



# PROTECTED AREAS IN-SIGHT

THE JOURNAL OF THE EUROPARC FEDERATION VOL. 12

## Our new future: How ready are we?



Chat

From EUROPARC to Everyone:

## Imprint

**Vol. 12 – 2020**

**Publisher:** EUROPARC Federation 2020, [www.europarc.org](http://www.europarc.org)

**Editorial team:** EUROPARC Directorate,  
communications@europarc.org  
Waffnergasse 6, 93047 Regensburg, Germany

**Graphic Design:** Václav Hraba

**Printing:** Printed in FSC certified paper by Contour Mediaservices, GmbH

**Co-funded by the European Commission**

The production of this publication has been supported financially in the framework of the European Commission's (Directorates-General Environment and Climate Action) LIFE funding programme of operating grants for European Environmental NGOs. The content of this publication does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the publication lies entirely with the authors.



Many thanks to all those who have contributed to this edition.

To: **Everyone** ▾

 Polls
  Chat
  Share Screen
  Record

Cover photo: Veitenstein © Naturpark Haßberge

**This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were forced to quickly adapt our work to the new situation. We moved practically all our activities and interactions with members and partners to the online world. The design of this edition tries to reflect that transition - from out in nature into zoom rooms.**

**Please note that many of the pictures in this edition were taken before Covid-19 regulations were in place.**

For more information: [www.europarc.org](http://www.europarc.org)

Ruhlauber forest  
© Nationalpark Kellerwald-Edersee



# Challenges and opportunities for Protected Areas in the new normal

**There are currently numerous challenges for Protected Areas in the 'new normal' and most of them do not relate to COVID-19. The new normal is conditioned by a world that is more complex than ever before.**

Until the early 2000s, the tasks of Protected Areas (PAs) were usually clearly defined with nature conservation and environmental protection, environmental education, a little leisure and tourism. But if you ask people today for statements concerning the current development (inside and outside of PAs) – the answers are quite different: trends, dilemmas, change, seeking, confused choice, alternatives – in short: We are living in a VUCA world.

VUCA is an acronym first used in 1987 and based on leadership theories and stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. We live in a world that's constantly changing, becoming more unstable each day, where changes are becoming more unpredictable – and they're getting more and more dramatic and happening faster and faster. As events unfold in completely unexpected ways, it's becoming often impossible to determine cause and effect. Problems and their effects are multi-layered, harder to understand. Decisions are reduced to a mesh of reaction and counter-reaction – and choosing the single correct path is almost impossible. The demands on modern organisations and management are more contradictory and paradoxical than ever. Making decisions requires courage, awareness, and a willingness to make mistakes.

What's needed today – if you work in any development area, as Protected Areas do – is to be a VUCA facilitator. Trying to change the meaning of VUCA to Vision, Understanding, Clarity and Agility. Huge tasks for often small PA's administrations and teams.

Society is subject to trends and megatrends in its actions. Policymakers take these and the new mega-drivers – climate change, globalisation 4.0, new pandemics and others on board and formulate complex and demanding policies and strategies such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the different Climate Treaties and the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

These all generate new facts and requirements that Protected Areas are confronted with. This article attempts to summarise the most important of these challenges in 10 theses:



Branching Out project Scotland  
© Lorne Gill/SNH

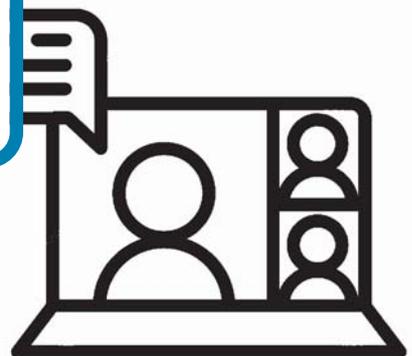


Barrier-free path to Virkkula bird tower in Liminganlahti  
© Sasa Dolinsek

**Thesis 1: The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 'Bringing nature back into our lives' is a very powerful document,** which foresees the "Transforming at least 30% of Europe's lands and seas into effectively managed protected areas". This, the EU Green Deal as well as the UN decade 2021-2030 on Ecosystem Restoration, show increasing political demand. The implementation of those strategies will present Protected Areas with enormous management challenges, including the need for new skills such as participation methods, to realise that implementation.

**Thesis 2: Economic Pressure on PAs is increasing:** Deforestation and the search for mineral resources in PAs indicates this pressure - from Romania to the Amazon and the USA. The protection status alone is not (everywhere) sufficient for effective long-term preservation of these areas. Protected Area managers must express international political solidarity and develop better strategies and tools to support each other beyond borders.

**Thesis 3: The societal expectation on solutions for climate change are increasing,** expressed for example in the EU Biodiversity Strategy: "Nature based solutions such as protecting biodiversity and restoring ecosystems are an excellent means of countering the effects of climate change and a very cost-effective use of resources." PAs need strategies that can adapt to climate change and compensate for climate change impacts elsewhere.



**Thesis 4:** The European Green Deal and Paris Agreement aim for the **EU to be climate-neutral by 2050** – that is an economy with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. Even PAs are contributing to climate change and need to rethink all their activities and infrastructure such as buildings, mobility, supplies and offers. Even if the impact is relatively small, PAs need to serve as role-models to the wider community.

**Thesis 5: The societal pressure after COVID-19 is increasing:**

More people search for 'undisturbed' areas for leisure and holidays. This search in combination with social media like Instagram will always create new hot-spots with tremendous speed. Traditional forms of visitor management are not sufficient anymore, new flexible instruments that react quickly to new developments are needed.

**Thesis 6: Unsustainable forms of tourism such as cruises and Alpine winter sports are also declining**

due to climate change and COVID-19. New trends such as health tourism are on the increase, going beyond the simple stay, towards concrete treatments in nature. Forest bathing for example, originally coming from Japan in the 1950s, is today an important new health product. PAs need to accept that they are important touristic stakeholders and fully implement sustainable tourism in their destinations.

**Thesis 7: We face an aging**

**society** with an increasing number of people with mobility restrictions or other special needs. At the other end of the age pyramid, bringing young people with migration background, closer to nature and ecosystems is also a major integration challenge. PAs need to find ways to fulfil the claim that "*national parks and other PAs are open to all and offer experience-oriented offers for different target groups*". At the moment it is hardly fulfilled.

**Thesis 8: COVID-19 has given the final push for digitalization both in classrooms and in leisure.**

Environmental education in PAs is rather conservative, many areas have not made the step from nature education to implementing principles of education for sustainable development. Many of the PAs have a focus only on children and schools. PAs are actors of education for sustainable development and need to integrate the trend to digitalisation into their educational offers.

**Thesis 10: Authenticity and 'regions' have become increasingly important**

in the mindset of larger parts of society, being considered 'healthy and authentic'. This new emphasis should be used to build consistent images of PAs as well as better implementation (and funding) of their objectives.

**Thesis 9: The EU 'Farm to Fork' Strategy aims for more sustainable agriculture,**

food industry and societal behaviour. PAs, having an integrated approach to land management, are both key actors in promoting this new European strategy, but could also be key beneficiaries of the respective EU Policies, programs and actions.

PAs should and can become real engines of sustainable regional development, which should be the desirable 'new normal'.