



EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION
LANDSCAPE AWARD OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

7th Session – 2020-2021

APPLICATION FORM

Presentation

The European Landscape Convention aims to promote the protection, management and planning of landscapes and to bring together European co-operation in this field. It is the first international treaty exclusively devoted to all dimensions of European landscape. Taking into account the landscape, natural and cultural values of the territory, it contributes to promoting the quality of life and well-being of Europeans.

The Resolution on the Rules governing the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 February 2008 at the 1018th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, draws attention to the fact that Article 11 of the Convention institutes the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe and that it is in keeping with the work carried out by the Council of Europe concerning human rights, democracy and sustainable development. It effectively promotes the territorial dimension of human rights and democracy by acknowledging the importance of measures taken to improve the landscape for people's living conditions.

Opened to the Parties to the Convention, the Award is intended to raise civil society's awareness of the value of landscapes, of their role and of changes to them. Its objective is to reward exemplary practical initiatives aimed at successful landscape quality objectives on the territories of the Parties to the Convention. The Award is conferred every two years and the files presenting applications must reach the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe.

At its meeting held in Strasbourg on 28-29 April 2008, the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDPATEP) decided that applications should be submitted to the Council of Europe Secretariat through the Permanent Representations of the Parties to the Convention.

*We would be very grateful if you could send no later than **30 January 2021** the following elements of the candidature file (20 pages maximum) established for your country on the basis of the proposals forwarded to you by the Ministries:*

- by E-mail, the Application form completed to: maguelonne.dejeant-pons@coe.int; susan.moller@coe.int;*
- by post, a copy of the Application form completed together with a CD-Rom, DVD or USB key, containing the all the additional material to: Maguelonne Déjeant-Pons, Executive Secretary of the European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Agora (A4-15V), F- 67075 STRASBOURG Cedex.*

*

*** * *

Please note that:

- participation to the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe is only open to local and regional authorities and their groupings and non-governmental organisations, as stated in the Resolution CM/Res (2008)3, Appendix, Article 2;*
- the application form must be completed in all its parts, in one of the two official languages of the Council of Europe (English or French);*
- the materials submitted must be copyright-free, for use by the Council of Europe in communications aimed at promoting the Award or any other publications or activities relating to the Convention. The Council of Europe undertakes to cite the authors' names;*
- files that are incomplete or fail to comply with the rules will not be taken into consideration.*

*For further information please visit the Landscape Award section of the Council of Europe website: www.coe.int/EuropeanLandscapeConvention
www.coe.int/en/web/landscape/landscape-award*

I. STATE CONCERNED AND APPLICANT

1. **State**

Bulgaria

Represented by

Ms Veradina Nacheva

Address:

Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW) 22, Maria Luiza Blvd. Sofia 1000 Republic of Bulgaria

Telephone:

+359 2 940 65 43

E-mail:

vnacheva@moew.government.bg
--

2. **Applicant**

Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation

*Name of the local,
regional authority(ies)
or NGO(s)*

Represented by

Ms Radostina Tzenova

Address:

Burgas 8000 53 Gurko Str., bl.1, floor 1
Bulgaria

Telephone:

+359 896 798908

E-mail:

saltoflife@biodiversity.bg
--

II. PRESENTATION OF THE PROJET

3. Name of the Project

The Salt of Life

4. Location of the Project

Atanasovsko Lake near the town of Burgas, Black sea coast, Bulgaria
Protected areas according national legislation: Managed reserve Atanasovsko lake, Protected site Burgas Salinas; Natura 2000 protected site Atanasovsko lake BG0000270 according to Habitats and Bird Directives

5. Summary of the Project (10-12 lines)

"The Salt of Life" project was implemented in SPA/ SCI Atanasovsko Lake zone (BG0000270), which is one of the pivotal biodiversity hot-spots in the Black Sea Biogeographical region. The Lake is part of the Burgas Wetland Complex, which is one of the three most significant wetland complexes for congregations of waterfowl along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast.

The beautiful and colourful Atanasovsko Lake, as we know it now, is by large a result of the symbiosis between Man and Nature - the significant modification for the purposes of salt production, made the site so rich and significant for the European nature. Nowadays, when the coast is severely affected by urbanization, the lagoon is of strategic importance for the conservation of the biological diversity along the Black Sea coastline.

Project actions addressed directly all confirmed threats to the Atanasovsko Lake lagoon that contribute to the long-term decline of the priority habitat Coastal lagoons (1150*), comprising 20.6% of the total Lake area and communicated the importance of the Atanasovsko Lake salt-works harbouring one of the key Natura 2000 sites, creating allusion with the importance of the salt hence the project motto: the Salt of Life.

