



Twinning Project MK 13 IPA EN 02 17

“Strengthening the capacities for effective implementation of the acquis in the field of nature protection”

STUDY TOUR TO LITHUANIA

Report D1.3. - 1




22-28 APRIL 2018

List of participants:

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2. SASHKO JORDANOV, MOEPP, Head of Unit for Protection of Natural Heritage and Natura 2000, Twinning Project RTA Counterpart
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4. ROSKA NIKOLOVSKA VUKOJEVIKJ, representative from MOEPP
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11. AJMAN AL ALLA, Head of Department of Nature in PA
12. AMET AXHIU / ADJIU, Head of National Park Administration
13. PECE CVETANOVSKI, Head of Department in National Park Administration
14. NATASHA ALEKSOVSKA, Twinning Project interpreter
15. ARTO AHOKUMPU, Twinning Project RTA

Program and key topics:

Date and time	Place and host	Topic
Day one: Monday 23.4.2018		
<p>18:30 - 19:15</p> <p>Merkine, main office of Dzukija NP:</p> <p>Director Eimutis Gudelevicius</p> <p>Conservation biologist Mindaugas Lapele</p> <p>Ruta Baskyte, SSPA Deputy Director; JPL of the Twinning Project</p>	<p>The bus from Macedonia arrived; Ruta Baskyte, Arto Ahokumpu and Natasha Aleksovaska together with Eimutis Gudelevicius and Mindaugas Lapele from Dzukija NP welcome the 13 person Study tour group.</p> <p>Coffee and tea in the main office/visitor centre; administrative issues.</p> <p>Mindaugas Lapele introduced shortly the group to key values of Dzukija NP, which are, pine forest, sandy soil, cold waters and warm people. The exhibition in the visitor centre showed diverse values of the park and were excellently implemented. This investment, as many others were funded by EU Structural Funds.</p> <p>For more information about Dzukija national park and Cepkeliai strict nature reserve http://www.cepkeliai-dzukija.lt/</p> 	
<p>19:30 - 20:10</p> <p>Information tower in Merkine (most of the visited PAs have several information or bird watching towers):</p> <p>Conservation biologist Mindaugas Lapele</p>	<p>The group visited a huge observation tower presenting Nemunas river valley</p> <p>The topics discussed in the tower</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of meadows and bird breeding areas by removing bush and trees from the islands of Nemuna river (one-time action); after that continuous grazing by Hereford cattle supported by EU agri-environment schemes • Totally the administration is in charge of 75 000 ha, 	



which consist of one NP, one strict reserve and some smaller nature reserves, which belong to Natura 2000 network; so, small Natura sites are managed by the existing administration close by

each PA and N2K site has responsible management authority.

- App. 70 % of land is private, the rest is owned by the state; 50 % of the area are commercial forests (both private and public)
- Private land owners can get Natura 2000 compensation; later a lecture on this topic



20:30
Marcinkonys

Arriving to the nature school in Marcinkonys;
accommodation and dinner

Day two: Tuesday 24.4.2018

7:30

Breakfast

8:30 - 9:00

Marcinkonys, visitor centre
Quide: Rima Finazonokiene;
Mindaugas Lapele



Presentation on the visitor centre and its exhibition:
General info on Dzukija:

- Largest NP in Lithuania, 60 lakes and 30 rivers
- The park is connected to Vilnius by train, one hour connection, good for tourism and environmental programs, especially in weekends; support also biking visits
- Promotion of cultural heritage has important role in PA management: festivals, hollow threebee keeping, resin collection, linen, candle making, baskets, joint renovation projects with villages
- nature and culture are tightly linked to each other; the people are used to live next and in and with the forest using ecosystem services before the whole concept has been introduced; also mushroom and berry picking are still important for locals. Collecting of mushrooms and berries are free except in strict zones.
- In the exhibition, the main theme is “Dainava forest: nature and the man” which represent pure nature, traditional lifestyle and crafts of Dzukija national park; it concretely shows how nature and people goes hand by hand having a lifestyle of benefitting “ecosystem

	<p>services". Kids and the needs of nature school programs has taken into account in the exhibition.</p>
<p>9:30 - 11:00 Field trip in Chepkeliai Strict Nature Reserve; Nature trail Mindaugas Lapele</p> <p>Adriana D'Amato volunteer from Italy</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chepkeliai Strict Nature Reserve, established 1975; totally 11,000 ha wilderness area, RAMSAR site; bordering with Belorussia • In the Nature Reserve no forestry, no hunting, cranberry picking is allowed for locals on September • Limited tourism; on July max two groups with 20 persons a day; registration obligatory, however without entrance fee • Southern and northern features are meeting at the site; complex of wetland: raised bog, pine forest in eskers, islands, lakes, small ponds; the area was heavily harvested between world wars by Polish; however, some nice areas with substantial amount of dead wood can be already noticed • Some small scale management for keeping mires open by removing pines (e.g. mating site for grouse) - mainly done due to lack of natural forest fires • After the visit question (see topics delivered beforehand): are there Payment for Ecosystem Services and any legislation related to the topic: clear answer - no experience, no legislation in Lithuania. 
<p>11:00 - 11:30</p> 	<p>Coffee and tea with apple pie in Darzeliai farm house. PA administration has renovated the farm house for volunteer accommodation, summer camps for youth and cultural events mainly in summer.</p>
<p>11:45 - 12:15 Gaudiskes meadow/field</p>	<p>Visiting of Gaudiskes meadow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meadow was left for the management of the PA administration, which evaluated it as a valuable site for nature conservation; the aim is to keep it open area



