




BfN Bundesamt für Naturschutz

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Pathways to Professionalisation: Developing individual and organisational capacities for protected area management. Lessons from Eastern Europe





Pathways to Professionalisation:
Developing individual and organisational capacities for protected area management.

Lessons from Eastern Europe

This document summarises the key findings of the project **'Capacity Building Plans for Efficient Protected Area Management in Eastern Europe (2012-2015)'**, implemented by the ProPark Foundation for Protected Areas (Romania), with the financial support of BfN, the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (FKZ 3512 82 1800).

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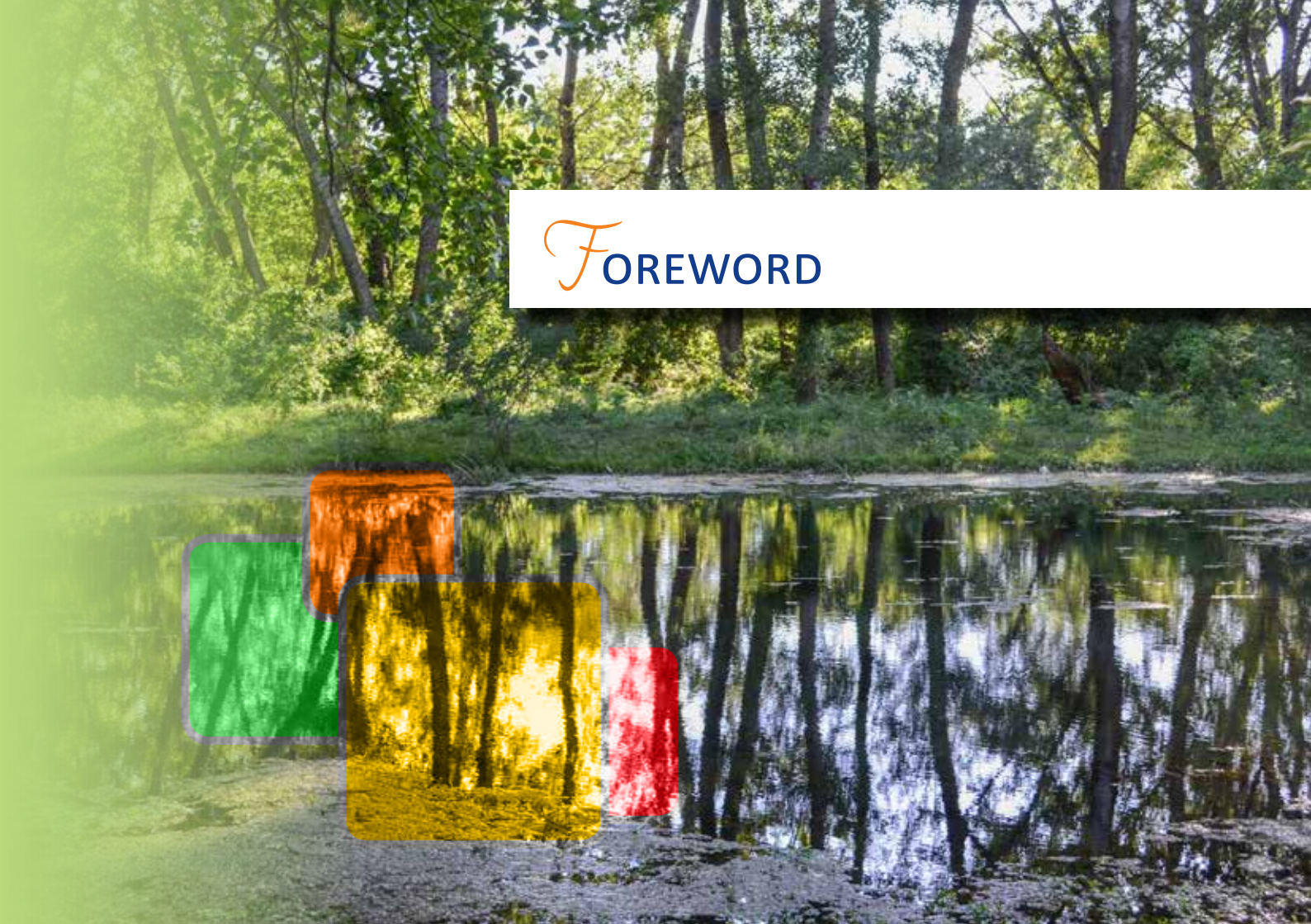
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CONTENT

Foreword 7
1. PROTECTED AREAS, CAPACITY AND PROFESSIONALISATION 10
1.1. Capacity development 11
1.2. Professionalising protected area management . . 13
1.3. Capacity development plans 15
1.4. The capacity challenge in Eastern Europe and the need for the project 15
2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION 18
Phase 1: Competence-based capacity needs assessment 19
Results, findings and recommendations 19
Applicability to other projects 21
Phase 2: National and regional plans for protected area capacity development 22
Information gathering 24
Planning workshops 24
The final plans 24
3. ESTABLISHING A PATHWAY TO PROFESSIONALISATION . 25
3.1. Developing the framework for professionalizing protected area management. 27
Establishing national systems for occupational standards and vocational qualifications 27
Updating human resource procedures 27
3.2. Capacity development programmes 27
Internal learning programmes 28
Internal formal training 28
Continuous on-the-job learning 28
Developing internal capacity for capacity development 28
External learning programmes 28
3.3. Monitoring and providing resources for professionalisation 29
Monitoring 29
Resources 29
4. SUCCESS FACTORS 30
Change readiness 31
The change process 31
Change implementation 32
REFERENCES 33

FOREWORD



Protected areas are becoming one of the biggest land use categories in the world. By 2020, global coverage should have reached the Aichi target 11 of 17% of the land surface and 10% of the seas. Protected area networks include a wide range of protection and use, from strict reserves with no human interference, to national parks that allow recreational, educational and spiritual use, to managed land- and seascapes that include settlements and resource uses such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Protecting and managing this network needs people, and today's protected area practitioners include not just government staff, but also other stewards and custodians such as foresters, farmers, fishers, indigenous peoples, local communities, private landowners, and staff of NGOs and businesses. These practitioners are expected to manage an increasingly complex range of protected area functions, including:

- Protecting species, habitats and ecosystems of national, regional or global importance;
- Maintaining ecosystem services, vital for local and national economies;
- Supporting local sustainable development and use of natural resources;
- Providing opportunities for tourism and recreation;
- Adopting entrepreneurial approaches to managing natural resources to generate income;
- Managing, complex organisations and working in partnership with other sectors;
- Embracing more open, inclusive and equitable forms of governance.



