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**Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for
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**A PRESTIGIOUS COMMUNITY:
HOLDERS OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA FOR
PROTECTED AREAS**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Diploma for Protected Areas (EDPA) is now 55 years old. Looking back to the mid-1960s, the concept of the EDPA was extraordinarily innovative. Few European countries has comprehensive nature conservation legislation; some even had almost none. The EDPA foresaw and established a network of protected areas across Europe that aimed to protect the natural heritage.

Subsequently the Council of Europe further developed nature conservation thinking; this resulted in the Bern Convention (1979). The Convention further stimulated action throughout Europe, with member States updating their conservation legislation. The European Union picked this up with two important Directives – commonly known as the “Birds Directive” and the “Habitats Directive”. These established the Natura 2000 network and the Council of Europe instigated the parallel Emerald Network for member States which are not members of the European Union. These now form two networks of many thousands of sites across Europe, aiming to protect hundreds of named species and named habitats.

The EDPA and the Bern Convention have been a major stimulus for conservation throughout Europe. Given this context, what is now the role of the EDPA? Alternatively, is the EDPA still necessary?

The Natura 2000 and Emerald networks focus on individual habitats and species; they aim to bring these into a good conservation standard. There are only two criteria for the award of the EDPA. The first relates to the protected area’s European significance. In other words, is the area particularly outstanding in a European context (this has usually been defined as the area being unique or almost unique and it does not depend on the occurrence of defined habitats or species)? Such a definition includes both natural and cultural features and incorporates concept of involvement of local communities. The second is that the management of the area should be exemplary. An area within the community of EDPAs is therefore very different from areas within the two large Natura 2000 and Emerald networks, not being a purely nature conservation designation. It is a holistic designation and hence should be viewed as Europe’s premier conservation designation.

2. THE PISA DECLARATION AND EDPA’S SLOGAN

At the 50th anniversary meeting of the EDPA community, attendees were challenged to develop a forward-looking declaration. Drafts were consulted on and discussed during the meeting, and a final version was agreed – it is known as the **Pisa Declaration**. This is an important statement about the EDPA network and, after consideration by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, was finalised and widely circulated. A copy is included as Appendix 1. This paper builds on the Pisa Declaration, as outlined in the terms of reference, which are listed in Appendix 2.

Further to the Pisa Declaration, a possible slogan was consulted on and finally agreed for display in the visitor centres and offices of places holding an EDPA. This agreed form of words is “*an award for exemplary management of outstanding European natural heritage*”.

Additionally, the Secretariat has collated a huge amount of information in the Dashboard of the European Diploma for Protected Areas.

3. THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

In order to be inclusive of the knowledge and aspirations of EDPA managers, a questionnaire was circulated in early January 2020. Managers were asked to respond by the end of the month. 29 replies from the 73 Diploma-holding areas were received and these are listed in Appendix 3. This appendix provides an excellent resource for the guidance of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, for the Secretariat, and indeed for the authorities and managers of EDPAs. The following two paragraphs give an extremely brief analysis of what was contained in those responses.

The overall impression is that the Pisa Declaration is appropriate to the needs of the EDPA although some small changes were suggested and the statement possibly needs to be made stronger. Overwhelming it is considered to be insufficiently known outside the conservation community and hence needs to be more sharply focussed. In developing a vision for the EDPA, a relatively shorter timescale, say about a decade,

seems to be preferred, though the longer term up to 2050 (the European Commission's *Green Deal*) or 2065 (the centenary of the European Diploma) should not be forgotten.

The collection of EDPAs, with their considerable diversity of environments, makes it clear that there are many case studies demonstrating how adaptation to a changing climate might be possible, how management can contribute to achieving the UN's sustainable development goals, and how other environmental challenges of the 21st century, such as managing invasive alien species, are being met. However, each EDPA is more or less isolated from all of the others – better communication both within the network and externally to governments (nationally and locally), agencies, businesses, NGOs and the public is required. Frequent words in the replies are “cooperation”, “exchange”, “sharing experiences”, “recognition”, and so on. Whilst the EDPA is valued locally, the vision must ensure that the EDPA becomes more widely recognised both nationally and internationally.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

What can raise the profile of the EDPA, enthuse all sectors of society across Europe, and ensure that authorities and managers are more coordinated?

Recommendation 1: is that a short visionary statement is required; a suggestion is:

By 2030, the community of holders of the EDPA:

- *is recognised internationally as an assemblage of Europe's most unique and important natural landscapes;*
- *serves people's aspirations to protect both the natural and the cultural heritages of Europe;*
- *demonstrates to all sectors of society how protected areas can meet the many environmental challenges of the 21st century, being models for other protected areas;*
- *supports the enjoyment of the natural and cultural features by both local people and visitors; and that the European Diploma for Protected Areas is recognised as Europe's most prestigious natural heritage award.*

To achieve such a vision, I suggest that the following seven recommendations are considered.

Recommendation 2: a communication strategy

The questionnaire responses have highlighted the need for communication amongst the EDPAs. There was much discussion of this need during the Pisa meeting, and it is one of the challenges (perhaps the most urgent challenge) of the Pisa Declaration. The preparation of such a strategy is beyond the scope of this paper – it will require considerable consultation and the involvement of a specialist in communications. Hence, my recommendation is that a comprehensive communication strategy be agreed within the next two to three years (Action: Secretariat, with input from the EDPA managers).

Recommendation 3: making information more widely available

Prior to implementing a communication strategy, an electronic newsletter could be produced and circulated as widely as possible. Such a newsletter (probably circulated annually) would contain information from the Secretariat relating to the Bern Convention, new EDPAs, and renewals of existing EDPAs. Each individual EDPA would be requested to submit relevant items of news, results of research, forthcoming meetings, management initiatives, etc. It might also be possible to commission an article on a special topic for each newsletter – these might be, for example, adapting to climate change, managing increasing numbers of visitors, or linking the cultural and natural heritage. My recommendation is that an electronic newsletter be instigated this year (2020). (**Action:** The Secretariat to collate material; the EDPA managers to submit items for inclusion and be responsible for wide electronic circulation of the newsletter within their own nation).

Alongside this recommendation, or as an alternative, an online platform could be created. This would allow communication between EDPA managers to be immediate. The aim is for the rapid exchange and sharing of knowledge and experiences and indeed for any issues of relevance to the community of EDPAs. (**Action:** The Secretariat to create and administer; EDPA managers to post information on the platform).

Recommendation 4: focussing the Pisa Statement

The Pisa statement is generally seen as satisfactory. However, it could be more strongly focussed so that it becomes more vital for the policy and decision makers in governments, agencies and NGOs. The writing of the shorter and more focussed statement is beyond the role of this paper and would need to include the agreed vision. This statement would be factual and be capable of being adapted for use in each of the member States, for example by briefly outlining the EDPAs in that nation. It could invite the member States to consider if they have any protected areas of European importance which could be proposed, subject to meeting the criteria of European importance and exemplary management. It should stress the prestigious nature of the award and recognise its significance at the European level. My recommendation is that such a statement should be written. (**Action:** the Secretariat to arrange preparation of the statement; EDPA managers and their authorities to produce localised versions for policy and decision makers).

Recommendation 5: topical meetings

The questionnaire responses indicated that managers would appreciate a greater exchange between EDPAs, for example the chance to meet other managers, discuss issues of mutual importance, or just to be part of the community. This would involve travel, accommodation, etc., all of which is expensive when financial resources are limited. However, it should be possible for any EDPA to arrange a meeting on a particular topic – for example, coastal management in the face of rising sea levels – and invite all EDPAs who are interested to attend. Although there would be no central funding for such an activity, the Secretariat advertise the meeting to all EDPAs and others associated with the Bern Convention. After the event, a record of the deliberations would be communicated to the EDPA community. My recommendation is that EDPAs be encouraged occasionally to arrange meetings. (**Action:** EDPA managers and their administrations to consider arranging a meeting; potential attendees to arrange their own funding).

Recommendation 6: anniversary meeting

Anniversary meetings have marked the founding of the EDPA. The last two were at the Thayatal National Park in 2005 and at the Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli (Pisa) in 2015. These have greatly helped in making EDPA managers feel part of an international community. Organisation and finance, however, falls heavily on the Secretariat and on the EDPA hosting the meeting. Sources of financial support, or partner organisations that might contribute, need to be found, planned and agreed well in advance of 2025. A broad theme for the meeting needs to be decided and the occasion taken to raise the profile of the EDPA community further. My recommendation is that plans be established for such a general meeting in 2025, marking the EDPAs 60th anniversary (**Action:** Secretariat to commence planning and search for a host EDPA; EDPA managers to assist and offer suggestions).