and stop forest overcoming; originally the idea came from locals

- EEA Grants were used for opening the area and building a fence and shelter for the cattle. (The EEA Grants are jointly financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The EEA Grants are available to the 13 EU member countries that joined the EU and the European Economic Area (EEA) in 2004, 2007 and 2013 as well as Greece and Portugal.)
- The Hereford cattle was introduced (for meat production), in the beginning by PA administration, now local farmer is taking responsibility; the same cattle is also going to graze on summer time in Nemunas island visited first evening.

Conclusions:

- Locals are hesitant to try something new without concrete tools to encourage them, it was necessary for the park to show example and establish conditions for grazing
- It is important to use all possible funding options, also international ones; the PA administration may have experience and skills for applying, not necessary local farmers
- Active management is needed for meadows and open area; some subsidies are essential, without the farmers can not continue traditional or new/applied ways of farming
- Active co-operation with individual farmers is crucial part of the job descriptions of personnel in PA administration



13:00 14:00
Marcinkonys



Lunch in nature school

14:00
Marcinkonys, nature school
Ruta Baskyte&MidaukasLapele

Presentation System of Lithuanian PA 2017 08.ppt
Main content and messages:

- Natura 2000 network includes 84 SPA and 475 pSCI areas covering 17,63 % of LT territory

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning system includes national, PA level and detailed operational plans (Slide 15) • Concrete examples of planning objectives and measures (slide 20 - 27) • PA governance system (Slide 30) Ministry + Agency + PA administrations covering all protected areas; a model which should be applied also in Macedonia • Structure of SSPA and PA administrations (Slides 35 & 36); similar structure in all administrations, well balanced with the objectives; specialists for the key area: biodiversity, recreation, culture, landscape and general administration. • Lessons learned (Slide 41): shift from control to prevention and wide partnership; strong integration into the society □ gain support from locals and politicians • Funding in Slides 43 - 46; basic funding from government goes mainly in salaries; The increase in EU funds is remarkable (Slide 45) - main investment and practical management is done with EU support; Rural Development Program is essential for forest and agricultural management <p>Key issues Dzukija NP and Zepkelijai SNR; presentation Makedonia_2018.ppt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picturesque valleys of rivers, inland dunes, hills and lakes. • Traditional way of living, old wooden architecture , and crafts • Unique cultural landscapes - mosaic of small villages, fields and pastures, scattered in the woods • In Dzukija National Park, there are 25 habitats, 66 species of animals and 6 plant species protected in EU. • Additionally there are 21 smaller Natura 2000 areas in Varena municipality managed by NP administration; this same approach should be considered for MK • Forest were managed by NP until 2004; now government owned forest are managed by State Forest Enterprise; clear situation, forest inspection and PA specialists are controlling the forest management measures. When joining EU, forest management was not in line with the requirements of the directives. Only after comprehensive habitat mapping the new regulations for forestry are applied; no contradiction at the moment. • Berry picking is free, except some areas in Cepkeliai SNR, and it is important for locals
<p>15:15 - 15:40 Marcinkonys, nature school Director Gintautas Kibirkstis</p>	<p>Presentation on Nature School: Za-pranesim--Dzukijos_NP-gamtos mokykla.ppt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combination of programs for children and for tourists

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive games and special programs adapted for each season • Teachers can also have their own programs and lessons.
<p>15:40 16:00 Marcinkonys</p>	<p>Coffee</p>
<p>16:00 - 16:50 Mindaugas Lapele</p>	<p>Drained lake, dam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lake was drained in order to make new field for farming for local people in 1960's • later villagers proposed PA admin to restore the area and they prepared a nature management plan for the site with Norwegian financial support; main work was to built a dam for regulating the flow of water and remove bushes from the area • the area is now important for birds, amphibians and frogs; total area of 20 ha • later the aim is to introduce European Bison in the area for grazing • total costs for one-time actions 30 000 euros 
<p>17:00 - 17:15 Ethnographical village Zervynos,</p>	<p>Historical village Zervynos; symbol of Dzukija region due three crosses</p> <p>Good example on close co-operation with local villages and PA administration in gaining support from abroad in order to maintain cultural heritage; result local ownership of the values of protected area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The threat and aim for conservation: how to keep wooden architecture alive in a village, where are no anymore young people living and many houses are used only as a summer cottage • First idea was to built a community house with Norwegian support; didn't succeed • second idea: restauration of wooden roofs and windows; totally 36 buildings were restored with 15



- owners; use of Larix in the roofs; long lasting solution
- funding agreement: 5 % house owner; 5 % municipality; 90 % from the grant.
- Result: landscape values are preserved, appreciation and pride of the area and the roots of the people increased among locals, PA admin gain more support from locals and the identity of this area is strengthened.