Out of this growth and diversification, a new 'protected area sector' is emerging, that is not yet widely recognised. Protected areas are often still considered as a marginal form of land use, and those who work in them frequently lack a strong, uniting professional identity. Working conditions are challenging and even dangerous, salaries are low, budgets inadequate (and often among the first to be cut) and political interest limited. Many protected areas remain as paper parks, well below their potential. Gill et al (2017) provide clear evidence that Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) with adequate staff capacity had ecological effects 2.9 times greater than MPAs with inadequate capacity.

If protected areas are to succeed, we need *inter alia* to raise the profile of their management as a formally recognised profession with certified standards, and to improve working conditions for all practitioners, who should be respected as professionals in the same way as health workers, teachers and engineers.

The processes described in this publication were designed to provide a foundation for professionalisation of protected area management across 23 countries in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Several countries in the region have now started on the path of professionalisation; it is hoped that this report will encourage them and inspire many others to follow in their footsteps.





1. PROTECTED AREAS, CAPACITY AND PROFESSIONALISATION

1.1. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Capacity development has been defined as 'the process of strengthening the abilities of individuals, organizations and societies for making effective use of resources to achieve their goals on a sustainable basis.' (GTZ, 2003). This definition recognises that capacity can be developed at three distinct, but related levels.

While formal training and learning are vital foundations for individual capacity, 70% of learning takes place through experience and social interactions with others (Lombardo and Eichinger, 1996). Competence-based approaches to individual capacity development are based around proven acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitude (Figure 1). Skills ensure the ability to perform a task reliably and consistently; knowledge provides a theoretical and technical understanding of the task; and having the right attitude and motivation helps ensure that individuals complete the task conscientiously and ethically. Effective individuals also require a set of 'soft' skills; personal attributes such as leadership and critical thinking, creativity and collaboration.



Figure 1. The elements of competence.



Organisational capacity

The effectiveness of individuals is, to a major extent, dependent on good organisational capacity. Without the elements shown in Figure 2, the effectiveness of competent individuals will be reduced.



Figure 2. The main elements of organisational capacity (McKinsey and Company, 2001).

Societal capacity

Societal capacity (the term 'enabling environment' is often used) includes all the rules, laws, policies, types of governance, power relations, values, social norms and public attitudes that govern civic engagement (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). This project was not designed to directly address societal capacity.

Linking organisational and individual capacities

Effective organisations need effective people to function well; they need to pay close attention to human resource management, not just in terms of systems and processes, but also in terms of building staff capacity and addressing morale, motivation and personal and career development. An organisation needs to provide a proper environment for skilled and motivated individuals to be effective.



1.2. PROFESSIONALISING PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

A profession is more than a job, it is a career for someone who wants to be a valued part of society, to become competent in their chosen sector, to maintain their skills through continuing professional development, to make a commitment to behave ethically and to protect the interests of the public (TotalProfessions.com, 2016).

Professions normally require their members to achieve and adhere to standards that define expected knowledge, competences and personal conduct. Standards are often linked to learning programmes and qualifications, which may be officially recognised by national authorities.

The need to professionalise protected area management is recognised in a recommendation from the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014: 'To promote and support recognition of protected area managers, stewards and custodians from all types of protected areas as 'professionals' through systems and tools for professionalisation that strengthen performance in protected area management through competent individuals and effective organisations'.

Priorities for the professionalization of protected area management include:

- Official recognition of protected area occupations;
- Adoption of recognised standards of competence and performance, integrated into recognised qualifications;
- Improved professional development and career paths;
- Adequate remuneration, working conditions and security.

Programme 1 of the 'Strategic Framework for Capacity Development in Protected Areas and other Conserved Territories' produced by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) in 2015 includes four main objectives for



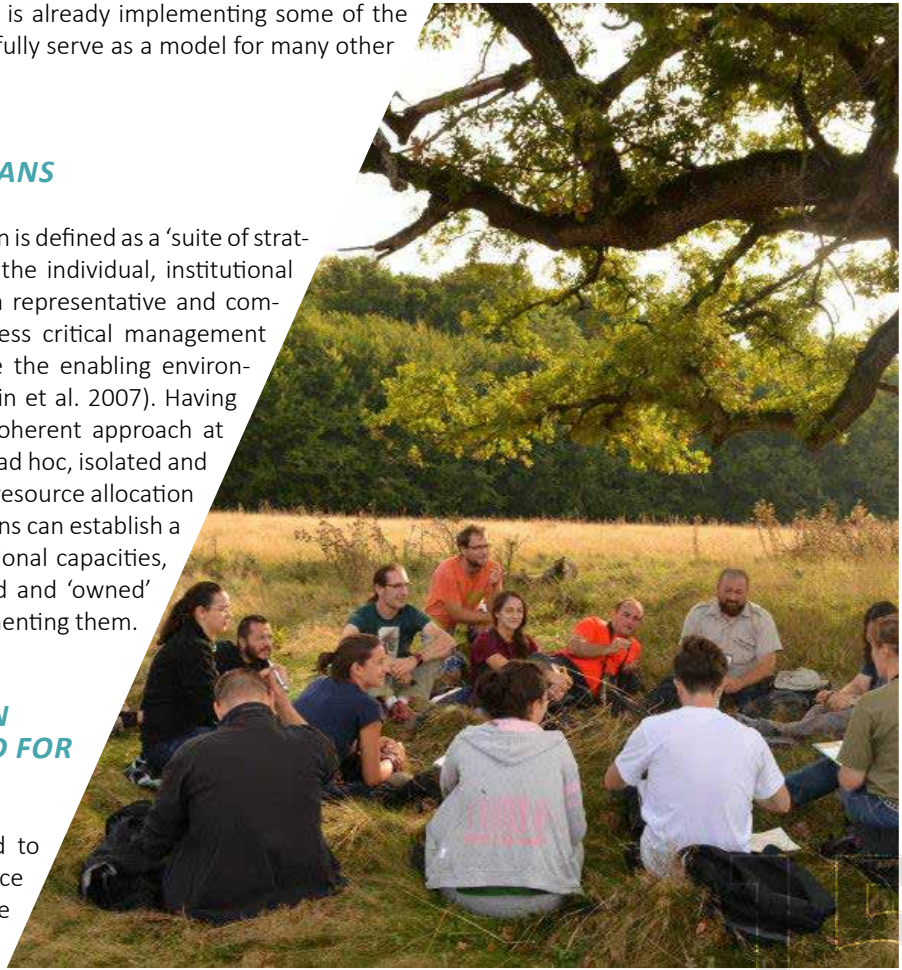
professionalisation (http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/sfcd_final_july_2015.pdf):

1. A set of global tools, guidance, and support materials is made available through IUCN WCPA to support development of competence-based approaches.
2. Protected area occupations and associated standards are officially registered in at least ten countries.
3. Protected area employers and learning providers are enabled to adopt competence-based approaches to building the capacity of protected area staff.
4. Protected area managing organisations are supported and enabled to improve and update working practices.