Recommendation 7: growing the Community of EDPAs

Currently there are only 73 EDPAs. This is a relatively small number in relation to the size of Europe. For the EDPA to be recognised as Europe's most prestigious conservation award, an appropriate number of such outstanding protected areas should be considered. An aspiration might be to add one or two new EDPAs per annum, aiming to have 80 - 85 by 2030, and increasing this number thereafter so that there is a ceiling of 100 EDPAs by the 100th anniversary in 2065. To be a member of the community of 100 most prestigious protected areas in Europe would be an outstanding accolade. My recommendation is that members of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, especially those in member States without an EDPA, should be invited to propose areas in their nation which meet the EDPA criteria. (**Action:** Members of the Standing Committee and their Administrations).

Recommendation 8: re-branding the EDPA

Should the EDPA be re-branded? A change in the name of the award could make it more inclusive. The use of the term "Diploma" implies exclusivity since the award is to a single protected area. Following the example of a well-known international award, perhaps a name such as "European Natural Heritage Area" (or "European Natural Heritage Protected Area") might be used, with inscription on an appropriate register. A name, which resonates both nationally and internationally, and hence is more greatly valued by governments, local populations, etc., would strengthen the award locally, nationally and internationally. However, re-branding might be a difficult task, requiring agreement amongst the member States of the Council of Europe. Despite the potential difficulties, my recommendation is that re-branding of the EDPA be considered. (**Action:** the Secretariat to consult).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Council of Europe is to be congratulated on establishing the European Diploma for Protected Areas in 1965. It was an extremely forward-looking venture; it established the concept of pan-European nature conservation; and it was both visionary and revolutionary in the mid-1960s. It is significantly different from other networks because the focus is on landscapes which are unique or nearly unique and hence of great European significance. The importance of their natural heritage is based the totality of their animal and plant life, their habitats, and their soils and geology, and is supported by their cultural heritage. The award of the EDPA is thus unique in Europe and is the premier European conservation award.

However, the full potential of the community of EDPAs will only be achieved if more resources, both human and financial, are made available for its development over the next 10 years. Exemplary management of the individual EDPAs requires sufficient resources locally. Centrally, the Secretariat requires resources for coordinating activities associated with the community of EDPAs.

The EDPA is a very prestigious award. The thinking behind the EDPA paved the way for other nature conservation networks, such as Natura 2000. Perhaps by 2030 and beyond the collective thinking of EDPA managers and their staff about current environmental issues will be a similar beacon for the future of all of Europe's protected areas. The community of EDPAs will be influential in the conservation and management of Europe's biodiversity, both by 2030 and well beyond.

APPENDIX 1. THE PISA DECLARATION

The paper agreed in the Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli (Pisa), Italy, on 22 May 2015 was considered by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention. The following text, on the Future of the European Diploma for Protected Areas, was adopted on 4 December 2015.

The Standing Committee to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the Convention,

Having regard to the aims of the Convention to conserve wild flora and fauna and its natural habitats;

Thanking the Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli, the Tuscany Region and Italian conservation authorities for the excellent organisation of the Workshop “Protected Areas in Europe: the next 50 years” held on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the European Diploma for Protected Areas;

Noting that the European Diploma for Protected Areas has proved to be an efficient instrument to protect exceptionally important sites in Europe for the last 50 years;

Highlighting the importance and the role of the European network of Diploma areas in preserving Europe’s natural and cultural heritage, and their contribution to the defence of environmental and ecological ideals;

Wishing to further develop the European Diploma as an instrument for the implementation of Article 4 of the Convention,

Recommends Contracting Parties to the Convention and invites Observer States to:

1. Maintain the high natural values and exemplary management of the 74 Diploma-holding areas, taking into particular account the global change, and highlighting their role as model areas for best practice and sustainable management;
2. Promote in these areas innovative conservation tools to improve, where appropriate, their management;
3. Consider, particularly for States that have not yet submitted applications to the network, to make proposals for new or additional sites that could better represent the diversity of habitat types present in Europe; in this context, devote special attention to marine and freshwater ecosystems;
4. Take into account the appended guidance for the management of the European Diploma Areas.

GUIDANCE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AREAS IN AN INTERCONNECTED ERA

1. Improve knowledge of European Diploma areas using and developing innovative monitoring techniques;
2. 2a. In areas designed for further development, use traditional knowledge, devise mechanisms for participatory management and strengthen co-operation with the private sector, promoting the green economy; encourage and catalyse local innovations and eco-friendly initiatives contributing to sustainability;
2b. In areas where mass tourism occurs, support actions aiming at minimizing threats caused by growing human impact;
3. Develop modern communication tools to reduce pressure on the wildlife of European Diploma areas, improve public awareness, and reach the local community and the political level;
4. Incorporate a climate change mitigation and adaptation approach, preferably by nature-based solutions, into the adaptive management and strategic programme of work of European Diploma areas;
5. Improve internal and external connectivity in and around European Diploma areas, linking them to the surrounding area and other protected areas;

6. Develop appropriate capacities to address new challenges related to the threats linked to climate change, such as intensive flooding, drought, storm, erosion, wildland fires, rising sea levels, or biological invasions;
7. Address, in particular, the threat of invasive alien species, following the European Guidelines on Protected Areas and Invasive Alien Species; in this context use those areas as pilot areas for enhanced monitoring and “early detection and rapid eradication” programmes, as well as for general awareness on the risks for native biodiversity from invasive alien species;
8. Strengthen human, technical and financial capacities in European Diploma areas.

APPENDIX 2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Council of Europe is currently working on an activity aimed at raising the attractiveness of the European Diploma for Protected Areas. In that context, the Provider has been chosen to provide a medium- and long-term strategic document which sets a role for the European Diploma in supporting the implementation of the world targets and strategic priorities for biodiversity.

The strategic document will build on the Pisa Declaration, consider the perspective of managers of the Diploma holding areas regarding the benefits of the Diploma and assess the extent to which the European Diploma fits the purposes of current environmental challenges.

The strategic document will result in recommendations for raising the attractiveness and relevance of the European Diploma and for networking the community of Diploma holding area managers. The recommendations should take into consideration the limited staff and financial resources of the Secretariat of the Bern Convention and propose concrete steps forward.

APPENDIX 3. THE QUESTIONNAIRE RETURNS

This appendix lists all of the questionnaire returns. A very few changes have been made – these are:

- *First, instead of giving the name of the EDPA, each has been assigned a pair of letters, AA to AZ and BA to BB. Allocation is roughly in the order in which I received replies with the completed questionnaire.*
- *Second, if the answer to any question had more than one paragraph, the paragraphs have been usually brought together. Thus, in the listing below, more or less every paragraph represents the reply from one EDPA.*
- *Third, because this is a ‘cut-and-paste’ document, and because so many national proofing tools have been used, there is a huge variety of blue and red underlined words, clauses and sentences. Please ignore these underlines.*
- *Finally, one of the returns was in French. An approximate translation into English has been bracketed and placed in italic script after the French language replies.*

Question 1: The Pisa Declaration called on governments, authorities, NGOs and communities to support the EDPA. To what extent do you consider that the Pisa Declaration should be strengthened or amended so as to achieve such broad support?

AA: The EDPA community members should be more connected, to transform the category into a network, like in the case of the European Geoparks Network (EGN). More frequent meetings would strengthen visibility, more publications to show that the EDPA is present, mere declarations are not enough if they are not supported by actions.

AB: Before replying to the questions let me list points of the Pisa declaration:

- *to develop **dedicated communication** strategies on the European Diploma areas, their intrinsic value, and the benefits they provide, including by making use of **innovative IT resources to reach and influence the political level, local communities, and media professionals**;*

- to take **traditional knowledge** into account and devise mechanisms for the participatory management of protected areas, including by strengthening cooperation with the private sector and promoting the green economy;
- to **adapt existing management and regulations to the most pressing threats**, including climate change and invasive alien species, so as to ensure that protected areas in Europe form an interconnected network of functionally related ecosystems. In this respect, the concept of “naturalness” should be further developed, taking also into account the interdependencies with the surrounding environment;
- to devote more attention to the **marine and fresh-water ecosystems** in order to ensure that they are also well represented in the network;
- to make use of **innovative and collaborative management techniques** to scale-up EDPAs attractiveness and efficiency, prevent/reduce conflicts with the local communities, and improve their reactivity to the threats to biological diversity;
- to involve the **local communities** actively in the conservation and development of protected areas.

In my opinion the European Diploma should not create “own” structure but it has to be including in the national/regional/local strategies and action plans/activities for protected areas. It would not create a burden for managers but should be a help for them. Managers (and at the national level decision makers) should be aware of the above points and use them as relevant. The most important are results.

AC: We believe that the Pisa Declaration should be strengthened in terms of financial assistance to protected areas.