17:30 - 17:45 Ula Spring



Short stop in Ula Spring, which water keeps everyone young. 84 km long meandering Ula river is one of the main canoeing routes in Dzūkija NP and it is surrounded with dry and flooding meadows and thus is valuable nature site.



17:50 - 18:00
Management of Pulsatilla Patens

Lithuanian **NGO** Nature Heritage Fund <http://www.gpf.lt/en> has implemented management measures for Pulsatilla Patens, which is dependent on forest fires. Its flowering requires reduced moss cover and the NGO organized voluntary camp, where part of the moss cover was reduced by hand and it resulted good flowering of Pulsatilla Patens.



A good example of simple management measure done by NGO with excellent results.



18:30 ☐
Dinner, local dance and sing group



Day three: Wednesday 25.4.2018

7.30

Breakfast

8:00 - 10:20

Drive to Zuvintas Biosphere Reserve; short stop in Pyramid of Merkine



(<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/pyramid-of-merkine>)

Deep inside the Dzūkija National Park in Lithuania is an odd glass dome that protects a pyramid. The pyramid marks the spot where in 1990, a young boy and his family are thought to have experienced a miracle, and today the pyramid and dome are believed to channel divine energy.

Zuvintas Biosphere Reserve
Director ArunasPranaitis

Meeting with the Director Arunas Pranaitis, who presented shortly the map area of the Reserve
Drive to Bukta Forest
For more information about Zuvintas BR
<http://www.zuvintas.lt/>

10:50 - 12:00
Bukta forest; RamunasMazetis

BuktaForest is part of Zuvintas BR, Natura 2000 forest area, which is managed by local State Forest Enterprise. Beech



and bird are main species. The area is hosting valuable habitats and rare plant species as well as versatile population of woodpeckers. For woodpeckers all dead wood will be left into the forest, the goal is to have at least 25 m³ of dead wood of different stages.

Nature trail, which is 2 km long, was built two years ago, ecologists were at the beginning against of the trail, but it is implemented professionally and does not harm nature values. Municipality and Forest Enterprise are in charge of maintaining of the trail.



Some old oak trees (more than 150 years) are designated as nature monument.


Main part of Bukta forest is kept in natural condition, but in 25 % of the total area, active management is applied. The management is done by implementing Forest management plan, which has to be in line with Biosphere Reserve management plan. The status of BR mgmnt plan is higher than Forest management plan. The key conservation value in the area is birds depending on dead wood the requirements of Bird Directive has to be applied. Thus in the management prectises, it is required to leave 25 oaks/ha and additionally to secure at least 25 m³/ha of dead wood. Biosphere Reserve staff is in charge of monitoring of the area.

After joining the EU, the area designated as Natura 2000 site, but the management plan was not renewed immediately. Implementation of Habitat and Bird directives were not totally integrated into the management practices, mainly due to lack of comprehensive habitat mapping. Knowledge on habitats and their management requirements were not in appropriate level. Only after the mapping (the project in Lithuania 2009 - 2014) it was possible to integrate all the requirement of Directives into the management plan and management practices. The main changes were in forest management practices and introducing more active management in open habitats.

Conclusion:

- Good co-operation with Forest Enterprise is valuable
- Nature conservation has to be driving force, forestry activities has to support conservation goals and follow requirements of Directives
- Comprehensive habitat mapping is a precondition for good management plan
- Forest management practices need special attention when introducing Habitat and Bird Directives; habitat management guidebook is necessary

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active management measures are required for open habitats, those are not possible without compensations or subsidies
12:10 - 12:40	Field lunch
	Drive back to the Visitor centre, coffee
<p>13:30 -</p> 	<p>Bird observation from the roof of the centre</p>  <p>Arunas Pranaitis presentation Žuvintas BR Management and planning 2018.ppt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zuvintas wetland 6940 ha is the largest in LT; shallow water, average 0,6 m; floating vegetation islets cover 20 % of surface. Ramsar, Natura 2000, UNESCO Man and Biosphere programme; the area of Biosphere reserve is 18 490 ha; 3 strict nature reserves, one botanical reserve and five botanical and zoological reserves. • Important bird area, 190 species; also important stop over place • 10 000 visitors annually • Excellent example on habitat map (Slide 25) and management principles (slide 28) • In the management plan, a lot of attention has been paid to prioritise conservation objectives, because management measures has to fit the requirements of key conservation values; high priority has been put for rare and higher status species • A lot of active management (Slides 35 -42) <p>Ruta Baskyte presentation: Management plans 2018 03 05 sulietuvisku tekstu.ppt Presentation on history of PA system and different types of management plans; content of management plan Slide 14&15. Databases on Protected areas (Slide 33);</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) State Cadastre of PAs - boundaries etc (SSPA) – for general public and decision makers; 2) Biodiversity monitoring system: Collect biodiversity monitoring data (insects, mollusks, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals and bats (332 species) in

