterranean basin.

This day turned out to be full of useful information for the continuation of the MEET Project, especially on the following points:

- **Although there is widespread consensus on ecotourism development principles, the methods to deliver them differ from one territory to another.** They are strongly influenced by:
  - **the institutional organisation present and the ability of the institutional organisations concerned to speak to each other and work together:** horizontally (e.g. culture / environment / tourism) and vertically (local stakeholders / central government).
  - **The emphasis on public-private partnerships,** whether for gathering the resources required to manage the protected area, events and activities, promotion or marketing of the sector.

In all cases, informing and raising the awareness of all stakeholders (national and local institutions, the private sector and the local population) about the advantages of ecotourism are necessary preconditions to lifting constraints on dialogue as well as the sound and beneficial development of ecotourism.

- **Ecotourism and territorial development are inseparable concepts:**

The purpose of ecotourism, especially in situations of extreme poverty and fragility of local heritage, is to generate benefits for the area and its inhabitants (maintaining business activities and the population, diversification of employment opportunities, increasing revenue enabling natural and cultural resources to be preserved, improvements to local living conditions, etc.). This why it is important to understand the territorial issues and set targets for development that match the local context and aspirations of local people. To this end, training stakeholders is a recurring theme which requires vital investment.

- **The MEET project constitutes an experimental laboratory which must be capitalised upon, both in the Mediterranean and elsewhere:**

The diversity and wealth of personal accounts presented during this first day of the seminar, together with feedback from participants, constitute, above all, the foundation stone for a collaborative platform on ecotourism engineering in the Mediterranean. This platform is being built and would no doubt benefit from being linked with other international initiatives (such as TAPAS, for example) to

promote the principles and tools to develop ecotourism. The Mediterranean basin alone combines a large number of complex challenges for the future (climate change, political and institutional changes, spatial and social inequalities, the strong concentration of visitor numbers, rapid growth of tourist accommodation capacity, etc.). The initiatives run as part of MEET take on a particular profile in this context which is both sensitive and full of promise for the future.

**Based on the work of the day which gave the first elements to define sustainable tourism in protected areas méditerranéens, a second seminar will be held in February 2015.**



## 4. Day 2: 13 June

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### *Field trip to the Cévennes National Park*

Day 2 of the seminar was devoted to a field trip and meeting with tourism businesses involved in Part 2 of the ECST with the Cévennes National Park.

#### **The Cévennes National Park ([www.cevennes-parcnational.fr](http://www.cevennes-parcnational.fr))**

Bruno Daversin presented the Cévennes National Park. Its natural (MAB biosphere reserve since 1985) and cultural heritage was recognised by UNESCO in 2011 and listed as a World Heritage site for Mediterranean cultural landscapes. He described the development of tourism which has been the leading economic sector within the park for more than a century and emphasised the area's characteristics and paradoxes. Finally, he described how the three parts of the ECST were implemented in the Cévennes National Park. *See Annex 8 for slide presentation.*



#### **La Soleillade en Cévennes ([www.lasoleillade.com](http://www.lasoleillade.com))**

Daniel Amoros owns a holiday cottage and presented the unique history of the region from the Wars of Religion which saw the Protestants (the Camisards) take refuge in these mountains to the Second World War when Resistance fighters (the Maquisard) also hid in the area.

He also presented all that he had done to register his property in an ecotourism approach, including promoting local heritage, produce from his vegetable garden or local producers, natural materials, energy-saving measures, managed prices, etc. (see website).



#### **Anambule ([www.mascorbieres.com](http://www.mascorbieres.com))**

Gabrielle Brumelot presented an ecotourism business venture based on raising donkeys. She offers donkeys to rent for half-days or several days to accompany hikers as well as accommodation at the beginning of the walk.

#### **Le Jardin des Sambucs ([www.jardinsambucs.com](http://www.jardinsambucs.com))**

Nicholas and Agnès Bruckin were our hosts for lunch in the Jardin des Sambucs which was prepared with produce from the garden and other local ingredients. They then presented the garden, its design and its spirit (see website).

Marie-Lou Bruckin showed us the self-catering and bed and breakfast accommodation offered in the Jardin des Sambucs.



### **Camping Isis en Cévennes ([www.isisencevennes.fr](http://www.isisencevennes.fr))**

Florence Faidherbe presented her campsite and is also committed to the sustainable development process. This is an example of a business accompanied by the National Park and the Cevennes Ecotourism Association to improve its practices and have access to Park recognition.



### **Cévennes Ecotourisme ([www.cevennes-ecotourisme.com](http://www.cevennes-ecotourisme.com))**

Anne-Laure Saby presented the Cevennes Ecotourism Association which was created to coordinate a network of tourism businesses located in the Cevennes National Park who are all involved in sustainable development. The association provides support to these businesses for Part 2 of the ECST. *See Annex 9 for document or website.*



*Photo: Anne L'Epine, Parcs nationaux de France.*