AD: Maybe it should be on top priorities for the European Parliament, to be a part for the next financial exercise 2021 – 2027, special funds for the European Diploma holding areas in view to recognise their importance and role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

AE: We do not see any pressing need to amend the declaration. The aspiration for EDPA, as set out in the Pisa Declaration, to ‘*promote the sustainable use of our natural resources, underlining humankind's role in the conservation of a common natural and cultural heritage, and improving human well-being through the wide array of ecological goods and services that the Diploma-holding areas do provide*’ and for such places ‘*to function as models of best practice and sustainable management of protected areas*’ is very much in alignment with the aims of Scottish Natural Heritage. If there was one aspect we would amend, it would be around the description of the use of EDPA in testing innovative/ creative/ collaborative approaches. We do use Beinn Eighe and other protected areas in such ways, but our aspiration is to test and demonstrate approaches that will support the sustainable use, enjoyment and management of nature whether in protected areas or elsewhere. In short, to tackle the pressing challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change, we need to be influencing land management at a scale greater than that encompassed by our protected areas.

AF: The PISA declaration is a declaration of intent with general goals for the EDPA network. In our view, the PISA declaration should be expanded to develop a catalogue of specific conditions have to be met by European Diploma holding areas. Examples can be the IUCN guidelines for protected areas that apply worldwide or the conditions of the German MAB National Committee for UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Germany.

AG: The Pisa Declaration sets out general principles that are absolutely correct and acceptable. It rightly calls on governments, authorities, NGOs and communities to support the EDPA network. We believe that, beyond the aims of the Pisa Charter, more concrete action should be taken in order to obtain broader support. In the case of government and institutions, an annual meeting at national level of the protected areas awarded the Diploma could be organised for exchanges between them. In the framework of events at European level (e.g. the EC Green Week or similar initiatives of the Council of Europe) specific moments could be dedicated where the Diploma Areas meet, exchange their experiences and good practices and develop common protocols. Diploma Areas should then work at local level with concrete actions in favour of local communities, highlighting the role and importance of EDPA.

AH: The ideas of the Pisa Declaration are not new at all. In a similar form you will find them with a lot of international organizations. And yet the EDPA network with its wide range of exceptional natural sites is something special. That’s why the presentation of its ideas should be different from that of others =

providing an effective response to climate change: **governments and business can only be effective if they work together with local people, local organizations (NGOs)**

- It's hard to get people to listen to your message and to take action
- Present your idea by making it as specific and small as it can possibly be
- Explain why this initiative offers a possible solution in certain fields
- Think about the language you will use for you audience (Cut the cackle!)
- Present your idea with s.th. written, s.th. spoken, s.th. visual
- Presenting the main (!) idea is not a singular event, it's a campaign

We recommend to produce a short (maximum 10 minutes), striking film version (English/French) to present it in EDPA/NGO institutions/exhibitions Europe-wide.

AI: In our opinion, the content of the Pisa Declaration is reasonable. We would in fact appreciate if the declaration was better announced to the public.

AJ: The **delivery** of dedicated communication strategies on the European Diploma areas, their intrinsic value, and the benefits they provide is vital to achieving broader support. Further efforts to strengthen cooperation with the private sector and promote the part that European Diploma areas can play in developing the green economy would encourage support

AJ: **Disseminating best practice** on addressing the most pressing threats, including climate change and invasive alien species, ensuring that protected areas in Europe form, as far as possible, an interconnected network of functionally related ecosystems would strengthen individual protected areas and demonstrate the benefits of the network. Ensuring that marine and fresh-water ecosystems are well represented in the network is important and will widen support for the network. Promoting the involvement of local communities actively in the conservation and development of protected areas is crucial to developing their social benefits.

AK: the awareness of the European diploma can be greatly improved, for example through more active communication. The European diploma is now mainly known to initiates, but not to the general public. Communication must make the great importance and value of the diploma more widely known. The EDPA must also be put on the map much better digitally.

AL: The Pisa Declaration is sufficient in this form to achieve widespread support.

AM: The Pisa Declaration covers key issues concerning protected areas, therefore, to achieve broad support stakeholder engagement should be widened as much as possible. Particularly engage protected areas in discussions, which need special attention. If necessary, create a fund that will provide site visits to protected areas of EDPA, exchange of best practice in management and conservation and regular implementation of environmental projects in any protected area, including in these processes communities, NGOs, etc. This will help to strengthen and make visible the benefits of having European Diploma for Protected Areas.

AN: In a world in which changes of all kinds (social, environmental, political, ...) are constantly and rapidly happening, such initiatives should also be strengthened through periodic updates; not so much because it is considered necessary to modify its principles but to keep them continuous and always present, give them greater visibility and give the opportunity to adhere to them to new actors.

AO: I think that the Pisa Declaration is set up appropriately and sufficiently. I would append only any appeal to develop effective environmental education programmes or practices. (I don't consider communication and education for identical activities.) Educational programme or practices which would be aimed on all target groups but mainly on children. It is the best investment for better attitude to nature conservation in the future.

AP: In the case of ED DP there is an effort to fulfil all obligations stated in the Pisa Declaration. The communication strategy is well started. The needs of EDPA are clearly defined in the Pisa Declaration and cover all essential areas related to EDPA. The implementation of individual points of the Pisa Declaration will ensure comprehensive management of protected areas.

AQ: The Pisa declaration contains the main elements for achieving the proposed objectives. The element that should perhaps be added is the need for greater synergy of action of the various protected areas, starting

with the application of common and shared monitoring procedures, which are the basis of a standardized collection of data essential for conservation.

AR: The award of European Diploma is an invaluable tool for effectively protecting and conserving the natural inheritance and unique biodiversity of our country and facilitates the implementation of an effective management of protected areas. The Pisa Declaration as an important document for the whole EDPA network meticulously integrates and formulates the current issues of utmost importance related to the approaches to biodiversity conservation, protected area management efficiency and in encouraging links between human societies and the natural world. Active involvement of different stakeholders in this process like governments, authorities, NGOs and communities is crucially important to ensure the maximum support and assistance to the EDPA upon the capacities, appropriate knowledge and expertise. Accordingly, in order to strengthen the support of the objectives defined with the declaration and achieve broad support from various parties involved, its crucially important that the document become available for the wider community. Target audience should be very well informed and aware of the importance of the activities and objectives implied within the declaration.

AS: It would be very important:

- to strengthen the network between the EDPA sites
- to open special tenders for sites
- to collect good practices from the EDPA holding areas
- to organize special workshops, financially supported field trips for EDPA sites members and institutions affected (local and international)
- to develop new EDPA communication strategies

AT: As far as we know, we haven't felt any effect of Pisa declaration at our protected area. The "brand" of EDPA is not known outside nature conservation community. It is important, that governmental bodies consider EDPA as something special and extraordinary. On the other hand, the extreme attention paid to the "competitive" UNESCO World Heritage Sites brand is, due to the frequent abuse for purely commercial and marketing purposes, risky path.

AU: Austrian National Parks have in comparison to other Protected Areas a relatively efficient annual budget. Unfortunately, this budget is very rarely increased, but there are possibilities to gain financial support via projects. A declaration could strengthen the acknowledgment, that protected areas, especially National Parks, fulfil international requirements and implement international recommendations.

AV: We consider the most important for now is to create and implement a system to ensure that Pisa Declaration is applied and to have a firm system of check and balances.

AW: We would like to see more solid, systematic cooperation and programs in the EDPA community. The EDPA community is a bit lacking in combined effort, the European Diploma is a prestigious award, but not really an active community.

AX: Selon notre avis la Déclaration n'a pas besoin d'être modifiée. Elle devrait être à nouveau diffusée près des autorités centrales, locales et les ONG pour qu'elle soit connue ; l'occasion pourrait être une des nombreuses rencontres publiques locales ayant pour thème le Parc, mais on pourrait aussi organiser une rencontre publique ou un Séminaire consacré au rôle international des zones protégées. Ensuite, les ONG et le monde scientifique devraient se mettre en réseau pour diffuser la conscience de l'enjeu près des communautés locales (qui font pression sur les autorités locales et les gouvernements) et travailler ensemble davantage pour satisfaire les besoins (qui sont réels) cités dans la déclaration. *[In our opinion the Declaration does not need to be changed. It should be distributed again to central, local authorities and NGOs so that it is known; the occasion could be one of the many local public meetings on the theme of the Park, but we could also organize a public meeting or a Seminar devoted to the international role of protected areas. Next, NGOs and the scientific community should network to spread awareness of the issue among local communities (who put pressure on local authorities and governments) and work together more to meet needs (which are real) cited in the statement.]*

AY: We think Pisa Declaration quite well reflects needs for EDPA; however it may be strengthened especially on awareness-raising on the benefits of biodiversity and nature-based solutions in the context of climate change and disaster-risk reduction.