	<p>observation points marked on interactive map in Natura 2000 territories; for PA administrations</p> <p>3) Protected Species Informative System; Data on endangered or threatened wild animals, plants and mushrooms species found in natural environment of Lithuania; data for decision makers</p> <p>Visit to the bird watching tower (15:15 - 15:45)</p>
16:05 ☐	bus trip to Aukstaitija NP
21:30	Accommodation, nature school
Day three: Thursday 26.4.2018	
8:00 - 9:00 Aukstaitija NP nature school	Breakfast
<p>9:15 - 10:10 Juodupe wetland; Tautgirdas Masiulis, head of nature department, Violeta Jasiuliene, Specialist of Nature Department Agnė Jasinavičiūtė Chief Specialist of Landscape Protection Division; SSPA</p> 	<p>Introduction of Aukstaitija NP; established on 1974 as first national park in the territory of Lithuania, later on 1991 renamed as Aukstaitija national park. forests, lakes, wetlands. For more information about Aukstaitija national park http://www.aparkai.lt/</p> <p>Visiting Juodupe wetland area, which is managed for the <i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>, also for habitat types: 6450 Northern Boreal alluvial meadows, 7140* Transition mires and quaking bogs, 7160 Fennoscandian mineral-rich springs and springfens, 7230 Alkaline fens, 9010* Western Taiga, 91D0* Bog woodland.</p> <p>The area belongs to the Forest Enterprise and PA made an management agreement with them. Natura management plan was prepared 2007 and the area was harvested in 2010 in order to have more light and lifespace for the valuable plant. FE declare the area and PA administration got the income to pay all works done for the management of the area.</p> <p>Discussion on species conservation: a land owner can have compensation for loss of income due to management of species; in most cases these are done in voluntary basis. However, the park administration has also made a list of the most important sites, which can be purchased for the government with full price by National Land Service under the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania. If the area is not in such a list, the PA administration does not have a tool to force private land owner for active management measures.</p>



10:20- 10:55
Visiting Ladakalnis Hill

Long ago the hill served as a site of pagan sacrifices to the Goddess Lada - the Great Mother who gave birth to the whole planet. Seven lakes can be seen from the top of the hill, also open landscape in some of the islands for the management of birds and species - goat grazing areas. The trees from the hill was removed as a landscape conservation measure. Landscape conservation has a big role in Lithuanian PA management.



Discussion on waste treatment; Lithuania has adopted some years ago a principle, which encourage people to “bring out” everything they “bring in”. On the same time, there were campaigns for collecting litter from protected areas and, after that, the problems has declined dramatically. Simultaneously the deposit and recycling system for plastic bottles and cans has taken into use. As a result, we could notice extremely clean protected areas and also countryside as a whole.


11:30- 11:45
Director GedasKukanauskas;

Short visit to the visitor centre and introduction of Aukstaitija NP by the Director GedasKukanauskas.

<p>Tautgirdas Masiulis, head of nature department, Violeta Jasiuliene, Specialist of Nature Department, Italian volunteer Stefania Travaglia</p> 	<p>Discussion on the emblems and logos of the PAs.</p> <p>The logo and emblem system for PAs was established 2016 in EU-PHARE project, when each of the protected areas got their own logo and the PA system as well as State Service of protected areas got its own emblem. The logos present key values of each protected area and landscape forms. They are widely used in printing materials, web pages, info boards, uniforms, vehicles etc. giving a professional and unified outlook for the whole system. The project is supporting MoEPP to establish equal system for Macedonia by drafting a rulebook for marking of Protected Areas.</p> 
<p>12:00- 13:30 Drive & lunch</p>	<p>Lunch in the restaurant Romnesa, Ignalina</p>
<p>14:00- 15:00 Zemaitiškes meadows</p> 	<p>Grazing area, where sheep (traditional Lithuanian breed Black-Headed) and cows are maintaining landscape value and the area open for birds. Totally more than 100 bird species are found in wetland and meadows. PA has to inform local people on the possibilities for applying EU agri-environment subsidies for keeping sheep and cows in protected areas. The requirements of directives has to be translated in the language of local people in order to get them understand the benefits which may raise from EU and from a site belonging to the Natura 2000 network. Natura 2000 areas needs strong and capable management organisations in order to be able to communicate continuously with local people and communities, which is a precondition for proper management, especially in the areas, which require continuous management.</p>