A major output under the first of these objectives has been the Global Register of Competences for Protected Area Practitioners (Appleton, 2016), which specifies 300 skills and associated knowledge requirements (competences) regularly required in protected area and associated work around the world. This drive for professionalisation is also reflected in Recommendation 103 from the 2016 World Conservation Congress: 'Establishment, Recognition and Regulation of the Career of Park Ranger'. (https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2016_REC_103_EN.pdf)

The project and activities documented here have acted both as a learning platform and a pilot for the development of the IUCN WCPA Strategic Framework and the Competence Register and have inspired much of the work of the IUCN WCPA thematic group on Capacity Development. The work of the project on institutionalising capacity development in protected area authorities

in Romania, Moldova, Croatia and Georgia is already implementing some of the objectives of the Framework and will hopefully serve as a model for many other countries wishing to follow the same path.



1.3. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PLANS

A Protected Area Capacity Development Plan is defined as a 'suite of strategies and actions aimed at strengthening the individual, institutional and societal capacities needed to create a representative and comprehensive protected area network, address critical management weaknesses and key threats, and improve the enabling environment within a protected area system' (Ervin et al. 2007). Having such a plan provides a clear long-term, coherent approach at protected area system level (as opposed to ad hoc, isolated and inconsistent actions) and enables effective resource allocation and fund raising. Capacity Development Plans can establish a vital link between individual and organisational capacities, but to do so they must be fully developed and 'owned' by the organisations responsible for implementing them.

1.4. THE CAPACITY CHALLENGE IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE NEED FOR THE PROJECT

The political changes after 1990 have led to new challenges, institutions and governance types for protected areas in many of the Eastern European countries, with major

implications for capacity at both individual and organisational levels. In this context, capacity development for protected areas in much of Eastern Europe has been dominated by project-based, one-off training courses. Such courses may be of good quality, but in the absence of a permanent local framework and systematic approach for building capacity, their benefits are often short-lived. The challenge for national authorities and donors is to find ways to build capacity that are sustained after projects end.

In response to this challenge, the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Bundesamt für Naturschutz - BfN) commissioned the ProPark Foundation for Protected Areas (Romania) to implement the project 'Capacity Building Plans for Efficient Protected Area Management in Eastern Europe (2012-2015)'. The project aimed to provide technical support to strengthen capacity development for protected areas in Eastern Europe, through development and institutionalisation of national and regional plans for capacity development, based on capacity needs assessments conducted in 23 Eastern and Central European countries.

Figure 3 shows an overview of the entire project; the following sections explain in detail the various stages.

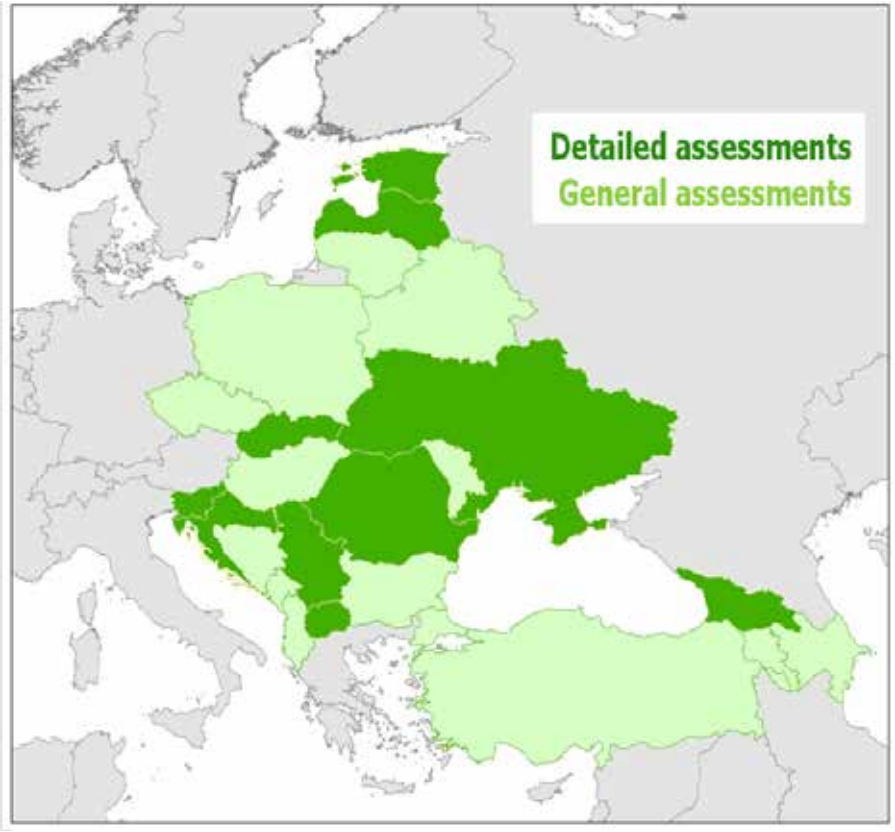


Figure 3. Countries covered by the project (see Figure 4).