AZ: The Pisa Declaration is too little known and should therefore be made available to the general public in an appropriate manner.

BA: We fully support the content of the Pisa Declaration. However, in order to be effective at the level of the authorities, NGOs and communities, this declaration is too extensive and is formulated too indirectly in terms of language. In order to achieve a broad impact, it is proposed to present the contents of the Declaration in a more concise and striking form.

BB: It would be advisable to send information (reminder) on the Pisa Declaration to the relevant Ministries of EU countries responsible for national parks.

BC: The Communication about the Declaration needs to be strengthened.

Question 2: The United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals look forward to 2030. Do you consider that this the appropriate timescale for a new Vision for the EDPA, or would the EDPA's 100th anniversary (in 2065), or any other date, be preferable?

AA: We cannot avoid endorsing political agendas if we want to gain GOV recognitions and support. Yet this does not mean that we should abandon the efforts of seeking for longer term visions, like the mentioned anniversary. Although we have to survive till that date, so short term, medium term and long-term actions could support each other and reflect on midterm corrections if needed.

AB: Taking into consideration our task to update/formulate in 2020 the vision of the Bern Convention it would be very useful also to do tackle the vision of the European Diploma. I think it should be stress not only number and wide scale of areas and European countries involved, but also "news" such as addition of the E. Diploma sites to the WCMC database of protected areas, dashboard etc. The vision does not need to be lengthy but strong.

AC: We believe that 2030 is a suitable date for the new vision of EDPA. The year 2065, in our opinion, is a very distant date. Sustainable development problems we think will not be able to wait so much time for their solution.

AD: It is very important to analyse the progress in 2030 and to propose a new Vision for the EDPA. All efforts must be made, in common with other conventions and networks.

AE: We have no particular views on the timescale for a new vision for EDPA, but note that in promoting sustainable management of nature there are far greater influences, such as the UN Goals for 2030; and that 2065 would seem to be rather too far in to the future when environmental policy is evolving so rapidly.

AF: The time frame for mission statements and goals should be set so that current developments can be taken into account and the need to act promptly is underlined. We consider a period of 10 years to be appropriate. We do not believe that longer periods make sense.

AG: We don't think the date is that important. 2030 could work well, the important thing is to define concrete actions that can help the Protected Areas follow the goals of the Pisa Charter. It would be useful to start meeting as set out in the previous point.

AH: Sometimes debates (greetings even from Davos) give the impression that climatic change is a problem of the future. In reality, far-reaching climate changes are severely noticeable today, and their impacts will quickly increase. That is why it is extremely important to adapt in a timely and efficient manner. Visions focus on the goals the United Nations/the EDPA desire to achieve in the long run, generally in a time-frame of five to ten years, sometimes even longer. But as impacts from climate change are increasingly being felt, we must do anything but quiet the EDPA's conscience with the 2065 date. That is why we plead for the United Nations' 2030 date, without falling into actionism.

AI: We think 2030 is the appropriate timescale.

AJ: 2030 appears to us to be an appropriate timescale. 2065 is too far into the future.

AK: in view of the major societal challenges that apply to Weerrribben Wieden, it is certainly important not to wait until 2065. Adjusting the vision of the EDPA by 2030 is more obvious.

AL: I think this is an appropriate timescale.

AM: Taking into account the current challenges and the need to overcome them and achieve the 17 sustainable development goals, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would be appropriate timescale for a new Vision for the EDPA.

AN: 2065 is far away. Undoubtedly, that new vision for EDPA would make more sense for a date not so far away. And it could well be that cited 2030, along with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

AO: The year 2065 is rather far. Some of goals will be still topical in that time. But there may occur any new issues or any new challenges in next years and there will be a necessity to append any other goals. So, I think that the year 2030 is appropriate timescale.

AP: We do not prefer any date.

AQ: The 2030 deadline seems absolutely appropriate for a new Vision for the EDPA. For certain actions it would even be appropriate to speed up the time. The implementation of common monitoring and active conservation actions require rapid activation times, especially taking note of the speed of transformation of ecosystems due to climate change as a priority.

AR: From our point of view, the planned year of 2030 is an appropriate timescale for a new vision of EDPA to discuss the ways and methods for solving the main challenges for protected areas existing at the current stage and to find the common ways to address and tackle them in the effective manner.

AS: Unfortunately, it is very hard to increase public awareness about sustainability, nature- and environment conservation, because it's very hard to define the solutions and effects of climatic changes. There are so many human effects, but there are also many natural tendencies, which influence our life, too. Researching helps to understand the processes. In our opinion the local and European aspirations have bigger social support in Hungary than the global acts. The EDPA has to define both, middle-term (to 2030) and long-term goals (to 2065). The EDPA has to create researching methods, where the effects are comparable between the defined "milestones".

AT: In our opinion, the vision should have longer timescale and prospect. The 2065 seems appropriate.

AU: For a new Vision for the EDPA I would suppose a timescale in accordance with the European Commissions "Green Deal", therefore by 2050.

AV: Action must be taken now given the current and fast environmental challenges. We consider that this is the appropriate timescale for a new Vision for the EDPA.

AW: 2065 is far in the future, we believe that 2030 is a more appropriate timescale.

AX: Non, toutes les mesures sont urgentes face à l'accélération de la crise climatique, de la perte de biodiversité, etc. [*No, all measures are urgent in the face of the acceleration of the climate crisis, the loss of biodiversity, etc.*]

AY: Thinking that The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all and EDPA is an important tool for reaching these interconnected goals especially those related to nature conservation, we consider that 2030 is the appropriate timescale for a new Vision for the EDPA

BA: We consider a period of 10 years to be appropriate for the formulation of a target horizon. With longer periods, there is a risk that the steps required to achieve the objectives will not be pursued in a sustainable and present manner and will then not be achieved.

BB: I have no opinion about the proper date.

BC: I think that 2030 is an excellent goal for a new vision.

Question 3: Can the EDPA network tell us anything about adaptation to the effects of climate change (any evidence from your own EDPA would be helpful)?

AA: EDPA territories are very diverse, this is a good field for studies. So separate management practices to meet climate change challenges can be compared, because we have to be prepared. But we live in a dynamic world, nothing is stable, climate itself follows this pattern, fluctuates, we should not deny this. The suddenness of climate change is which we have not been prepared for, the human factor and influence. Ecological networking, opening up migratory corridors between EDPA reserves and habitats should be on the agenda, transnational cooperation within the united Europe.

AB: Yes, it can. Mainly if there is a specific recommendation or even condition attached to the specific resolution. If not we might consider adding into the format for the annual report another question related to the climate change issue (not very much complicated for managers, so it would be good to formulate 2-3 questions to be easily replied).

AC: In our territory, we have recently been observing the facts of climate change. These changes are happening now. We do not yet have information on adapting to the effects of climate change, as these changes are only taking place. We think that it takes time to adapt to the consequences of such a change.

AD: -

AE: We are unaware of what other EDPA might tell us. We are carrying out/ have carried out various projects concerning climate change and protected areas (including Beinn Eighe) and would be happy to share the findings with others.

AF: An important focus of research in the European Diploma holding areas of the Berchtesgaden National Park and of the Bavarian Forest National Park is the investigation of the effects of climate change on ecosystems, on plants and wildlife, and on abiotic elements (in particular temperature development, snow cover, permafrost, glacier development in the Berchtesgaden National Park). Adaptation strategies for landscapes outside the national parks can be derived from this. The development of water level of Danube in the European Diploma holding area. Weltenburger Enge also gives clear indications of climate change and the need to take countermeasures.

AG: Our Protected Areas have started working on the climate change emergency. In this sector, sharing experiences and new strategies we can adopt is of paramount importance. We are working on several European projects with actions on climate, but a synergic approach with other EDPA areas is fundamental.

AH: - 3.1 Like in many German forests, in the Siebengebirge Reserve heat and drought in 2019 have caused damages to larger areas of the fir tree forest, especially in the southern (Bad Honnef) part of the reserve. While in the central (VVS) part deciduous trees (beech, oak) meanwhile make up for more than 85 % of the forest, in the community of Bad Honnef fir tree areas still take 60 % with all the consequences of the bark beetle explosion.