	
<p>15:00-15:20 Reskutenai craft center</p> 	<p>Coffee; lovely cake</p>
<p>15:20- 16:40 Reskutenai craft center</p>	<p>Presentations about management plans for Natura 2000 areas, nature management measures integration to National park management plan, discussions;</p>
<p>16:40 - 17:15 Ethnocentre Violeta Tautgirdas</p>	<p>Weaving, spinning, felting, wood and ceramic workshops are organized in the center of Reškutėnai traditional crafts. The gastronomic heritage is also forgotten: homemade bread and cakes are cooked in the ancient furnace, pressed cheese, and made by domestic cheese.</p>
<p>17:20- 17:40 Lygumai hill</p>	<p>Field trip to Lygumai watch tower and representation of Kretuonas lake Great island from above; one more example on active management by grazing in the islands; both conservation of valuable habitat and species as well as landscape conservation.</p>
<p>18:00 <input type="checkbox"/></p> 	<p>Joint dinner in the restaurant Romnesa, Ignalina with the director of State Service for protected Areas; Mr. Albertas Stanislovaitis and Director of Aukštaitija NP Gedas Kukanauskas</p>
<p>20:30 Drive to nature school</p>	<p>Accommodation</p>
<p>Day three: Friday 27.4.2018</p>	
<p>8:00</p>	<p>breakfast</p>
<p>8:30 - <input type="checkbox"/></p>	

<p>Drive to Anyksciai Regional Park</p>	
<p>10:20- 11:20 Guide; Indre Merekeviciene</p> 	<p>Guided tour in tree top walking path in Anyksciai RP; Built in 2015; annually 1 million visitors; World tourism Award 2016; tickets sold on voluntary base; capacity 500 visitors on time; the path is one kilometre, of which tree top path 360 metres. Strong support from local municipality and nation-wide appreciation.</p>  <p>Example of excellent info board with maps and description of services.</p>
<p>11:20 - 13:00</p>	<p>Drive to Vilnius</p>
<p>13:00 - 14:00 National Visitor Centre; Ruta Baskyte</p> 	<p>Presentation on exhibition in the National Visitor Centre, which start actioning in 2015. National Visitors' Centre of Protected Areas is providing visitors with information on protected areas in Lithuania and abroad. National visitor center exposition - "Protected areas. The journey of life is a circle" reflecting the rhythm and cyclicity of nature. Here visitors can find funny and interactive information about Lithuanian and foreign protected areas (national and regional parks, reserves, sanctuaries, natural monuments, etc.). There are 12 stops and in exposition which explain system and history of PA in Lithuania, introduce PA in the world, represent exceptional value of national and regional parks, nature reserves.</p> <p>Key message in the exhibition: "It is very important, that the citizens of Lithuania would be aware of the importance of protected areas for the state and society, understand their benefits, visit and enjoy protected values, be proud of the county's past and cultural heritage, would not be afraid of nature, be able to behave properly in natural environment and be able to choose the activities that foster the values and give benefit to the people."</p>
<p>14:40 - 15:20</p>	<p>Presentation "Legal and Practical Challenges of</p>

<p>National Visitor Centre; Presentation from Mr. Algirdas Klimavičius, Department for Nature Conservation and Forests, Ministry of Environment</p> 	<p>Implementation of NATURA 2000 Before and After Accession to the EU” ISSUE: The most challenging when introducing Natura tasks (slides 5, 7, 8):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Elaboration of national Habitats Interpretation Manual (and management guidelines);</i> 2. Formulation of sites selection criteria; 3. <i>Finding way of accommodation of N2K sites into national protected areas system;</i> 4. Amendment of Law on Protected Areas; 5. <i>Involvement of scientific community, NGO and land owners;</i> 6. New habitats and species to be protected; many of their sites of occurrence were outside national PA; 7. Sites selection at sea and EEZ; 8. Percentage of national PA has increased from 12 to 16 % (by 241 kHa); 9. Still, some 15 % of N2K network sites are outside national PA; 10. <i>Other legal, administrative or planning instruments had to be introduced</i> 11. Learn from mistakes of others: <i>LT undertook national inventory of natural habitats in whole country only in 2009-2014;</i> 12. Expensive inventories at sea <p>Excellent presentation, everyone should read this!</p>
<p>15:30</p>	<p>Closing</p>

Key findings and conclusions:

Study tour; issues, comments and recommendations

1. **Structure of protected area administration:** Lithuania has excellent and functional structure of protected area administration: Ministry of Environment, which also deals with forestry issues, State Service for Protected Areas as an National Agency (personnel ca 80) and PA administrations in the field (33 under SSPA which has personnel totally ca 400).
It is recommended in Macedonia a) to clarify the role and tasks of MoEPP, b) to establish a National Agency Protected Areas which will in charge of strategic and methodological development of PA; b) to nominate a responsible body for each PAs c) to secure funding for the agency and PA administrations from government budget
2. **Each of protected areas have responsible management authority;** due to fulfilling the requirements of the directives a lot of new small protected areas were established (biosphere polygons as Natura 2000 sites). Existing National and Regional Park administrations took the management responsibility for the new areas. Recommendation: when proclaiming a new

protected area in Macedonia, the decision should include the nomination of responsible management authority with sufficient funding