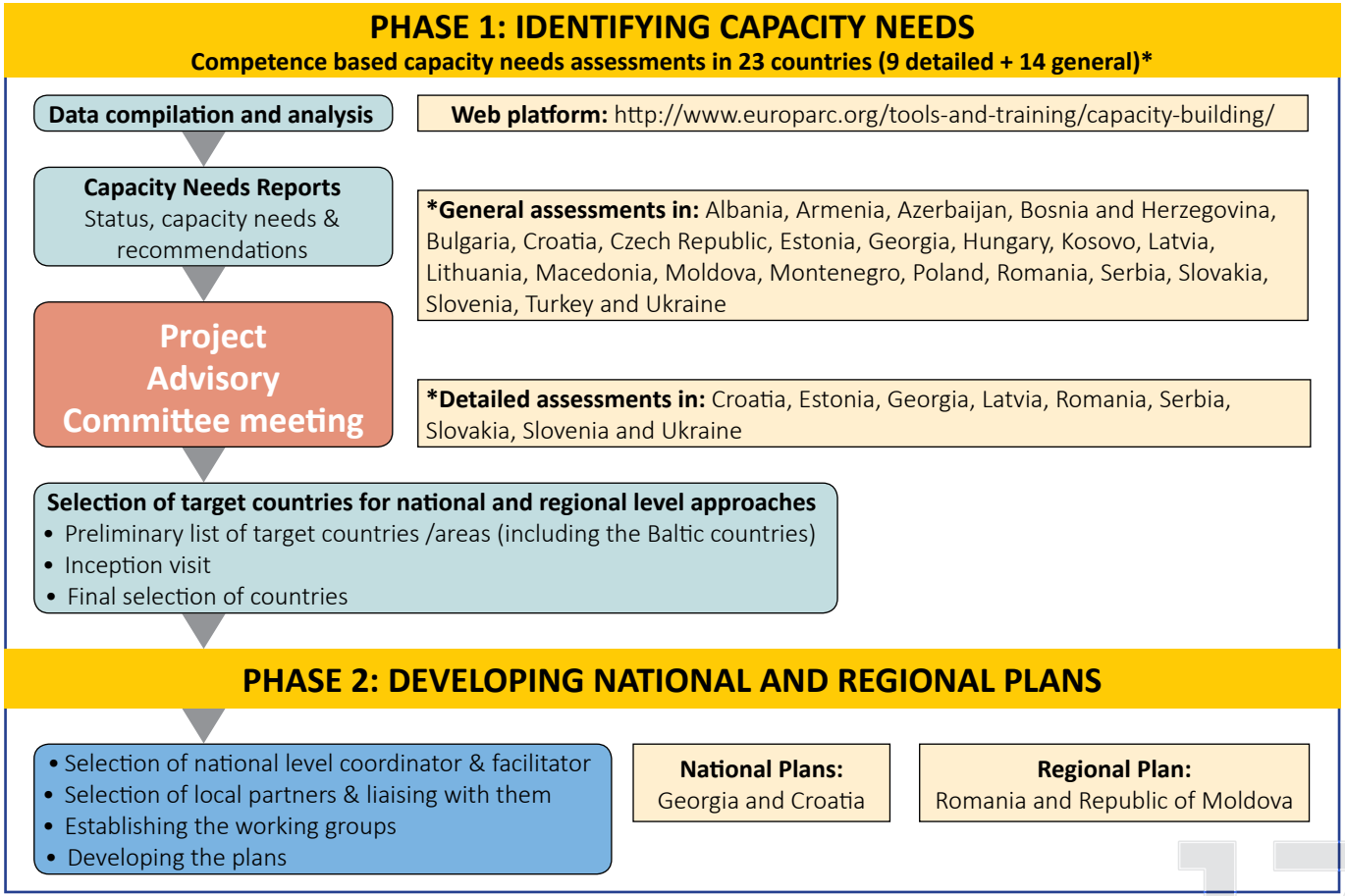
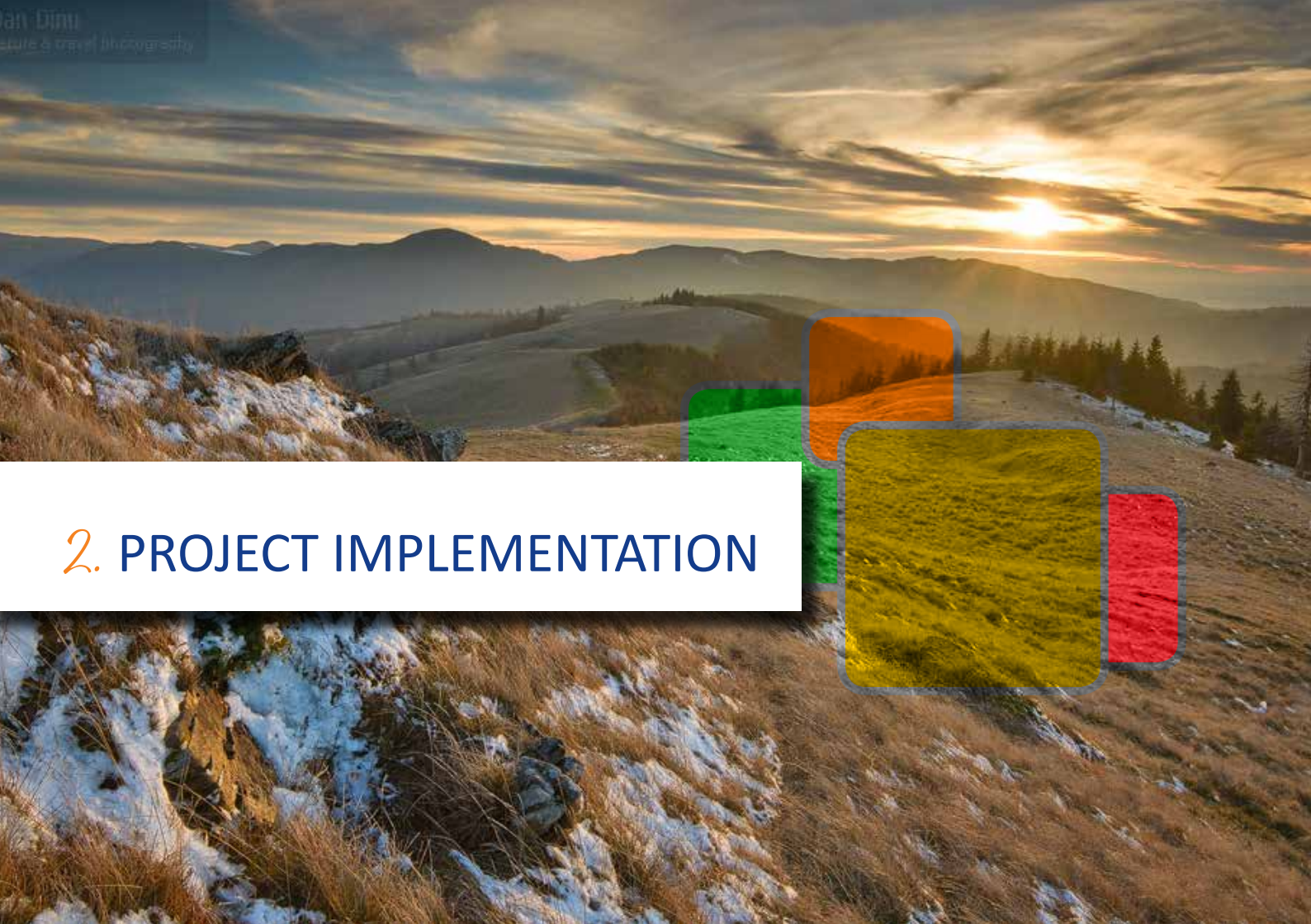


Figure 4. Project overview.