Trees being infested had to be cut down to stop the insect from spreading. Reforesting is costly. One ha of new woods costs between €5.000 – 10.000. Meanwhile we have started to plant different types of deciduous trees (8.000 so far) to create new woodland. By increasing variety these forests shall become more resilient to climate change. Relevant in this situation was that our area is climatically situated just at the borderline between Atlantic and continental climate. Especially on the sun-spoilt slopes of the Rhine valley for centuries we have had thermophile plants and trees, such as the sessile oak, hornbeam, service tree or edible chestnut, so when replanting this fir part of the forest we included these species loving aridity and heat. For these planting actions of course we needed many hands-in-the field and found remarkable support with big business enterprises, such as Telekom, German Post, DHL, who – with their idea of team-building - sent us dozens of employees for this collaborative task. Nevertheless, on a broader national level, a framework for adapting the management of forest resources to climatic conditions has just started to be installed together with forest authorities. As European forest landscapes vary strongly with respect to bioclimatic conditions, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for problems. In any case, the future changes in climate and their impacts on forest ecosystems will remain more than difficult to project because there are no historical parallels to learn from, and because, e.g. they depend on future emissions of greenhouse gases

AH: - 3.2 In the present situation of fir tree death (even beeches suffered heavily) we have succeeded in getting a regional global market leader actively involved in ecological measures (4 million € at the moment).

AI: In the long run, the network can safely draw conclusions about the effects of climate change. However, this would require a long-term survey of the ecosystems. In our case, there is an increased failure of beech trees in the dry slope areas, but we have no actual and reliable evidence to verify climate change.

AJ: The network of protected sites will provide a range of evidence of the impacts of climate change and approaches to mitigation. Coastal protected areas such as Minsmere will be ‘early adapters’, as the impacts of climate change are already compounding coastal processes, as highlighted in Recommendation 2 of the reserve’s recent Diploma renewal.

AK: Yes, this is possible. This mainly concerns the relationship between the EDPA designated area and the relationship with the environment. Differences in, for example, water levels between nature and other functions should be more integrated to ensure that EDPA is preserved in the future and also contribute to climate challenges.

AL: For the Tsentralno–Chernozemny Biosphere Reserve, the effects of climate change have had a definite effect on the composition and dynamics of flora and fauna. Therefore, the EDPA network can provide information on current changes needed to respond and adapt to these consequences.

AM: Climate change is currently one of the main environmental challenges so taking into account the role of protected areas in the sustainable use of natural resources and adaptation to the effects of climate change, the EDPA network can offer a lot of ways to cope with the challenges.

AN: Definitely. With regard to the Teide National Park, several years have been carrying out various works of evaluation and monitoring of climate change and its effects on its natural resources, mainly in its flora, highlighting in this sense the phenological study initiated in 2014. The availability of a wide network of weather stations has long been a great help.

AO: We don’t have any evidence about adaptation of ecosystems in our protected area yet. We suppose that the climate change will reveal significantly in next years or decades. We have only some records about several species which are spreading more to the north what is caused by global warming. One example: the northern boundary of the European Mantis (*Mantis religiosa*) distribution area was approximately 100 km far on the south from our area. It is rather common species in the Poloniny NP now. Protected areas with natural ecosystems without human intervention are the best models for studying of processes caused by climate changes. So therefore, this protected area should be used for this purpose primarily.

AP: So far, adaptation to climate change has not been thoroughly investigated in our protected area. Climate research started in 2019 at the initiative of the Resolution CM/ResDip (2018) 12. However, we have the results of a long-term (almost 40 years) research into the tree species composition of the core zone of the reserve. (The fir-beech forest is dominant habitat in Dobročský prales NNR.) These revealed a change in the proportion of main tree species. The proportion of main tree species was almost balanced (European beech – 34 %, Silver fir – 39 %, Norway spruce – 25 %) in 1978. Measurements in following decades pointed to significant decrease of silver fir proportion, less spruce. In 2015 beech accounted for 65 %, fir 20 %, spruce 13 %. These results cannot be generalized as an adaptation to climate change. There may be more factors affecting species composition. In the case of silver fir browsing is the important factor affecting reduction. However, an upward trend in the spruce reduction by bark beetles indicates a link with climate change. Long-term research will be needed to assess the adaptation of the reservation ecosystem to the impact of climate change. Undoubtedly, the EDPA network represents unique localities for obtaining relevant information on this issue.

AQ: Climate change adaptation strategies have yet to be tested to a large extent. The first step must be a synergy of the monitoring actions at the EDPA level, therefore a common verification of the effects of the mitigation applied. A first step should be a comparison between the different EDPAs to verify which mitigation strategies have so far been applied or designed.

AR: Preserving the natural heritage of Georgia and among them the unique biodiversity of Vashlovani Protected Area has the utmost importance for the country on national level. Hence, constant monitoring is conducted to control the existing nature conservation status of the area and stabilize the negative effects of climate change. In cooperation with donor organizations the Agency upon its capacities is implementing different activities to reduce the climate change impacts and help adapt to this process by various effective measures. For instance, in the frames of the financial cooperation with EU and UNDP, the Agency of Protected Areas has completed the Project “Sustainable management of pastures in Georgia to demonstrate climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits and dividends for local communities” within which 4,064

ha of degraded pastures were rehabilitated, about 300 ha of migratory route was introduced, as well as sustainable pasture management practices among farmers and sheep-breeders in the Vashlovani Protected Areas were implemented. Elaboration of the pasture management plan was crucially important for Vashlovani Protected to mitigate and adapt to climate change by introducing innovative practices of pasture management, which in turn improves the lives of the local residents and protects structure of the ground vegetation for over grazing as far as the Climate Change and unreasonable human actions still represent one of the biggest challenges. Modern practices of pasture management can offer Vashlovani a way out. This can include rotational grazing and weather monitoring to allow sheep owners to effectively use natural resources. Besides, the issues of climate change will be included in the new management plan of Vashlovani Protected Areas which will define the ways and methodologies for mitigating and protecting the unique natural treasure of Vashlovani Protected Areas from the negative impacts of Climate Change Process. The new management plan will be elaborated in 2020 and will be valid for the next ten years.

AS: The diversity of habitats and biodiversity provides the stability of the ecosystem we live in, that is why the nature conservation is very important to survive environmental changes we have to live with. The transnational researching works could help understanding the changes surrounding us. For example, On Szénás Hills, there are many endemic and relic species, which react to small changes suddenly. Also, for example the population of *Linum dolomiticum* is decreasing since 2010; the decrease is presumably caused by microclimatic factors. The researching is the clue to understanding the nature's reactions to local and global changes.

AS: In Hungary we have main problems with invasive alien species. The monitoring activity is a main task of nature conservation. Hungarian habitats need special treatments if we want to save the unique Pannonian landscape. Unfortunately, the financial and human resources are not endless. The EDPA main goal based on conserving biodiversity could help lobbying for resources.

AT: We are still missing any complex scientific research on climate change in our protected area. In recent years, we are experiencing long periods of draughts and really mild winters. It has most probably some impact on species living in Podyji National Park. Unfortunately, we still do not have more detail study. Nevertheless, there is long time data collection history on the development of the land use as well as on climate parameters in many protected areas. Comparing them can give us important results. Particularly in our protected area for example can be studied impact of increasing proportion of trees and shrubs in agricultural landscape on water regime / draught mitigation. We are interested in doing such a research.

AU: In many protected areas in the EDPA network scientific studies take place and deliver additional data on developments, trends, causes, etc. The Nationalpark Thayatal is currently working on a scientific study, which shows the drought resistance of the native oak trees in the protected area. It is believed, that the genetic material of the native oak trees is more resistant to drought than the ones used in the economic forestry in the region. While most trees in the region suffered due to little precipitation in the last years, the Thayatal oak trees show very few signs of stress, seemingly being able to withstand more than genetically different oak trees in the region. If the study can prove those observations, the Nationalpark can become a source of genetically intact, native and resilient species which can be provided to the entire region in order to adopt and counteract rapidly progressing climate change.

AV: EDPA could provide a platform for prospective managers and managers alike to share and engage in nature conservation programs, which incorporate a climate change mitigation and adaptation approach. Knowledge and experience sharing and orientation.

AW: EDPAs are important areas for studying the climate change and monitoring its effects. Their role in finding suitable methods and methods to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change can also be an important one.

AX: Oui, tout spécialement pour les Parcs situés à proximité des villes et côtiers comme le nôtre (risque d'inondation, érosion, vague de chaleur des villes).

Des échanges techniques (de bonnes pratiques) entre zones protégées similaires sont souhaitables sur cet objectif prioritaire. [Yes, especially for Parks located near cities and coastal areas like ours (risk of flooding, erosion, heat wave of cities). Technical exchanges (of good practices) between similar protected areas are desirable on this priority objective.]

AY: Although there aren't any investigated results which depends long term researches, short term monitoring results in our site show that there is seasonal change in immigration movements. But still we need long term monitoring data to link it with climate change. However, we think that each EDPA is important for adaptation to the effects of climate change as a means of maintaining essential ecosystem services which can increase resistance, resilience and reduce the vulnerability of livelihoods against climate change. EDPA network also has a potential for synergies and co-benefits between biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation, including nature-based/ecosystem-based approaches.