3. **Open areas with human influence are important Natura sites;** the management of those areas requires continuous maintenance, which is not possible with state direct expenses; In European Union, the Agri-environmental schemes are the most important tool to support biodiversity in open area (fields and meadows). This requires in accession process a good co-operation between MoEPP and MoAFWM (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management) as well as State Enterprise for Pastures. Actually, only in PAs, it is possible to continue or even refresh old traditional agriculture methods after joining EU. One of the main threats for the conservation values in MK will be overgrowing of open meadows, one because of the adverse climate change and second due to declining pressure for grazing.
4. **Forest habitat types requires special attention** in Natura site management. The management methods should be thoroughly discussed by MoEPP with MoAFWM and State Forest Enterprise during the accession period in order to clarify the rules and regulations. In Lithuania it was good to notice, that co-operation in local level was functioning. Forest enterprise was in charge of practical measures, but PA administration was supervising. Also the Forest Management Plan was subordinate to the Protected Area Management Plan. And also it is worth noticing, that PA administration is not depending on the income from forestry practices.
5. **For management planning several levels and approaches are needed,** not only Protected area management plan. In Lithuania, there are at least three levels; Nation wide planning; single PA level management planning (spatial plan) and Operational plans for the part of the PAs where practical management measures takes place (so called Nature Management Plan). All those three levels can be found also in Finland. At the moment in MK legislation only PA management plan is recognized (OBS: Additionally Study for valorization of Natural Values, which should be replaced by up-to-date database and GIS system). It is recommended to consider to introduce in legislation national planning and site level operational planning methods.
6. **The process for establishing a proposal for Natura 2000 network;** according LT experience, Habitat Interpretation Manual with management principles for each of habitats is one of the first steps which should be done. Second step is formulating clear criteria for selection of potential N2K sites. Also clear plan, how proposed N2K sites should be integrated into the PA system and national legislation is needed. Comprehensive habitat mapping should be done as soon as possible when the sites are established - it is too cost and resource demanding to be implemented during the identification process. Natura 2000 management planning is possible to make an efficient and functional way only after comprehensive habitat mapping with relevant databases and GIS system (in practice after joining the EU). And last step is to make settings for monitoring, which is precondition for reporting of the status of habitat, species and sites. In Lithuania it took almost 20 years going through for all of mentioned steps.
7. **Funding:** Natura area management needs several types of funding from different sources; First of all, government should provide basic funding for personnel and running costs of Natura site managers. However, not forgetting the establishment of National Agency for methodological development and its sufficient funding. For actual management measures, especially with open areas, Agri-environmental schemes are must. EU structural funds have been widely used in Lithuania for infrastructure investments like offices, visitor centers and nature schools, nature trails and info boards, observation towers etc. Working environment for Pa administrations has totally improved in 14 years of being part of EU. Life funding has successfully used for boosting practical management measures, especially in one-time actions like restoration. PA system need skills and enough staff for applying the money from outside. The system in LT, where SSPA can apply national large scale projects and PA administrations local, site based projects seems to be

working excellently. Based on LT evaluation (2012), the need for proper Natura area management is 39 €/ha annually. Additionally, it is worth of mentioning, that the government should be able to pay compensations for land owners and have special rules for purchasing the most valuable areas to the government if that is the only way of securing conservation values.

8. **The overall image of protected areas is important;** unified logos and emblems and visual outlook tells people about areas of high conservation value, professional organizations and personnel looking after. Repeating the logos and emblems everywhere (vehicles, info boards, uniforms, web sites etc...) gives an impression of network of well managed protected areas. LT harmonized the system ten years ago and since has put a lot of attention to maintain unified identity and it seems that local and national appreciation of nature and support for nature conservation is prevailing. It was easy to notice, that Lithuanians are proud of their nature and country.
9. **Garbage problem is solved;** protected areas are clean, garbage problem was acute ten years ago. Lithuania adopted some years ago a principle, which encourage people to “bring out” everything they “bring in”. On the same time, there were campaigns for collecting litter from protected areas and, after that, the problems has declined dramatically. Simultaneously the deposit and recycling system for plastic bottles and cans has taken into use. As a result, protected areas are extremely clean and also countryside as a whole seem to have overcome the garbage problem.
10. **Landscape management** was the key principle and approach when planning the PA system into Lithuania. Later biodiversity has strengthened its role, especially through introducing Habitat and Bird Directives. Natura 2000 management is fully integrated into the “traditional” PA management, which is possible due to balanced staff roles in administrations. Each administration has key roles as follows (clearly shown in National Visitor Centre): Director; conservation biologist, landscape manager, recreational manager, culturologist, ranger. This composition serves manifold goals of PA system. Culture and old traditions area crucial part of management and thus local society involvement for PAs. This result support and pride for areas and PA system. In countryside the PA administrations are working as a “hub of intelligence”.
11. **Good infrastructure for visitors and tourist** is essential in order to help people to enjoy nature. This brings benefits for local enterprises, improve the health, happiness and wellbeing of the people and increase the acceptance of nature conservation. In Makedonia, more attention should be put to visitor services and co-operation with tourism enterprises.