2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

PHASE 1: COMPETENCE-BASED CAPACITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The starting point for the project was to determine the current capacity for managing protected areas in 23 countries in the region (see Figure 3). Rather than just asking individuals (or their managers) what training is required, a more structured, competence-based approach was used (see Appleton, 2016), with the following stages:

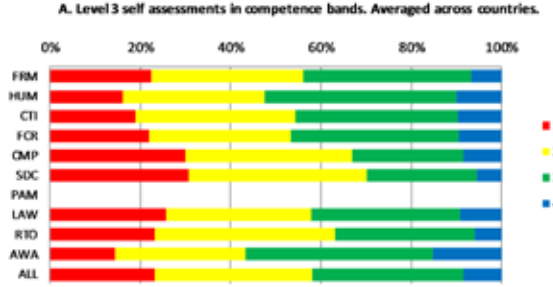
Stage 1. Preparing a list of competences required for all levels and types of work in protected area management. A generic checklist of 125 competences in 10 technical categories at 4 job levels was used. This checklist was an early version of the list published in Appleton (2016).

Stage 2. General competence assessment by managers. 354 managers representing 1,070 protected areas in 23 countries assessed the capacity of their staff at four levels against each of the ten technical categories, using a scale of 0-4 (see Figure 5).

Stage 3. Detailed competence-based self-assessment by individuals. 1,457 staff at all levels from 208 protected areas in 9 of the 23 countries assessed their own competence for each of a list of specific skills relevant to their job level, using a scale of 0-4 (see Figure 5).

RESULTS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By using a numerical scale for the competence assessments, responses were not language dependent and could be readily tabulated, analysed and presented. A simple graphical 'traffic light' system was used to present the assessments for competence categories and for individual competences. This technique enables rapid visualisation of the results and has greatly aided presentation and discussion of the findings. Figure 5 shows an example.



The abbreviations are for the categories of skills (e.g. FRM = Financial and Resources Management, HUM = Human Resources Management and Development). For full details see Appleton et al. (2015).

Assessment scale		
0	Skill not needed	
1	Skills needed but competence very weak. Extensive capacity required.	
2	Skills needed and competence moderate. Further capacity required.	
3	Skills required and competence good. Regular updates required.	
4	Skills required and competence excellent. Could provide training.	

Figure 5. Example of a graphic showing competence assessment results.

The capacity needs assessment process and results were presented in separate reports for each country and collated into an overall report; these should be consulted for detailed results (Appleton et al., 2015). The main findings and conclusions from the overall report are summarised in Table 1.

While aggregated results should be treated with caution as they can mask major differences between the countries, four regional results were particularly evident:

- Working with local communities is a major capacity need across the region, especially for rangers and technical staff, who are recognising the need for communicating and cooperating with protected area communities.
- Wildlife identification and conservation biology are surprising gaps in competence at all levels. It is possible that the shift of focus for protected areas to community outreach and tourism has led to basic natural history and conservation being neglected.
- Staff at all levels across the region are recognising the need for improved communication skills.
- First aid is the top priority for rangers in almost every country.

Table 1. Main findings and recommendations for capacity development for protected area management in Eastern Europe

Overall conclusion
For effective management of protected areas in Eastern Europe, staff require increased capacity development that is focused on rationally identified needs, is appropriate to the participants, is professionally designed, delivered and assessed, and is affordable and sustainable.
Main findings
• With some exceptions, availability of training is inadequate, amounting to around 10%-30% of what is required. Availability in many countries in the eastern part of the region is almost negligible. • The topics of training frequently do not reflect the priorities of managers, the preferences of individuals, or the competence needs identified through the self-assessments. • In several countries, there is a high and probably unsustainable reliance on internationally funded projects and/or NGOs to provide training, suggesting a lack of capacity for capacity building at the institutional level. • Across the region, most training is delivered by providers outside the existing protected area service. Few protected area agencies have formal, systematic internal capacity development programmes for their staff. • Most of the training that is provided is inadequately recorded and documented. This leads to inefficiency and limits the effectiveness of capacity development programmes. • Newer methods of training and learning are not being used, and are not considered important by managers. • It is very difficult in most countries to quantify expenditure on training and capacity development.

Strategic capacity recommendations	Specific capacity recommendations
1. Promote professionalisation of protected area management. 2. Establish recommended regional norms for access to PA capacity development. 3. Develop and pilot a competence-based framework for protected area work across the region. 4. Encourage investment in capacity development that is institutionally owned and driven, and based on rationally identified needs. 5. Provide regional guidance on low-cost approaches to training and learning using existing resources. 6. Capacity development is required at the level of managing institutions as well as within protected areas. 7. Promote and pilot new, technology-based approaches to learning. 8. Develop guidelines for designing and organising study tours and exchanges. 9. Promote the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. 10. Update and diversify current university and college courses related to PA management.	11. Build capacity for capacity development. 12. Develop, pilot and promote a common regional foundation programme for all protected areas staff. 13. Develop, pilot and promote a model foundation programme for law enforcement and compliance training for rangers (Including senior rangers). 14. Develop, pilot and promote a regional capacity development initiative on working with communities. 15. Develop, pilot and promote a regional capacity development initiative on tourism. 16. Build capacity in applied conservation biology and conservation management. 17. Build capacity for modern protected area planning, monitoring and reporting for both site administrations and national authorities. 18. Build capacity for innovative and diversified financing of protected areas. 19. Provide specialist training for senior managers in skills for negotiation and conflict resolution.

