

EDPA: Last 50 years and the next 50 years

Session 2: Management of protected areas and climate change: New challenges

Moderator: Øystein Størkersen, Norway (Chair Bern Convention)

Let me start by thanking the Italian authorities for inviting us to the famous and beautiful area of Tuscany!

Generalities on protected sites and climate change

The Bern Convention has issued several guidance decisions and also operate an expert working group on the topic of climate change effects and how to mitigate. Both we in the Bern Convention and other biodiversity Conventions have issued many good ideas and guidances on national mitigation relating to biodiversity. Some of these are directed specifically towards management of protected sites.

I believe that many of you (if not all) present here today are practical people, and wish to discuss concrete ideas and cases of concrete management to cope with contemporary issues in your protected sites. Monitoring of the situation within and around protected sites is vital for early warning and execution of any mitigation efforts. It is easy to understand that this enable us to take action in relation to vulnerable species, change in vegetation, and spread of alien species as important examples. Dramatic and innovative changes in management to conserve specific species and habitats could be the end result and the question is often 'are we ready for this?' An example could be the potential of changing the vegetation cover, such as planting of trees.

Another example of mitigation is of course changes to the area of protected sites, such as extensions. This can be necessary to improve the dynamics of a site and capability to cope with changes in ecosystem factors, such as flooding, droughts, storms, erosion, wildfires and rising sea levels. We could call these extensions buffer zones. For those of you who are interested I will refer you to Bern Convention document 2013/07 'Draft guidelines on the management of Emerald Sites' which lists concrete advice on development of an adaptive management plan.

An even more dramatic turn could be the abandonment of protected sites! It must be a difficult choice to expect that protected sites are abandoned in some areas and hopefully replaced with other sites? Hopefully extensions are far more manageable. However, I think that our system of protected areas and the political will for major changes are not always quite up to such a challenge.

Let there be no doubt: International networks of protected areas are extremely important and today we see a growing interest world wide for more networking of sites and I for one want to see even more in the years to come. Europe has taken the lead in establishing coherent and solid networks, while we should also recognize other networks such as Ramsar sites, Western Hemisphere Migratory Bird Network along with for instance the Diploma sites (being special sites of excellence). Networks are not only important for biodiversity, they give an added dimension to the national system of protected sites. Which often prove to be very effective and important in the fight to protect them.

Protected areas are not always protected forever in the sense that they will be left unspoiled or secure from the ravages of human impacts. In fact the work to protect them really starts in earnest the day they are protected, while their status as international sites or sites of excellence does strengthen their protection regime and how most people regard them.

Driving forces and threats

No doubt important underlying or driving threats against our environment and protected sites stems from the effects of increasing globalization and the technological efficiency of man. Humans seem to have no boundary and left uncontrolled, we have ended up in a situation where we today face unprecedented reductions and threats to biodiversity through unsustainable use. Broadly speaking we have politicians and regulatory frameworks incapable of taking appropriate actions that will work on long term basis. Still there is hope, as I believe that nature conservation in the broadest sense of the meaning, is equivalent to ensuring sustainable lives for ourselves and future generations. Surely this must be good news for us all? Therefore it is disappointing that we increasingly see how raw capitalism and greed is the basis for management of our common environment. UNEP has recognized that this is causing more and more problems with maintaining ecosystem services and biodiversity, nor does it exactly help the 140 or so poor nations of the world. I am not saying that sustainability mean cessation of any use of the environment, but in plain words we must give the environment the same standing as money to be able to manage the natural world wisely and sustainably and to the benefit of humans. But what has this to do with protected sites?

Protected sites are only protected as long as the politicians want them to be. As soon as they become interesting for other uses, the same politicians can alter their status and claim them for development. The public might find this shocking news?, as even protected areas cannot claim to be 100% protected, as they are always under the political will. According to UNEP all of us need to change our views. In other words if we want to destroy natural areas, the biodiversity must have the same right to exist as money. Money should not be the only value that we grant rights and often at the cost of our environment. Therefore if we choose to give a concession to destroy areas, it must be accompanied with obligations to both map biodiversity and to restore it after the development. Protected sites must have the right to exist too and to be secure for future generations, in other words they must be no-go-areas for capitalists looking for opportunities. I suggest that you think about this and also recognize the important task you can play. I see hope in the fact that the civil society, including you and me and NGO's can play a crucial role. Because we are the only ones that can let the politicians and others in our society know that we need to change the way we look at our commons, protected sites and consequently the future we want.

Will technology save us?

When diploma sites come under threat of climate change, be it warmer climate, flooding, rising sea temperature or sea levels, loss of biomes – some of these threats can be used as excuses to destroy even more of the environment. These threats are more dikes, more seawalls, more water dams, more power lines, more wind turbines and more technological innovations. These are likely to be the short term solutions from a society believing that technological innovations will save us all. Typically these solutions does not take onboard the cost of sacrificing more biodiversity or ecosystem services, as these resources are not given either equal rights or value as money or jobs. In other words,

instead of accommodating changes and maintaining natural services, there is a risk that we may end up with more destruction of the environment to mitigate climate change effects.

I want you to be aware of the underlying mechanisms and choose your strategies accordingly. Let me give you an example: If a neighboring village to a protected site claims that unless we build a reservoir for drinking water in the midst of your diploma site, the village has to abandon cultivated fields – what will the political solution be?, and how will the technocrats and capitalists respond to such an opportunity? Unfortunately the answer is mostly given. Those of us who see the management of the natural world in a longer perspective need to choose strategies and build alliances. I think that most of us are well aware of these scenarios, while not always making strategic choices to meet these challenges.

I am sorry for bringing such difficult information to you, but these are serious issues, and debated worldwide by economists, lawyers, by UNEP, and also in the Bern Convention. We know what to do, I refer to three Rio Conferences, and numerous guidance documents from biodiversity Conventions. I strongly think that we have no more nature to loose, we must stem the ongoing loss of our environment and act now. You are capable of acting, but you need to be strategic in your choices, you need to know the driving forces behind our societies and I believe we all need to learn about the challenges we face today.

This seminar is a celebration of our diploma sites, but I also hope that we can learn from each other and if we bring new ideas back home, I think we have succeeded with the aim of the workshop!

Thank you!