Highlights from the study trip / Best Practices / Lessons Learned by Participants

Process and steps of designation of Natura 2000 areas, lessons learned in Lithuania, Implementing Criteria of Annex 3 of the Habitat and Birds Directive *

Issues related to Natura 2000 network are very much in focus in the process of harmonization of national legislation, in the area of nature protection, with the corresponding EU legislation. Full transposition and implementation of the EU Habitats (HD) and Birds (BD) Directives are activities of high priority for the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning.

Since Natura 2000 network is based on the two EU Directives, it is necessary to provide favourable conditions for protection and conservation of species and habitat status through designation and protection of areas where these habitats and species are present. The species and habitats present in our country will be explored and will be used as a basis to propose Natura 2000 sites, which also requires adjustment of the national legislation with the EU.

Due to the fact that the EU has not established a transitional period for identification of natural habitats and species of European importance and the designation of Natura 2000 sites at national level, these activities should be finalised in the period before the country becomes an EU member state.

What have we learned from Lithuania?

- ✚ In Lithuania, 17.63% of the whole territory is protected areas and 13% are NATURA 2000. Protected areas are divided into several categories: strict nature reserve, nature reserve, national park, regional park, biosphere reserve, biosphere polygon.
- ✚ The number of NATURA 2000 sites in Lithuania is 494.
- ✚ Protected areas and NATURA 2000 sites are managed by the State Service for Protected Areas and the PA administrations. These institutions engage different experts who work on implementation of projects and finding sustainable solutions for nature protection and conservation.
- ✚ The first declared protected area is the strict natural reserve Zhuvintash which was first declared in 1937 and today it is NATURA 2000 area.
- ✚ In Lithuania, NATURA 2000 is managed by special administrations established specifically for this purpose. The financing comes partly from the state budget and partly from the EU funds.
- ✚ Protected areas are divided into several zones: zone for strict protection, zone for environmental protection, ecosystem restoration zone, zone for carrying out economic activities, recreation zone and residential zones, in which construction of recreation and housing facilities is allowed.
- ✚ The management plans of NATURA 2000 sites are not obligatory but of great importance for the effective management and planning of activities and conservation measures. In Lithuania, out of 494 Natura 2000 sites, 235 areas already have management plans and others are in the process of being drafted.

Experiences of biogeographical seminars for Natura 2000 *

One of the most important issues during the study visit were: the process and steps for proclaiming Natura 2000 areas; legal and practical challenges for the implementation of Natura 2000 network before and after EU accession.

The process of implementation of the biogeographical seminars was thoroughly explained. Biogeographical seminars are the place where the proposed areas and the lists of habitats and species are discussed in details, usually species by species or habitat by habitat.

It was also discussed about the challenges in the process of identifying and designating Natura 2000 sites, among which one of the bigger challenges is the negotiations with the local citizens in the process of proclaiming NATURA 2000. It takes time and patience to explain to the people the benefits from declaring areas as NATURA 2000.

Shadow list from NGO regarding the proposed Natura 2000 network *

In the process of identification of NATURA 2000 sites and preparation of reference lists of species and habitats, the non-governmental sector and the scientific circles played a key role.

Lithuania has strict procedures for establishing protected areas and follows thoroughly these procedures. Under the law of Lithuania, landowners, municipalities and government officials jointly decide on proclaiming some protected area, including future Natura 2000 sites.

Therefore, the cooperation and transparent approach with them is of great importance in this enduring and demanding process.

Funding of the management of Natura 2000 network including EU LIFE +

In Lithuania, NATURA 2000 is managed by special administrations established particularly for this purpose and the financing is in part from the state budget and in part from the EU funds.

The Government of Lithuania and the Ministry of Environment do not have a separate budget for the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives and so far, most of the projects have been implemented by use of EU funds and programs (eg. LIFE +)

Smallest share of funds is allocated for the implementation of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, whereas the biggest share goes for infrastructure and building of recreational facilities in protected areas, which is have a lower priority for nature conservation.

Monitoring and Reporting to the EU on Natura 2000*

The monitoring of the national protected areas and Natura 2000 areas is carried out by expert teams of ecologists, biologists and foresters, etc. who work in the State Service for Protected Areas and PA administrations. They perform regular monitoring, revision of information and update of their database.

Under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive it is provided as an obligation that reporting to EU should take place every six years.

National legislation, policy framework and institutional capacity for payment of ecosystem services (PES) *;

According to Mindaugas Lapel, Lithuania does not have any experience nor legislation regulating this area.

Forest management in PA and especially in Natura 2000 sites

For the forests (private and state) in the protected areas management plans are prepared (similarly as forestry bases in the Republic of Macedonia), which are submitted for further procedure in the forestry department which is within the Ministry of Environment.