APPLICABILITY TO OTHER PROJECTS

The competence-based approach to needs assessment used in this project formed part of the development process for the IUCN WCPA global register of competences for protected area practitioners (Appleton 2016). This includes detailed guidance on how to conduct a similar assessment, as well as for how to use the competence register in many other ways. The register is now being widely used by projects and protected area authorities in five continents. A critical factor in its success is that it does not provide a single global blueprint for using competences and standards; instead it encourages users to adapt the materials and develop courses and standards that fit local contexts and needs.



PHASE 2: NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PLANS FOR PROTECTED AREA CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

After considering the results of the needs assessment, the project Steering Committee selected four countries where the project would support national plans for capacity development: Croatia, Georgia and, working together, Romania and Moldova. The following national authorities responsible for protected areas led the planning processes in each country, with support from national consultants and the project management team.

Croatia: State Institute for Nature Conservation.

Georgia: National Agency for Protected Areas.

Moldova : Ministry of Environment and the State Forest Administration.

Romania: Ministry of Environment and the State Forest Administration.

Figure 6 shows the main stages in the process for preparing the capacity development plans.

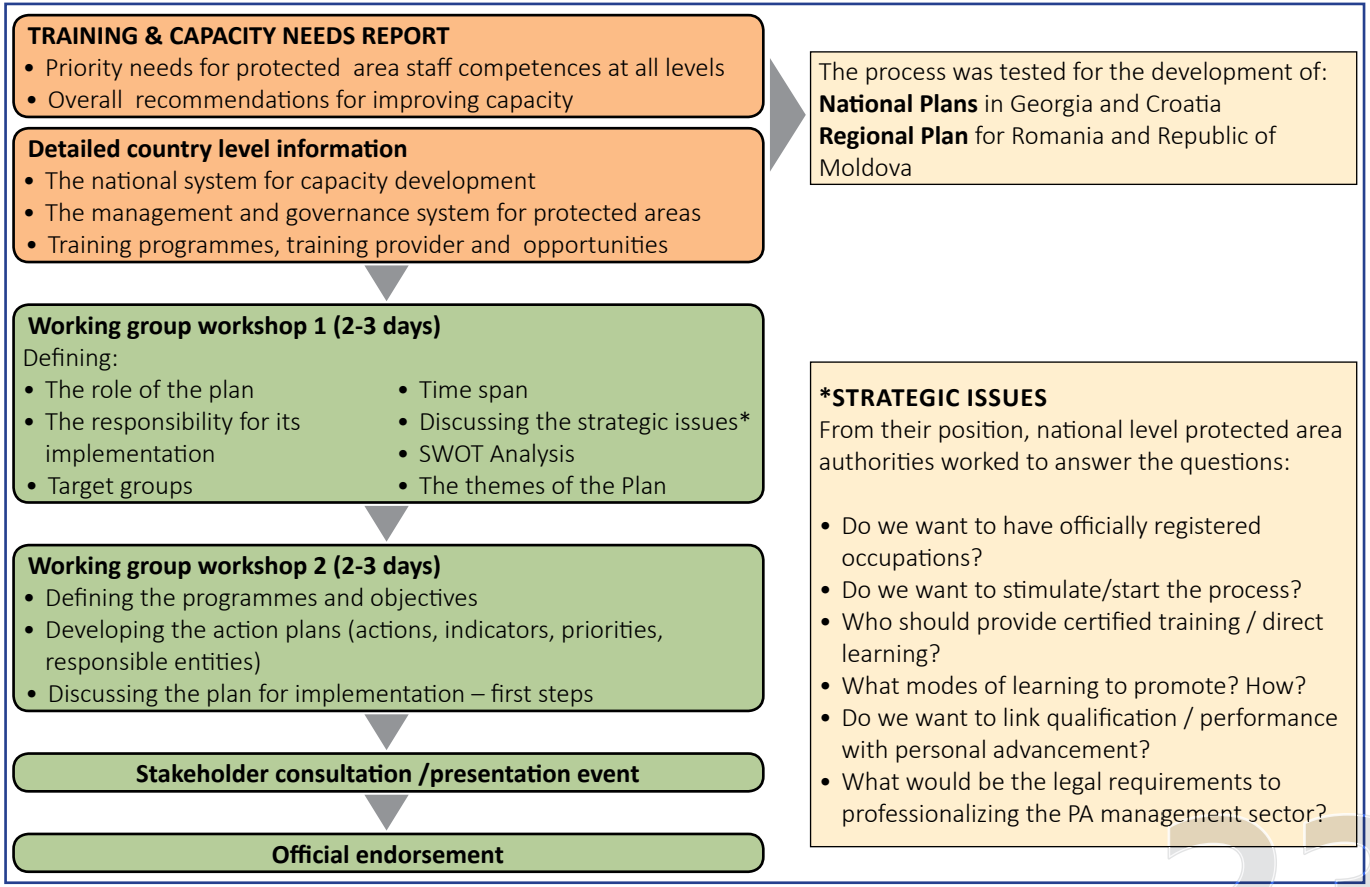


Figure 6. The stages, key inputs and strategic issues from the planning process

INFORMATION GATHERING

The needs assessment provided essential guidance on individual capacity, but the planning process required a much wider range of information related to organisational structures and processes, human resource management and national policies and systems for education, qualifications and professional development. National consultants spent considerable time researching these topics, many of which were unfamiliar to those working in natural resource management.

PLANNING WORKSHOPS

The workshops were conducted in a highly participatory and interactive way, involving a range of structured exercises, individual and group assignments. Participants included representatives of national protected area authorities, protected area management bodies, NGOs, authorities responsible for professional qualifications and development, universities, human resource departments, projects and donors, as well as individual experts.

THE FINAL PLANS

Figure 7 shows the main elements of the final plans.