6. Photo representing the Project - *name of the author of the photo Todor Bozhkov*



7. Website of the Project

<https://saltoflife.biodiversity.bg/>

III. CONTENT OF THE PROJECT

8. **Start of the Project** month year
The project must have been completed at least three years previously

9. **Partners**

10. **Financing bodies**

11. Central aims of the Project

The Salt of Life project is aiming to secure long-term preservation of the Atanasovsko Lake coastal lagoon. The specific project objectives are:

- To establish a functional, efficient and sustainable infrastructure for water management and control of the coastal lagoon in Atanasovsko lake. This aims at long-term improvements of habitat conditions and at adaptation to the effects of climate change including changing rainfall patterns and rises in sea-level.
- To reduce the impact of direct and indirect threats on Atanasovsko Lake lagoon and its priority bird species by securing sustainable habitat management including improvements to existing and creation of new breeding sites for priority bird species.
- To monitor and evaluate the effects of the proposed habitat restoration measures on the lagoon, other significant habitats, and Annex 1 bird species during the project and to feed this information into future site management plans.
- To improve the visitor experience at the site and to disseminate the project results to a wide European audience of site managers, ecologists and the general public.
- To enhance public understanding of the ecological, economic and social values of the coastal lagoons and raise support for the conservation of priority coastal habitats and bird species.

12. Outcome

The optimal maintenance of the favourable state of Atanasovsko Lake is accomplished through restoring and repairing the system of dykes and barriers and management of the water levels and salinity in the basins. This ensures the water circulation in the basins, which is vital for the adequate conditions of the lagoon.

“The Salt of Life” project aims to reduce the effects of floods and to improve the ecological processes in the Lake. To achieve this, we have cleaned 23 km of the Bypass channel that surrounds the Lake and prevents freshwater influx that changes the ecosystem. The channel is also the main "artery" of the lagoon, providing its connection to the sea. It collects the water of all rivers that flow into Atanasovsko Lake and thereby discharge them to the sea. We have repaired 20.5 km of demolished dykes and barriers that has provided more effective water management in Atanasovsko Lake and has led to improved condition of 1150* habitat type and enhanced efficiency of the salt production.

Five artificial islands built for nesting and resting of key bird species in Atanasovsko Lake – new safe areas, protected from floods and predators.

Thanks to the work on the project and the involvement of highly qualified experts, we now know the Lake better and understand the complex processes that take place in it.

Project actions impact has reached a wide range of people who were now informed about the wealth of the area and the benefits of protected territories and Natura 2000 protected zones. We have built understanding and respect for the processes taking place in the Lake, its biodiversity, as well as the Bulgarian sea salt and the fascination of the salt extraction process. What is more, we have built an emotional connection between the people and the Lake.

The project team opted for reversing the generally indifferent attitude of local and national public through series of information tools telling the Tale for the Lake, Salt, Birds and People. Our innovative travelling exhibition "symBiotic" was hosted in the 13 biggest Bulgarian cities. We created the annual Salt of Life Festival – an event with amazing ambience offering visitors the opportunity to experience the life of salt workers or jump into the unique opportunity – ride the Salt Train only possible during the fest. Our effort culminates in the establishing and promoting the Trail of the Salt. We can proudly report 400,000 people who explored the trail for the last 5 years.

IV. RESPECT OF THE CRITERIA OF THE ATTRIBUTION OF THE AWARD

13. Sustainable territorial development

Is the project part of a sustainable development policy?

Does it contribute to the enhancement of environmental, social, economic, cultural or aesthetic values of the landscape? How?

Has it successfully countered or posed a remedy to any pre-existing environmental damage or urban blight? How?

The project is a part of the sustainable development policy on EU, national and regional level. It contributes to the development and implementation of EU policy and legislation in the area of nature and biodiversity, in the Union Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, and the Birds and Habitats Directives. It contributes to the achievement of the all specific objectives of sub-programme Environment in priority area Nature, set out in Article 11 of the Life Regulation. The project was in accordance with the key documents of the local planning - the Municipal Master Plan, the Municipal Development Plan and the Integrated Urban Regeneration & Development Plan.

The project conservation activities are in line and actually implement some needed activities included in the Action Plan for Managed Reserve Atanasovsko lake adopted with Order of the Minister of Environment and Water No. РД-1378/17.11.2003.

The particular combination of the cultural and natural, material and spiritual values of Atanasovsko Lake make it a perfect educational setting in which one can learn about history, geography, economy and ecology. Since a century the salt is produced in extensive tradition mode that is instrumental to sustain its wealth. This symbiosis of Man and Lake stands central for the communication message of the project.