AZ: Especially for the Wurzacher Ried as a moorland area, an adjustment of the objectives and requirements for the preservation of the nature conservation quality is necessary and already established. Thus, measures to reduce the effects of climate change are increasingly being taken here (e.g. work against increased succession as a result of climatic changes) and new measures are being designed with the aim of safeguarding the natural water balance of the area. In addition, environmental education in the area is increasingly focusing on the role of peatlands in climate protection.

BA: Climate change is leading to population changes and the seasonally changing occurrence of various species in need of protection, also within the EDPA network. The water level dynamics of Lake Constance as one of the defining factors for the EDPA "Wollmatinger Ried-Untersee-Gnadensee" depends on snowfall and snowmelt in the Alpine region. Thus, climate change influences the quality of the shallow water, silt and reedbed zones as breeding, resting and wintering areas. Climate change favours the spread of neophytes into the litter meadows of the NSG "Wollmatinger Ried-Untersee-Gnadensee". However, the water level dynamics can hardly be influenced by local actors, if at all by changes in the damming of the Alpine water reservoirs.

BB: National parks, due to their small area, have only local significance in regulating or mitigating climate change (e.g. as natural water reservoirs). They can also be used as research objects to observe the spontaneous response of ecosystems to climate change.

BC: Every single area can share their experiences with the network so you can learn from each other.

Question 4: How could the EDPA better support you in meeting the needs of protected areas given the current environmental challenges?

AA: Distributing solutions and suggesting common protocols for sustainability, working out new ways of consultations instead of mass meetings with huge environmental impact on the host site, yet not to lose the face to face communication among close EDPA sites.

AB: The European Diploma is for me one of important tools – internationally adopted standards that must be used as much as possible for protecting our precious nature site. From my previous experience it is extremely important that independent experts formulate their reports and recommendations fairly taking into consideration as much as possible given conditions and specific of the site (national scale). The European Diploma should be a positive motivation, not a burden.

AC: EDPA can provide support by engaging public opinion and world science in protected area issues. It would also be of great support to further strengthen the international status of protected areas.

AD: Maybe it will be useful if the Bern Convention or/and European Council could implement a training programme (workshops, seminars), yearly, in one of the European Diploma holding areas, by rotation. All the EDPA sites should present their progress (annual reports), their challenges and to find solutions to certain threats.

AE: For the reasons explained above, the EDPA is not a driving influence in setting our priorities for tackling the challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change. I have reviewed some recent annual reports and query the need and value to you of the level of detail we are providing. Clarification of the level of information required, if different from that being supplied, would ensure effective use of our available resources.

AF: In addition to climate change, the pressure of use by visitors is one of the major challenges for the European Diploma holding areas in Bavaria. Corresponding conditions in the resolutions for the European Diploma holding areas can support the implementation of countermeasures.

AG: EDPA should assist in encouraging governments and institutions to pay more attention to the EDPA network and to implement concrete actions to network the areas through different actions, such as meetings and social tools for sharing and comparison.

AH: While it is becoming increasingly evident that environmental problems such as climate change and global warming are existential threats to human societies, these problems will very likely persist and even intensify unless governments enact effective and potentially costly environmental policies. However, government policies and spending ultimately rely on public support. This underscores the need to increase man's present knowledge about the processes threatening our life. In the long run, however, governments and business can only be effective if they work together with local people, local organizations (NGOs) to preserve the environment and to respect environmental and social standards. In our wilderness area of meanwhile 700 ha (existing in a treaty with the NRW government since 2010) we have realized a strong desire of visitors to enjoy and experience wilderness (difference between wilderness forest and economic forest/ biodiversity) and also a growing acceptance of some access limitations. That is why we feel encouraged to develop public awareness of the special qualities of this area by creating special "wilderness hikes".

AI: We would welcome to see, that the special nature of the EDPA areas, the current challenges and related problems that need to be tackled, were made even better known to governments and the general public.

AJ: Through improved marketing of the network to enable individual sites to market themselves more effectively. Through opportunities to network to discuss and develop best practice.

AK: It would help if the EDPA "entitles" to additional resources or gives priority when considering, for example, grant applications.

AL: EDPA should establish close relationships with the territorial administrations of the regions of the European Diploma holding areas.

AM: It would be necessary that the EDPA implements large-scale environmental and awareness raising programs that include protected areas. When attaching the recommendations and conditions to the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected areas of Khosrov Forest State Reserve it will also support offering appropriate ways to implement them, based on the best practices in the management and conservation of protected areas.

AN: In the first place, making an effort of dissemination and information that serves to know more and better this distinction that very few and unique places in Europe have. Likewise, strengthen lines of communication not only with the direct managers of the EDPA but also with the Administrations responsible for their management, in order to facilitate help in decision making. Even when establishing the recommendations and / or conditions when the European Diploma is given or renewed to a place, reflect, if necessary, those that may not be the direct competence of the manager, in order to involve the other administrations that although not directly can make decisions that could affect the site.

AO: Every EDPA can have own specific needs. Similar document like the Pisa Declaration cannot fulfil all needs or requirements for every EDPA. So I think that the practice of expert reports and CoE resolutions adopted for individual EDPA where the specific needs are taken into account is suitable.

AP: The network of EDPA is very varied. Gathering and sharing experiences from biogeographically and ecologically similar areas would help to address problematic issues. We would also appreciate, for example, information campaigns, or the EDPA network website with updates from individual territories, as well as research results.

AQ: The EDPA could support each national park with the following actions: 1) Identification of areas with similar environmental and climatic characteristics and challenges; 2) to encourage the creation of networks of protected areas with environmental and climatic similarities, identifying one or two head-park that should act as coordinators of the common monitoring actions; 3) Stimulate the activation of common and shared actions; 4) Plan moments of communication and return of data collected jointly; 5) Motivate National states to encourage financial support for environmental monitoring actions.

AR: EDPA is an important tool for attaining the major management efficiency objectives for Vashlovani Protected Areas since gaining the status for five years. Since 2015, after awarding with the European diploma, the agency of protected areas together with the administration of Vashlovani Protected Areas and

other stakeholders has managed to implement various activities of vital importance for the park that has been stipulated within the conditions and recommendations of the Council of Europe. It's noteworthy that the majority of the conditions that were elaborated by the council of Europe are addressed and the gaps filled, which was also evaluated by the IUCN expert during the field visits within the frames of European Diploma appraisal mission in 2019. Taking into account the successful experience and productive cooperation within the frames of EDPA, we are highly motivated to attain the European Diploma Award to be renewed for the successive 10 year period. In case the positive decision will be taken by the Council of Europe, Vashlovani Protected Areas will have the opportunity to be integrated in the big European family of protected areas again, which is already an important asset for the park authority to pursue and share best European experience and practices in terms of proper management performance, effective monitoring and patrolling systems, effective measures for managing illegal activities and law violations which is crucially important for the further strengthening and developing of Vashlovani Protected Areas.

AS: With special tenders, with financial support for local and transnational monitoring, researching works and environmental education, too. Environmental education is one of the most important activity to shape attitude of people and helping to reach the main goals of nature- and environment conservation. Regular site visits would be very helpful to raise the importance of the area for the stakeholders.

AT: It could be important voice, in case our local authorities and government would not recognize our problems and needs in future.

AU: Since many protected areas are facing the similar environmental challenges, the EDPA could provide information or provide the platform for good- but also bad-practices of other protected areas. There are multiple approaches to one and the same challenge, and protected areas are trying different measures to counteract those developments. Some of them achieve good results, some prove not to be working or just not being efficient enough. It would be great if this knowledge could be shared with all the EDPA Members.

Additionally, the EDPA should represent the diverse needs of protected areas on the European scale, which go beyond measures on climate change but consider also biodiversity protection, habitat networks, etc. The EDPA could aid by highlighting and representing those factors and needs in the climate change agenda of the European Union.

AV: Again we consider crucial strengthen human, technical and financial capacities in European Diploma areas, by for example promoting the exchange of information by forums for debate and discussion; staff exchange; establish cooperation protocols; for a continuous improve of our action in the field given the current environmental challenges .

AW: The most effective help in this respect would be to build links and exchange experience between EDPAs.

AX: Le Diplôme devrait renforcer l'autorité du Parc, notamment s'il propose des actions et de projets qui réellement améliorent la qualité de la vie. Ceci peut être mieux fait en réseau avec d'autres zones protégées similaires. [*The Diploma should strengthen the authority of the Park, especially if it proposes actions and projects that really improve the quality of life. This can best be done by networking with other similar protected areas.*]

AY: EDPA better supports us in meeting our needs by developing a knowledge/experience exchange platform for EDPAs and ensuring formal and vocational education programmes for practitioners and managers focus on current environmental challenges and risk mitigation strategies.

AZ: -

BA: The basis of all nature conservation is the knowledge of the specific composition of species and communities. This is becoming more and more out of the public perception. In order to counteract this, more attention should again be paid, for example in the annual reports, to the development of both site-specific target species and species of international importance.