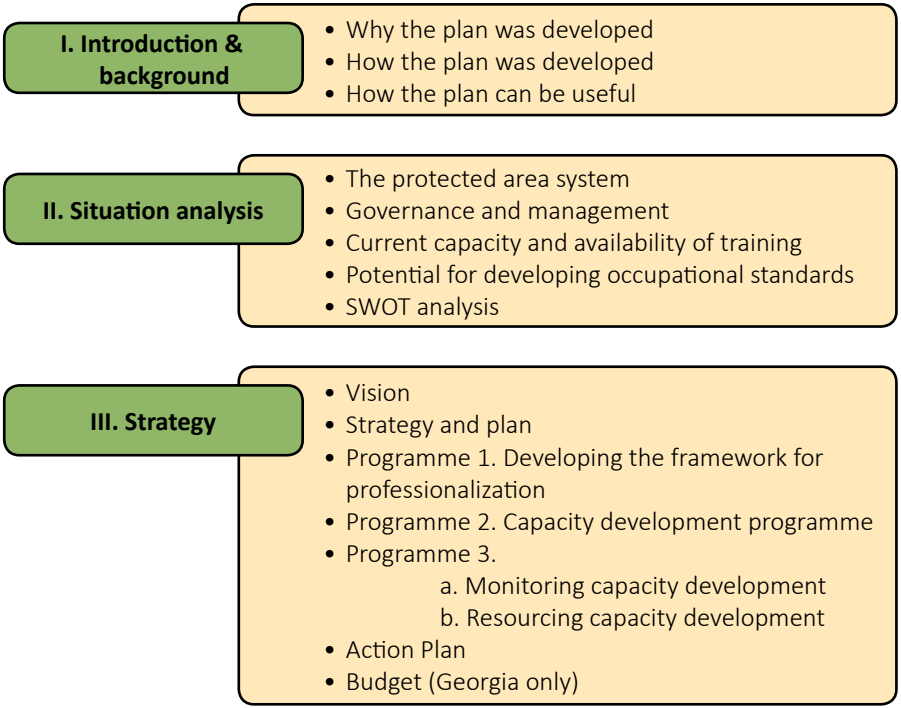


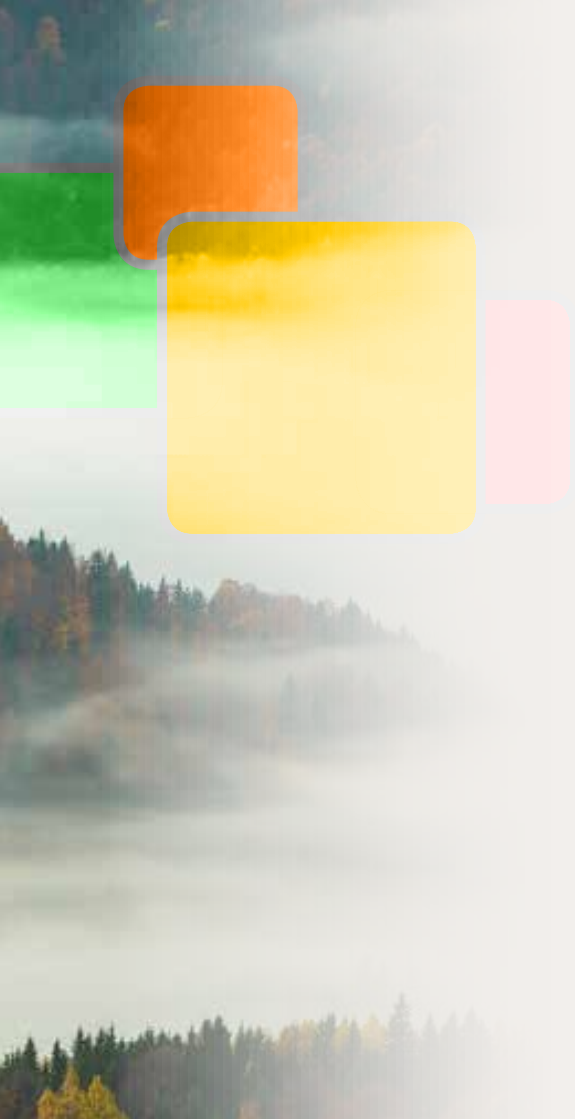
Figure 7. Main elements of the capacity development plans

3. ESTABLISHING A PATHWAY TO PROFESSIONALISATION



While many project participants might initially have thought that the plans would mainly concern training, the process in all four countries triggered a dialogue about improving standards, developing organisations as well as individuals and raising the profile of protected area management. The resulting plans therefore have a much wider scope, identifying the main components of an ideal, comprehensive and sustainable competence-based professional development system. The following sections summarise the main elements of the plans.





3.1. DEVELOPING THE FRAMEWORK FOR PROFESSIONALIZING PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

The planning processes recognised that sustainable capacity development requires a permanent institutional framework, with the following main elements:

ESTABLISHING NATIONAL SYSTEMS FOR OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

- This is a requirement for EU Member States.
- Georgia is in the process of adopting this approach, while Moldova is working to develop occupational standards for the registered occupations.

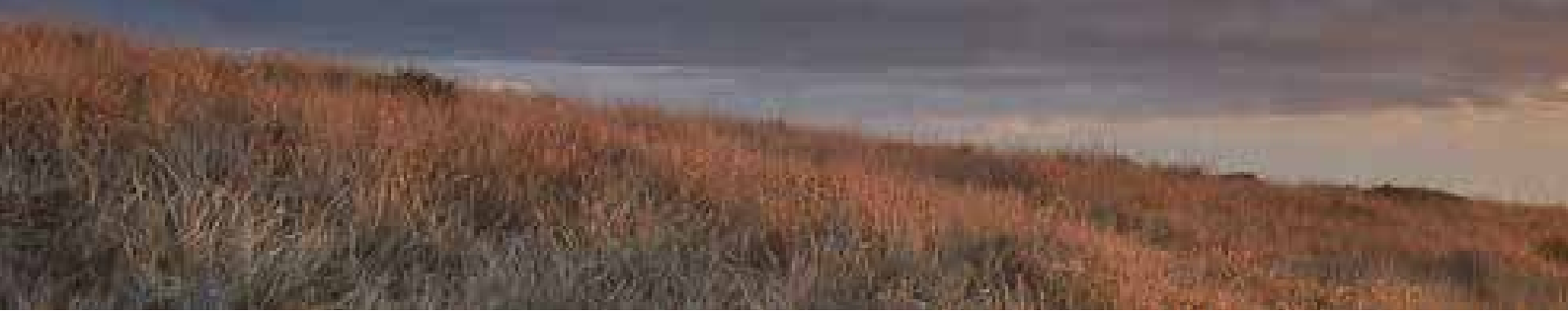
DEVELOPING NEW STANDARDS AND QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

- Officially registering protected area occupations (e.g. 'Ranger', 'Protected Area Specialist').
- Defining occupational standards, including competences required for each occupation, learning and qualification requirements and criteria and methods for assessment.
  - The IUCN WCPA Competence Register (Appleton, 2016) is designed to assist in this process.

Romania has already made considerable progress in establishing a formal professional framework and Moldova is aligning its standards with those of Romania. Georgia and Croatia are in the process of adopting this approach.