Within the project we worked actively to improve the quality of life of the citizens of Burgas by contributing to the inclusion of Atanasovsko Lake as the main element of the urban environment of the city. We have provided over 2 million € of direct investments to restore the lagoon and improve the tourist and visitor infrastructure of Atanasovsko Lake - the "green" connection of the city with the sea and the sea garden, offering opportunities for recreation, sports, environmentally friendly tourism and environmental education. The project has also contributed to the diversification of the tourist product of Burgas Municipality. Every year the number of people who benefit from the free SPA treatments with healing mud and lye from the Lake is growing. If in August 2013 they were 2 383 per day, they are now 4 727 in 2018. In total, over 400 000 visitors to the Salt Trail and the lye and mud pools receive non-financial benefits. The cultural values of the Lake are enhanced and utilized through the annual Salt Festival, birthday celebration events, exhibitions, Atanasovden celebration (celebration over the St. Atanasii name day), art plain-airs, film shooting, videos, photography, etc. The Atanasovsko Lake inspires many artists who present themselves through different spheres of art.

The project has investigated and analysed the possibilities for support of the traditional salt

production in the Atanasovsko Lake through agri-environmental schemes and other compensatory mechanisms. A major problem is the fact that the extraction of salt from sea water through solar evaporation is not an agricultural activity, but is categorized into the mining industry. This minimises the possibility for salt producers to have access to measures from the Rural Development Program, which is an obstacle to development and support of the industry not only in Bulgaria but also in many countries in Europe.

Thanks to the project we have supported environmental friendly business to create new products - chocolate with sea salt from the Lake, soap with lye, Fleur de sel, etc. All products associate the origin of the salt with the protected area. We created 23 new jobs (15 in Black Sea Salinas Ltd., 5 in BBF and 3 in BSPB). In addition to direct investment and job creation, places that provide goods and services around the lake (cafeterias, car parks, souvenir shops, salt and other lake products) generate financial revenue for local businesses from increased visitor stream.

The project successfully countered a remedy to the following pre-existing environmental damages like flooding of the lake and the surrounded areas, prevention of pollutions from illegal sewage water discharges, building of Oceanarium and Aqua park on the border of the Lake, etc.

14. Exemplary value

Can the project be considered of exemplary value? Why?

Which are the good practices that it implemented?

The Lake itself and surrounding territories are a protected Natura 2000 site, parts of it are also a Managed reserve and a Protected area, these having various conservation and sustainable use targets and restrictions. Still the landscape is full of life both birds and humans, all benefitting from its location and rich natural resources – lay, mud, salt, nevertheless picturesque views of the landscape and the proximity to beaches.

The project is one of the most complex and intricate attempts for habitat restoration in Europe and certainly the most advanced coastal wetland active management undertaken in Bulgaria and in the Black sea region. Therefore, the project has a great demonstration value in several main aspects. Firstly the project developed new experience and knowledge in direct wetland restoration, thus introducing model for tackling a complex and important conservation problem. It has provided a highly useful case study of large-scale restoration works in coastal areas, suffering the climate change effects.

Secondly, the project has supported environmental friendly economic activities, i.e. the traditional salt production, which contributes to the favourable conservation status of the habitats and provides sustainable income generation for the local community. This has been promoted as a good demonstration of the environmental, economic and social benefits produced by the lagoon ecosystem.

Following sound conservation logic, this project integrates a suite of complementing approaches and interventions proven to be effective elsewhere in the EU in order to ensure the long-term conservation of the Coastal lagoon ecosystem and its biodiversity. The project has applied an ecosystem-based management approach that considers the entire ecosystem of Atanasovsko Lake, including humans. Thus, the ecosystem is maintained in a

healthy, productive and resilient condition providing benefits for the citizens of Burgas and its tourists. These include:

- Direct conservation measures, which have improved the water management and 46% of the habitat *Coastal lagoons 1150*, whose hydrological and hydrochemical parameters has reached favourable values. An innovative technology for restoration of wooden barriers through the construction of small dykes has been introduced by Burgas Salinas Ltd. (the operator in the Salinas) due to the higher efficiency and smaller fragmentation effects on the habitat type 1150*. 2,500 m damaged wooden barrier have been repaired as small dykes; Restored 20,500 m of earth dykes, wooden barriers and small dykes are a key elements in maintaining the water regime of the habitat 1150* and ensure more than 10 ha favourable breeding territories for the target bird species; The predator protection system (pilot for Bulgaria) has been tested annually over an area of 2.5 ha (3,100 m dykes). It has secured the most valuable nesting grounds in Atanasovsko Lake. This activity has been very important for limiting the predator threat.
- For the first time since its construction, within the project the Bypass channel of Atanasovsko Lake has been thoroughly cleaned. This has ensured the protection of priority the habitat 1150* from future floodings and its adaptation to climate change as well as limit the inflow of polluted water from agriculture and settlements.
- The experience in building artificial habitats was evaluated and they were built in the most suitable for the conditions of Atanasovsko lake design and technology;
- Supporting traditional salt production as environmentally-friendly practice for using lagoon natural resources from the lagoon
- Enhancing visitors' experiences in a characteristic Natura 2000 site by developed interpretative systems and enhancing public support for biodiversity conservation through media work, the improvement of tourist interpretation, and establishment of a Atanasovsko Lake Public council.
- The innovative drone technology for monitoring has been tested for the first time in a Bulgarian protected area. It turned out to be appropriate and applicable approach especially at remote localities with difficult access. The drone technology will be even more useful for different future conservation objectives.

The project reinforced partnership with the private company Black Sea Salinas Ltd., operating in the Salinas, joint around shared benefits and common vision for the long-term for protection and sustainable use of the coastal lagoon site. This partnership was further extended involving other key stakeholders in a process of development of participatory management model of the Atanasovsko Lake Public Council.

The exemplary value of „The Salt of Life“ project has been acknowledged by the prestigious European Award Natura 2000 in 2018 where it was a finalist in the Communication category for demonstrating innovative, cost-effective, original ideas that are also replicable and sustainable. Thanks to the high public interest for the web site section “Inspired by the Lake”, the project was invited to “inspire” the guests of the official Awards ceremony in Brussels. The DUNE dancers have performed “Lake” dance on the background of an inspiring video dedicated to Atanasovsko Lake.

15. Public participation

Does the project actively encourage the public's participation in the decision-making process? How?

Is the project in line with the wider policies implemented by national, regional or local authorities?

The valuable protected area having various statutes gathered stakeholders to create together the Public Council of Atanasovsko Lake. This Council engages local authorities with various competences and responsibilities, related to: management of the protected areas, spatial planning and management, land owners and users, ensuring also scientific and public prospect. These are the Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water – Burgas, Regional Governor, Municipality of Burgas, Airport Burgas, Bulgarian Academy of Science, NGOs and others. The Council has met 12 times and has proved to be a successful platform to ensure participatory management of the lagoon and its broader surrounding landscape involving scientists, entrepreneurs, local NGOs, local and national government policymakers, farmers, protected areas managers, and community leaders in order to work locally, share experience and finding balanced solutions.

The greatest success of the project is that the Municipality of Burgas recognized the lake landscape as one of the region's greatest assets and began promoting it in its vision, including this in all regional strategic documents and communication materials.

16. Awareness-raising

Is the project effectively increasing public awareness of the importance of landscape in terms of human development, consolidation of European identity, or individual and collective well-being? How?

The project is targeted to different groups, with the ultimate objective to transform in a more positive way the public's attitude towards the lake itself and its surrounding landscape. In result of these efforts nowadays the Lake is one of the most popular natural sites in Bulgaria.

Through various unconventional and yet very informative actions, the project has played crucial role raising awareness about the protection of the lagoon landscape, the Natura 2000 requirements and therefore the benefits stemming out of this status especially concerning the biodiversity and salt production.

Through its "symBiotic" exhibition the project have not only reached 30000 people throughout the country, but also engaged them through interactive modules, and enhanced their knowledge using the learning-by-doing method. The exhibition travelled to 13 major cities in Bulgaria and attracted audiences of all ages and interests providing both educational experience and entertainment.

A Salt Trail was built equipped with attractive and highly informative sign-boards. The trail itself is an asphalt path covered with attractive drawings one cannot miss. Visited by 400,000 people surely their knowledge has been enhanced. The two walking trails represent the major attractions in the landscape here and a major success is the fact that

they are nowadays part of the official walking network of Burgas. Thanks to their growing popularity and special design to be easily maintained and replaced, this is a guarantee that the Municipality will be able to continue their maintenance in future.

Proactive work with students, inviting them in the field. In one year over 2,000 kids attended the project's education programme, becoming the young caretakers of the Lake – familiar with its conservation value. To extend our reach to the neighbouring territories we designed a special Wetlands Tour and visited 5 schools in the Natura 2000 site providing presentations and quiz games for more than 800 students.

Through traditional and social media the project has involved hundreds of thousands of people in the life-changing experiences provided by Atanasovsko Lake. 1,950 publications for 4 years in national and regional media and over 2000 supporters in Facebook.