BB: I have no opinion on this matter.

BC: We have a quite good protection for the EDPA in Sweden but it is important with the every 10 year of evaluation about the management.

Question 5: Thinking of the assets of the EDPA, how is the award perceived by (1) you and your team and (2) by the public visiting your area?

AA: We are very proud of the EDPA award (having signs and a big flag for the visibility) – still excited about the decision to be made after the last year's on the field revalidation – we emphasise it to the public and when lobbying, applying for funds. As for the visibility, my personal opinion is, that the previous logo, the stylized oak tree surrounded by the stars in front of the EU blue background translated much better than the recent one, that we are part of Europe, it could even substitute the official EU logo, consider this if the EDPA would like to gain more funds.

AC: The status of the Council of Europe Diploma nominee is positively perceived by both visitors to our protected area and our team.

AD: (1) The award of the European Diploma motivates us in addition to intensify our efforts for conservation and protection. The renewal of EDPA demonstrate that our efforts are working. (2) The number of visitors increased in the last years, that means the area is highly appreciated and the visitors believe that the award of EDPA made it more attractive.

AE: We take seriously the recommendations for Beinn Eighe NNR/EDPA and these typically align closely with our own aspirations as expressed in our management plan. Consequently, we regard the award of EDPA as an accolade rather than as an active influence on our reserve management. I am aware that the EDPA designation may be perceived differently elsewhere – for example at Scotland's other EDPA at Fair Isle National Scenic Area it was used to support the case for establishing an encircling marine protected area. The public are generally unaware of the EDPA – and of the other protected areas designations at Beinn Eighe including the Biosphere Reserve, Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area, Special Area of Conservation and National Scenic Area. Our recent, related promotional work has focused around promoting Beinn Eighe as a National Nature Reserve and a place for people to connect with nature – reflecting the public perspective.

AF: The EDPA award is an important quality feature and unique selling proposition. The EDPA award is judged very positively by the state administrations and the public.

AG: I think that the "European Diploma" label is important for our Protected Area in relation to its management model. We are committed to highlighting the value of the European Diploma but an even greater commitment is needed on my part and on the part of all of our staff. It would be important to enhance the value of the Diploma at a European and national level in order to make its value felt. See the indications in the previous points.

AH: Reputation is the opinion that people have about something because of what happened in the past, or more precise the estimation of the quality of in this case a) of the European Diploma, b) the Siebengebirge area or c) the organization the award was handed over to. The Siebengebirge area close to the conurbation Cologne-Leverkusen-Bonn with more than three million visitors per year has probably to be counted among the most frequented natural landscapes in Germany and is highly estimated because of its natural and cultural characteristics. In several places' visitors find hints/bronze plaques e.g. with the corresponding information = protected area of European importance, yet few visitors ask for closer details. These details they find on the homepage and in descriptions of the area. Well known far above the region is the Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge VVS, founded in 1870, for having rescued the area from destruction by quarries, for being the owner of the central area and for having maintained it for 150 years. Members and experts appreciate this international award and strive to communicate its relevance to visitors, yet I doubt them being successful to a larger extent.

AI: The EDPA Weltenburger Enge is perceived positively and recognized as a special award with regard to nature conservation issues. This is the case for both groups that you referred to.

AJ: Our team are proud that the site holds the Diploma and recognises the rigour applied to the renewal process. The public visiting the area are largely unaware of the EDPA, the network and Minsmere's status as a diploma holder. We would like to make more of this status.

AK: the team is proud of the European diploma because it says a lot about the quality of the area. Not much is known to the public about the value of the diploma. EDPA is almost always used in media communications, but the great importance and value may be made known to a much wider audience.

AL: Perceived by us and our team, by the public visiting our area as confirmation of the importance of the territory.

AM: The European Diploma of Protected Areas was awarded to Khosrov Forest State Reserve for its rich biological and landscape heritage and importance for the conservation of the environment. The award is an assessment of the protected areas long-term conservation, proper management plan and structure, although public perceptions of the diploma and its importance are mostly incomplete.

AN: For us, the staff of the Teide National Park, it is a pride that fills us with satisfaction to know that it has had the European Diploma since 1989 and that after the corresponding evaluations such concession has been renewed. This encourages us to continue working hard and with total dedication. However, I have to express my doubts about whether this European distinction, in general, and what Teide has in particular, is sufficiently known and valued by visitors to the national park.

AO: Me and my colleagues – we perceive positively that our National Park was awarded by the European Diploma. Although it is also a big obligation. Regarding to local inhabitants or stakeholders their attitude is various. Some people are proud. But for some of them they see the National Park as rather big obstacle and they reject everything what is connected to nature conservation including the European Diploma award. We have not noticed any increased interest from public visitors which we could to assign specially to the European Diploma. This award is not so known like World Heritage Site for example.

AP: For me and our team the European Diploma is significant award not only for the region, but for the whole of Slovakia, it facilitates cooperation with local stakeholders and justifies non-intervention regime in public reservation, points out the uniqueness and natural values of the territory, increases the interest of researchers from all fields of research, increases the responsibility of the territory administrator to implement measures in the protection zone. Generally, the European Diploma for the Dobročský prales is perceived very positively by the public. However, the need for environmental education is still relevant at all levels as well as propagation and awareness increasing.

AQ: The EDPA award is considered important especially by the local administrators of the protected area, who can boast this award in recognition of their political coordination work. As a rule, the Park staff does not work to obtain recognition. In most cases, the park's mission is the main motivation. For sure the EDPA award induces visitors to feel that the integrity and wilderness of the protected area are so high that Europe has recognized it by this award.

AR: Granting the status of European Diploma for Vashlovani Protected Areas in 2015 had a very positive consideration and expectation from the side of the Agency of Protected Areas and the state party of Georgia overall. Since that time, the Agency has a very successful and productive cooperation with the representatives of Council of Europe to fully address and satisfy the best international standards of the EDPA for ensuring the effective and sustainable management of Vashlovani Protected Areas. For us, as the team of professionals involved in the management and protection of unique biodiversity of Georgia, it became vivid, that the award of European Diploma for Vashlovani has contributed to the increased level of recognition on Georgian as well as on international level, as far as the unique natural treasure of Vashlovani is appreciated by both Georgian and foreign nature lovers which is very well reflected in the increased visitation of the area. The administration staff of Vashlovani Protected Areas is highly motivated to ensure the efficient management performance and monitoring of species to fully meet the conditions and criteria of European Diploma holding area. On the other hand, perception of protected areas from the perspective of the local communities has dramatically changed for the better since granting the status. If they were indifferent and less careful towards the unique natural treasure in the previous years, today we can boldly note that they are more aware of the importance of VPA and have become more supportive towards the protected areas then in the previous years. The number of illegal activities (poaching, illegal grazing, timber cutting etc.) has significantly reduced due to the increased environmental awareness and moreover, people living adjacent to protected areas have become actively involved in various environmental projects and cleaning campaigns managed by the administration of Vashlovani protected areas to improve the nature conservation status of the National Park and better protection of its unique biodiversity.

AS: (1) European Diploma helps the long-term protection of the area. It strenghtens the area's social awerness, too. The new exhibition and visitor centre will contain informations about EPDA. The award raises awareness of the area's importance. (2) Every co-operating partner considers its own responsibility to

retain the award. The local stakeholders take the special rules seriously. (1,2) It is considered a high standard award. The European Diploma is our common pride on Szénás-Hills EDPA.

AT: The brand of EDPA is not strong enough to be recognized in general public or with local authorities. Even though, we provide information on EDPA to representatives of local municipalities and general public. On the other hand, as the Podyji National Park Administration, we are proud to have received it.

AU: The award is perceived by the team and myself as a great privilege and honour to be part of. Together with our neighbouring Nationalpark Podyjí we are proud holders of the European Diploma and value it highly. We are also communicating the European diploma to visitors (Homepage, Publications, Presentations, etc.), but visitors are mostly unaware of the meaning of the European Diploma, but impressed by this (int.) acknowledgement this Diploma means, once it is introduced to them. Generally, we feel a connection with other EDPAs.

AV: EDPA provides an invaluable stimulus for the protection and efficient management of Europe's natural and cultural heritage by its unique supervisory mechanism. The need to renew the European Diploma for Protected Areas, encourage a continuous effort to preserve biodiversity and improve environmental conditions in the areas covered, by the protected areas managers and local communities.

AW: The EDPA award plays a very important role, primarily in preserving and managing the natural values of our area. Experts visits and recommendations repeatedly draw the attention of decision-makers to the importance of preserving values. The impact of the diploma is lesser for the visitors, as Tihany is one of the most well-known tourist and ecotourism destinations in Hungary. However we do our best to promote the award.