UPDATING HUMAN RESOURCE PROCEDURES

- Preparing standard, competence-based descriptions for all positions.
- Adopting occupational standards.
- Introducing formal, merit- and competence-based systems for recruitment, performance review, professional advancement and access to training and professional development.
- Improving records of staff qualifications, capacity development and performance.



3.2. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

All the plans aim to develop a diverse range of learning opportunities for protected area staff that reach far beyond formal training. The plans place particular emphasis on forms of workplace learning that are affordable, sustainable and make best use of existing know-how among staff.

INTERNAL LEARNING PROGRAMMES

The plans include proposals for:

Internal formal training

- Technical short courses developed and delivered by staff with appropriate expertise.
- An official standard induction/foundation course for all newly and recently recruited PA staff that is delivered by a team from the protected area organisation and accompanied by a basic study/information package.

Continuous on-the-job learning

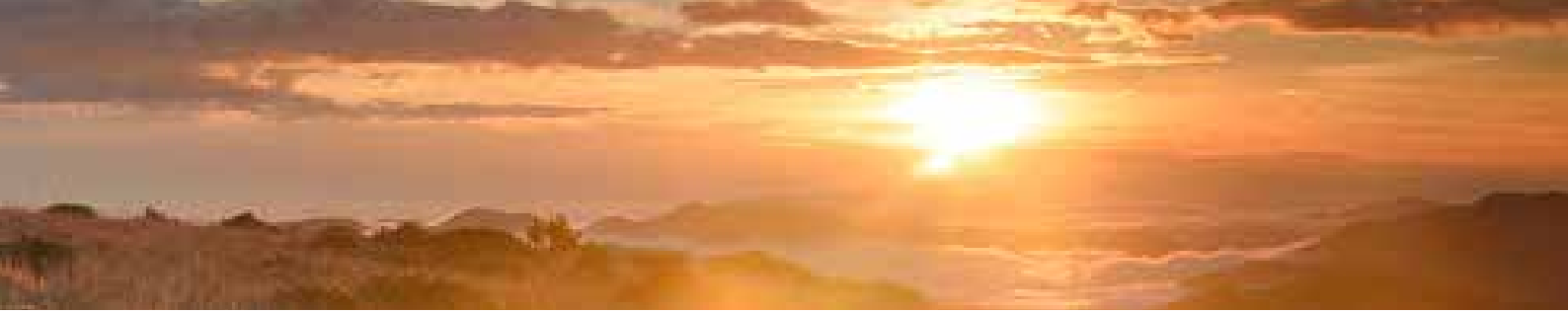
- Internal mentoring and coaching.
- Regular exchange seminars / conferences / workshops.
- Internal information sharing though a central server and database.
- Staff exchange between institutions and between protected areas.
- Study tours.
- Communities of practice on key topics of protected area management.

Developing internal capacity for capacity development

- Training trainers, mentors and coaches and establishing internal training teams.
- Establishing central directories of learning resources.
- Developing a systematic record-keeping and sharing system for knowledge retention.
- Establishing an internal competence assessment and evaluation system and formal certification of staff.

EXTERNAL LEARNING PROGRAMMES

- Working with technical colleges and universities to develop and deliver relevant competence-based courses and qualifications for staff at all levels.
- Ensuring that capacity building programmes in donor-supported projects meet nationally identified needs and support implementation of the capacity development plans. In Croatia, a UNDP-GEF project is working specifically to do this.



- Extending learning programmes to include other stakeholders (e.g. NGOs, universities, research bodies, community groups).

3.3. MONITORING AND PROVIDING RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONALISATION

MONITORING

A monitoring and evaluation system is necessary to ensure implementation of the capacity development plans, to assess the quality of training and learning programmes and to determine their impact. The plans include the following measures:

- Improved record keeping and analysis of staff education, professional development, capacity needs and performance.
- Monitoring capacity needs by conducting periodic needs assessments.
- Establishing quality criteria and monitoring methods for internal professional development programmes.
- Using monitoring results to support decision making and help assess the management effectiveness of protected areas.

RESOURCES

Implementing the plans requires specific internal budgets for capacity development (at central and protected area levels). In some cases, this would be aided by unifying elements of existing budget lines under the heading of capacity development.

Allocating responsibility to specific staff for coordinating capacity development (at central and local levels) would significantly support implementation of the plans.

All the plans acknowledge that resources will always be scarce, and therefore emphasise low-cost solutions, making best use of existing external and internal resources to build capacity. This gives better value for money and is more sustainable than relying on short term investments. Examples include:

- Accessing existing resources from other government and departmental programmes that support education, training and professional development.
- Encouraging donors to align capacity building programmes with the national capacity development plans.



4. SUCCESS FACTORS

The factors which have enabled and at times limited the success of development of national and regional plans in Georgia, Croatia, Romania and Moldova, can be categorised using the perspective of organisational change (see Kuipers et al. 2013).

CHANGE READINESS

In this context we understand change readiness as the willingness to rethink professionalization and to consider change towards more professionalisation.
The following factors were found to be important contributors to change readiness.

- Recognition within the protected area organisation and its parent Ministry of the need to improve protected area management. This has been supported by global initiatives through the CBD such as the Aichi Targets and, in the European Union, the Birds and Habitats Directives and the development of the Natura 2000 network.
- Growing awareness of new approaches to learning and professional development and the value of occupational standards, (as promoted by the European Union and by IUCN WCPA).
- Emergence of a first cohort of well informed and trained protected area professionals in influential positions.

THE CHANGE PROCESS

The following factors were found to have aided the process of developing the capacity plans.



- Involvement of all relevant actors in the process, including decision-makers and specialists in protected area management, conservation, human resource management, education and professional development, NGOs, independent experts and funding agencies.
- Availability of up to date information concerning capacity at the individual and organisational levels.
- Continuous emphasis on national ownership of the plans and on ensuring that they are relevant to local needs and contexts.
- Coordination at national level through cooperation between independent national consultants and lead agencies.
- Establishment of good professional and personal working relationships between national teams and external consultants and facilitators, enabling continuity and positive responses to problems and to political and personnel changes.



CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION

The following factors are contributing to the early stages of implementing the plans.

- A core of people in the lead organisations committed to and actively involved in the initiative ('change leaders').
- A focus on affordable activities making best use of existing resources and expertise.
- Integration with existing policies and programmes in education and occupational standards.
- Engagement with related and compatible projects and initiatives providing a foundation for change and helping maintain its momentum.

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