Inventories and mapping of habitats and species, databases of habitats and species

In the period 2009-2014, a national inventory was carried out in the territory of the whole country, and a

database of habitats and species was prepared.

Social and economic benefits of Natura 2000

The social and economic benefit of Natura 2000 and the protected areas for the local people consist of promoting traditional practices in production of branded products, organic production of agricultural products, crafts, etc. in order to attract tourists, as well as promotion of cultural values.

Likewise, the local population can be included in the projects and programs for conservation of species and habitats that are financially supported by the EU.

The livelihood for the local people in these areas mostly comes from farming and agriculture.

Within the visit, we were shown many good examples of promoting and supporting traditional occupations through the use of EU funds, for the purpose of sustainable management of protected areas.

Communication with local stakeholders and different sectors for Natura 2000;

Under the law of Lithuania, landowners, municipalities and government officials jointly decide upon establishment of a protected area, including future Natura 2000 sites. The plan for the establishment of protected areas must be announced in advance, and the parties concerned are invited to a public hearing, where they can express their opinion on the marking of the site, the boundaries of the site, the management regimes, and the conservation status. The government then is obliged to take the opinion of the local community into account, but it is not obliged to decide in their benefit. Since this is required by law, meetings with local stakeholders are held in all cases.







As an example of a good practice for management of protected areas and NATURA 2000 sites in Lithuania we noted the involvement of local people in projects and programs for conservation of habitats and species, such as traditional farming and cattle breeding which are practiced for the maintenance of pastures. Also, great emphasis is given to promoting the cultural values and tradition of the local population in the production of branded products.

Compensations for land owners

The government implements compensatory measures for landowners by purchasing or leasing their land which falls within the boundaries of a protected area that needs management for the purpose of conservation of habitats or species.

Furthermore, the government concludes compensation agreements with farmers for raising and keeping livestock, which is a very important activity in the whole process of management of protected areas and maintenance of its biodiversity.

Good practices from Lithuania

-  Good utilization of EU funds for infrastructure in PA and Natura 2000 sites
-  Good organizational structure of the system for PA and Natura 2000
-  Lessons learned about the preparation of Management Plans for the PA
-  Natura 2000 also promotes tourism which pays due respect for nature; encourages forestry in which the most authentic wood species and the oldest forests are kept, it teaches about sustainable agriculture, hunting and fishing that does not aim to eradicate them, but only to control them.
-  Process of establishing natura 2000 in Lithuania
-  Synergy between Government, experts and non-governmental sector

Conclusions (main challenges and recommendations for next steps in RM)

Thus, key challenges identified in the process of establishment and development of Natura 2000 in the RM are:

- weak institutional capacities at central and local level for the implementation of HD and BD;
- insufficient funding from the state budget for nature protection;
- non-existence of a special expert body for nature protection (Institute for Nature Conservation / Nature Protection Agency with responsibility for implementation of HD and BD);
- absence of management plans or action plans for protection of wild species in some PA;
- monitoring of natural habitats and wild species has not been established in accordance with HD;
- lack of public awareness about Natura 2000 and persisting stereotypes against Natura 2000 in certain sectors, such as forestry, agriculture, infrastructure, energy, tourism, etc.

The main challenge for the establishment of NATURA 2000 European ecological network in the Republic of Macedonia lies in the process of identifying future NATURA 2000 sites, since this process is quiet heavy and complex and involves updating old and collecting new scientific data for species and habitats of European significance, filling in SDF forms, defining the boundaries of the areas, planning future management of the area, including all the aspects of sustainable development.

However, what is very important to remember in all the phases of establishing NATURA 2000, is to raise public awareness, transparency and involvement of stakeholders.

When preparing management plans for future NATURA 2000 sites it is crucial to address private property issues and suggest compensation measures which need to be implemented.

Lessons learned from Lithuanian system of PAs:

- introduction of provisions for the structure of management plans for Natura 2000 sites in the national legislation on nature protection;
- arrangement and designation of protected areas (the preparation of a bylaw in the Twinning project is underway, and the experiences from Lithuania are welcomed);
- establishment and designing of Visitors Information Centre similar to that of the State Service for Protected Areas in Lithuania;
- Improving inventory data status
- Involvement of all stakeholders in Natura 2000 processes
- Identified need for establishment of special expert body for nature protection (Institute for Nature Conservation / Nature Protection Agency with responsibility for implementation of HD and BD)
- Need for reorganising the PAs in RM so that they have capacity to respond to the requirements of the EU directives

All the practices and knowledge shared during the study trip to Lithuania will help in the preparation of management plans for National Park Pelister and Monument of Nature Prespa Lake, which are the main result of Component 1 of the Twinning Project. Furthermore this visit greatly contributed to improving the knowledge of the participants on the process of proclaiming NATURA 2000 areas and the challenges and obligations which we need to undertake in the future in this respect.