A Public Discussion Platform is established during the project, involving all stakeholders. This turned to be a successful forum for sharing expectations, knowledge and experience. State-of-the-art communication models were tested and proved to be voluntarily perceived by other partners which proves their viability in future.

Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water - Burgas (RIEW) which is the statutory regional institution responsible for the planning and management of the protected site played a significant role in the major communication activities of the project. From the other hand, the successful projects results and positive reach out enhanced communication activities conducted by RIEW. In this way, RIEW demonstrated willingness and commitment to inherit some of the project communication activities like the “Birthday of the reserve” and the “Biodiversity carnival”.

Another unconventional approach is the annual event Salt Festival inspiring people from Burgas and the country to come to know the lake. It was a meeting point for artists and creative people sharing their vision of the symbiosis between nature and man, the importance to safeguard culture and traditions through art projects, performances and exhibitions. The Salt Festival allowed visitors to physically touch the Lake and get involved in the harvest of the “white gold”, to understand what the salt is used for, why lye and mud are so healthy through fun activities. Initially planned as a biennial event, due to a great interest and its special atmosphere, the Salt Festival started to be held each year in August.

The Lake is the only place which celebrates Birthday and Name Day (according the Bulgarian traditions) and invites its supporters twice a year.

The Birthday of the Managed reserve Atanasovsko Lake is on August 12. It is organised jointly with the RIEW – Burgas, celebrated with different events and a big cake.

Named over St. Atanassii and having the Bulgarian name Atanas, the lake's Name Day is on January 18. As a present tradition it is celebrated with a half-marathon named over the lake including run and cycling along the area. Winter is not an obstacle for the marathon having over 100 participants.

A unique ‘brand new’ approach is tested within the project – a dedicated culinary show, broadcasted on a national TV channel. The precious lake salt called “Fleur the Sel” is only produced in Bulgaria here in Atanasovsko lake. It is very specific for its rose colour, tender

flavour and sea scent. Presented in the first edition of the Food Hunters TV show by the famous Bulgarian master chef Andre Tokev, this reached a totally different public with culinary and tradition interest (<http://www.btv.bg/video/shows/lovci-na-hrana/videos/lovci-na-hrana-1-epizod-chast-1.html> [10])

100 bus stops in the town of Burgas branded with attractive photographs and short, easy for reception information about all three Natura 2000 sites around Burgas and their bird species, in partnership with the Bulgarian Society for the protection of Birds NGO. This innovative approach allowed to reach easily thousands of people while waiting for a bus. This approach received positive and impressive feedback.

Within the project 2015 was announced Year of Atanasovsko Lake lagoon, which give the opportunity to reach a high number of supporters all over the country promoting the lake landscape through variety of actions, materials and events.

A photo exhibition named “The Birds, the People and the Salt of Burgas” has been published on 9 large billboards at the main square of the centre of Burgas during the summer tourist season. Bearing in mind it is a tourist spot, an estimated 100 to 120 000 number of guests and residents of Burgas saw on a daily basis.

The video clips created within the project proved their viability and long-lasting interest thanks to internet and YouTube channel. Special clip with video taken from the drone “The colours of the lagoon” was produced. The animation “The water cycle of Atanasovsko lake” was presented to the Albanian Environmental Film Festival in 2016 reaching transnational audience. Later is was included in the selection of the Green Go Short films Contest. Translated also in English it has been seen by more than 20 000 people.

V. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Together with the printed version of the Application form, additional material in digital format should be included in one CD-Rom, DVD or USB key, and returned by post or courier to:

Maguelonne Déjeant-Pons

Executive Secretary of the European Landscape Convention

Head of Division, Agora (A4-15V), Council of Europe

F-67075 STRASBOURG, Cedex

Tel: +33 (0) 3 88 41 23 98

E-mail: maguelonne.dejeant-pons@coe.int

- Text (20 pages max.): *PDF format – A small Guide for the Lagoon; A short Presentation of the candidate – 2 pdf files*

- Photos (10 max.): *JPEG 350 dpi high definition (in folder)*

- Posters (2 max.): *PDF format high definition or JPEG 350 dpi high definition – Scientific poster for Atanasovsko Lake*

- Video (15 min max.): *mpeg 2 format - It is recommended to present a video (even of amateur quality). – 3 videos:*

The Salt of Life: A tale of Lake, Salt, Birds and People <https://youtu.be/iHfil80pnDw>

Atanasovsko Lake Water cycle <https://youtu.be/vLidCMMOapM>

The colors of the lagoon <https://youtu.be/cqYcpddaQ34>