AX: Le Service Préservation de l'Environnement du Parc est très conscient du prix du diplôme; la promotion de son importance auprès du public devrait être parmi les tâches principales soit du Service de Promotion du Parc soit du Service de Surveillance. Du matériel publicitaire (panneaux, dépliants) devrait être produit sur le diplôme dans la langue locale et au moins en anglais (visiteurs étrangers). [*The Park Environmental Protection Service is very aware of the price of the diploma; promoting its importance to the public should be among the main tasks of either the Park Promotion Service or the Monitoring Service. Advertising material (signs, leaflets) should be produced on the diploma in the local language and at least in English (foreign visitors)*].

AY: The European Diploma is adding prestige and power to our area. Both related institutions and local administrations are making their applications sensitively because of this diploma. They are working closely with the Park administration to support conservation activities and public awareness. This situation is supporting effective management of the area. The diploma is also adding additional interest and attention to the national park by the public visiting our area.

AZ: The European Diploma is perceived by us and the public as a real recognition of the outstanding quality of the area, as well as an indication of the special responsibility for its preservation. This also applies to the regional citizens, who see the European Diploma as a unique selling point and special feature and also use it as a tourist attraction.

BA: (1) For the NABU support team, the European Diploma is a central instrument for illustrating the high value of nature at the Lower Lake Constance of Lake Constance as well as for enforcing central concerns for the protection and conservation of the Wollmatinger Ried. The conditions and recommendations associated with the award of the diploma set clear priorities in the work for the area. The nature conservation administration also argues with the European Diploma in numerous lawsuits and in cases where the area is threatened and can thus lend emphasis to the conservation efforts.

BA: (2) For the public, too, the European Diploma is a sign of the uniqueness, diversity and importance of nature in and for our region. It increases awareness of the concerns of nature and thus facilitates the protection of the area and the implementation of measures to preserve and improve it.

BB: For our team, the diploma is a recognition of the natural values of our Park and support for our work. We use the award as a tool in grant/project applications. Public visitors perceive the Council of Europe diploma as an additional element of the Park's promotion.

BC: (1) An asset for the work of evaluating management. (2) Hopefully, visitors will be met by better and better management.

Question 6: What would you and your team wish to see included in the Vision for the network of EDPAs?

AA: The answers to the previous questions, like the emphasis on networking, contain this.

AB: Setting objectives to better promote the European diploma at the global/European scale but also nationally, within regions, too. Promotion within nature protection but mainly outside – tourism, planning, etc. And also other points of the Pisa declaration.

AC: We would like to see measures of financial support for protected areas. We would also like to see measures for legal support of protected areas.

AD: Sustainable management to reconcile the protection of natural values with the pressures of ever-increasing numbers of visitors. Maintain the balance. Human activities are compatible with the goals of protection and conservation of landscapes, ecosystems and species.

AE: A statement of intent or aspiration as regards the scale of the EDPA network, its size and impact. The conservation designation landscape is crowded with many designations aiming to fulfil the same overlapping aims and functions (including demonstrating sustainability and best practice). The current EDPA network, comprising 73 sites across 29 states, is small on both the national and European levels (cf >27,000 Natura sites, 344 Biogenetic reserves or 343 NNR in Great Britain), its profile is low - even amongst conservation professionals and, to those not directly involved with the sites, appears to serve (only) an accolade function.

AF: Securing and improving the quality of the European Diploma holding areas continue to be very important. The management of European Diploma holding areas should also serve as a model for the management of areas outside the European Diploma holding areas. The expansion of the EDPA network to include other high-quality protected areas of European importance and representativeness seems useful. The EDPA network is intended to promote more than before the cooperation between European countries in nature conservation and in other areas of society and support democracy.

AG: The general aims are fine, but we need to follow them up with concrete network actions as highlighted in the previous points.

AH: Comparing the striking difference of public support between nature parks (with mainly touristic orientation) and protected nature reserves (landscape preservation) the network's vision could be emphasizing landscape conservation taking precedence over landscape consumption, e.g. the sprawling of cities.

AI: The cooperation between the European states should be expanded and strengthened in nature conservation matters.

AJ: Emphasis on delivery, particularly as responded to at Q4 above.

AK: The EDPA should be given a more formal status. See answer 4. The network of EDPA areas should also be better utilized and more use should be made of the knowledge available in the network.

AL: Broad alert of best practices for European Diploma holding areas.

AM: Considering the anthropogenic and natural disasters that are a threat to protected areas and the main causes of biodiversity loss, it would be necessary to include common disaster prevention mechanisms along with socio-economic and educational activities in the Vision for the network of EDPAs.

AN: Have more support from all the administrations and institutions involved as well as useful tools that put a brake on or at least diminish the greatest threats that the national park has and I would say that, in general and most likely, the EDPA as a whole: climate change, the presence of invasive species as well as the appearance of new and strong anthropic pressure (excess visit and overcoming the carrying capacity in certain places and times of the day, which in addition to putting natural and cultural resources at risk affects the quality of the visit). And to put this recognition even more in value, in such a way that it is truly known by the visitors of the EDPA and the society as a whole.

AO: In relation to text written under previous Question 5 it would be good to put higher attention to better promotion of the European Diploma at European or global scale.

AP: In addition to the needs defined in the Pisa declaration, we would appreciate the above-mentioned information campaigns, sharing experiences and scientific knowledge in the Vision for the Network of EDPAs.

AQ: The dream of a park manager is to be able to measure the real effects of protection and the anthropogenic and climatic impacts. To do this it is necessary that these indicators are recognized as the priority ones to measure the "quality" of a protected area, especially of a national park. These indicators should not be the number of visitors, the number of contacts on the web or on social networks, but rather the fluctuations in alpha and beta-biodiversity, the degree of integrity of the habitats and the ability to measure their fluctuations, as well as the ability to measure the dynamics of wildlife populations. In this respect, the network of EDPAs could have an influence in the future. By encouraging the application of valid ecological indicators and by parametrising the value of awards to the ability to measure changes and to propose measurable and efficient mitigation.

AR: As one of the members of big European network of protected areas, we can boldly say that holding the European Diploma Status and being interconnected with so many protected area professionals is huge responsibility and great honour for us. Holding the status of EDPA is a wonderful opportunity for us to facilitate protection and conservation of our unique nature in accordance with the international standards and best European practices of protected area management, as well as European Diploma award is a great opportunity to make the unique nature of Vashlovani Protected Areas recognized and appreciated on international level. From this point of view, we would really wish to strengthen the communication with other representative protected areas holding the European Diploma Status. Having the opportunity to establish more close cooperation with other protected areas in Europe having the similar landscapes and ecosystems as Vashlovani protected areas. Accordingly, sharing direct experience and lessons learned with them in terms of best European practices of protected areas management performance would really be an invaluable asset for us and the further development and strengthening of the protected area network.

AS: Strengthen the connection and cooperation between the sites.

AT: We suggest considering the following principles / objectives:

- EDPAs ensure communication links with the surrounding landscape and can thus be a centre for improving of the function of natural cycles as well as for reducing landscape fragmentation
- EDPAs are the important sources of information and inspiration for landscape use and sustainable management also in the landscapes outside of the protected areas (for example for the adaptation to the climate change)
- the society perceives the exclusivity of EDPAs as a significant appreciation of the quality of the natural heritage management

AU: Even though it may sound contradictory, but on the one hand, for our National park it is important to actively manage unique areas in order to sustain them and therefore to keep the biodiversity at a high level, on the other hand, it is a necessity to reinforce wilderness. Therefore, it is important to have the acknowledgement that those active management measures are a necessity for a high level of biodiversity (at least in our region) but that protected areas should also cover the aspect of true wilderness which is so rare in Europe and embrace the idea of including areas which do not undergo any management at all, but are completely left in nature's hands.

AV: A functional, dynamic network with multidisciplinary information and coordinated action.

AW: Most important would be the strengthening of cooperation and the exchange of experience between EDPAs.

AX: Nous sommes convaincus que les Parcs devraient s'ouvrir à son extérieur, pour être à la fois un modèle et un moteur de développement « autre ». [*We are convinced that the Parks should open up to the outside world, to be both a model and an "other" development engine.*]

AY: From our site global warming is the main current environmental challenge for protected areas so strategic spatial planning for environmental-based adaptation and green infrastructure implementation should be included in the Vision for the network of EDPAs.

AZ: We would like to see improved cooperation with EU protected areas within the NATURA 2000 network.

BA: The EDPS network will work more closely and extensively with the NATURA 2000 network. The conservation of the species that characterise the respective area, the protection of the necessary ecological interactions and the maintenance of abiotic life-support systems should again be clearly in focus and take priority over other social and especially economic interests.

BB: Include the EDPAs network in the EU financing system.

BC: -