

EAI Seminar Series

Spring seminar report

Europarc Atlantic Isles Section of the Europarc Federation
Embracing Iceland, the Republic of Ireland and the UK

Naturally better – how protected areas can help deliver health and wellbeing



The Manor House, Howbery Park
Wallingford

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EUROPARC
Atlantic Isles

Conservation Without Frontiers

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This report features edited highlights of the presentations. To see the full powerpoints please go to www.europarc-ai.org

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Introduction

Landscapes: lifesavers

Dan Bloomfield

Development officer, EUROPARC Atlantic Isles

This seminar was an in-depth look at the relationship between health and protected areas.

Speakers from both health and protected area backgrounds presented a wealth of compelling evidence that simply getting out into the landscape, and being in nature, reduces the incidence of a range of serious health problems including heart conditions, obesity and depression. Quite literally, protected areas can help save lives.

The seminar was a continuation of work carried out by the Nordic-Baltic section of the Federation (see panel right), and focused on practical actions, for both individual protected areas as well as partnerships to continue to take this vital area of work forwards.

Sincere thanks to all those who were part of the seminar. A follow-on session is planned for the EUROPARC 2009 conference in Sweden. We hope to expand the group of members interested in working in this area, explore funding sources and set up a project group.

Public Health and Experience of Nature – the role of protected areas - main conclusions of EUROPARC Nordic-Baltic section seminar

(Maribosøerne, Denmark, May 2008)

1. Nature protection should be reconnected with social goals such as public well-being and health.
2. Partnerships should be established with a wide range of organizations, including health organizations.
3. Better communication is needed between the health sector and the nature sector.
4. To improve health, communicate with groups not using nature today.
5. For young people, use of technology such as GPS, mobile phones, and internet is very important.
6. To be active in nature must be fun!
7. The value of nature parks should be redefined to include health.
8. Increased use of nature can save huge expenditures in health sector.
9. The infrastructure should link settlements with nature for easier access and use.
10. Natural areas within and close to cities should be improved and linked with paths.
11. Information on the value of nature for improving public health should be shared with politicians.
12. The primary health care sector must be able to advise patients on how to be active in nature.

Towards a natural health service



David Stone

David Stone, principal specialist environment and human health, Natural England



Enjoyably delivering physical and mental wellbeing

Overview

This presentation briefly examined:

- The relationship between the natural environment and human health;
- Current critical health issues and the evidence supporting a natural environment prescription to help address them; and
- Some examples of environmental and health professional working collaboratively to deliver co-benefits.

Key points

- People are intimately connected to their environment through thousands of years of evolution, the biophilia hypothesis: in turn the environment determines our health.
- Evidence indicates that direct engagement with the natural environments and green spaces benefits health inequalities, mental health, physical activity, obesity and social cohesion.
- Evidence indicates that the quality natural environments and green spaces benefit people's health through moderation of temperature extremes, reduction of noise and UV, and through pollution scrubbing.

- Cross-sectoral initiatives have clearly shown the value of engaging people with natural environment a way to enjoyably deliver physical and mental wellbeing.

Conclusion

- **People's health and their experience of the natural environment are intimately linked;**
- **Evidence suggest that access to quality natural environments can play a role in addressing today's critical health issues;**
- **By working with health sector professionals, protected areas can effectively deliver a set of shared health and environmental outcomes – a natural health service.**

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Green space, physical activity and public health



Dr Charlie Foster
Senior researcher,
University of Oxford,
British Heart Foundation
Health Promotion
Research Group



Active adults reduce their mortality risk by up to 30%

Overview

A brief description of the relationship between green space, public health and physical activity and the evidence base for this relationship; and possible directions for developing this evidence base.

Key points

- Green space and public health are linked
- Green space promotes and maintains good health
- Green space provide a place for physical activity
- The evidence base lacks data on the causal nature of the relationship between green space and health
- The economic value of green space remains unknown

Conclusion

- **Green space is related to health**
- **Physical activity is related to health**
- **Our environment and how we use it does impact on our health**

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Useful web links

www.dphpc.ox.ac.uk/bhfhprg

- Adults who are physically active have a 20-30% reduced mortality risk compared to inactive adults.
- Estimates put the total direct costs to England of physical inactivity to the NHS as £1.06 billion
- Conservatively, this represents about 54,000 lives lost prematurely per annum.
- A 10% increase in adult activity would benefit England by at least £500m a year (saving about 6,000 lives).

Nature as an attractive sector for the preventative health sector – practical examples of lasting partnerships between the two sectors



Claus Jespersen
Director of Regional Office,
Danish Forest and Nature
Agency, Storstrom,
Denmark



Nature is also a social goal

Overview

A description of how the Danish Forest and Nature Agency is in a process of redefining its mission and vision putting more emphasis on social goals.

Key points

- The agency is looking more at human needs for forest areas from the recreational and health perspective.
- The forest and nature administration is trying systematically to establish partnerships with local municipalities to get their activities out into nature, to secure that people enjoy and have a relation to nature.
- If society wants special groups out in nature the responsible authority should pay for this special service.
- Science agrees – nature is good for your health. Public health report in Denmark 2007: sufficient evidence exists in the present scientific literature about use of nature and health, stress and disease to recommend area planning authorities and municipalities to think easy access for the public to nature and green areas when it comes to policy and planning.

Conclusion

The Danish Forest and Nature Agency's contribution to health-(care) is through settings – areas and facilities (activities, green surroundings); activities (physical and relaxing); work to create partnership together with municipalities and others about the use of nature interpretation and buildings, and communicate the relation between nature and health.

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Nature conservation and preventative health protection in Germany – a strong partnership?



Dr Thomas Classen
Scientific Assistant at the
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Health, Germany



Nature and wellbeing - a strong relationship

Overview

The presentation addresses challenges in global and national nature conservation and preventative health protection strategies and shows the results of a national survey from 2005 performing a systematic ascertainment of potential synergies and interferences between the two, identifying preconditions and potentials for effective co-operation and developing a concept for implementation.

Key points

- There is strong evidence of the relationship between nature and human well-being.
- Connections between the explicit conservation of nature and impacts on health are rare and mostly confined to the international discussion of sustainable resources management.
- Most of the stakeholders are principally open to connections between nature conservation and preventative health protection, especially those from cross-sectors. Some promising approaches could be identified.
- Strict division of competencies and responsibilities and persistent hard line opinions of few but influential persons were underlined

as main causes for horizontal and vertical barriers of communication and missing co-operation.

- Numerous potential subjects and fields for co-operative action could be identified.

Conclusion

There is a need for horizontal and vertical integration of strategies and concepts of nature conservation and preventative health protection, for reduction of the deficit of information, reduction of situations with rivalry or conflicts and reduction of thinking only in responsibilities and competencies since 'sustainable development is healthy development!'

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Breakout session one: A natural health service – the implications for you

These starter points, picked up as a basis for discussion and action, are recorded verbatim

Key points

- Physical activity + physical and mental wellbeing - health outcome
- Accessible and welcoming green space: barriers to use; quality; accessibility; diverse spaces; biodiversity and ecological function- spaces
- Resource: best of both worlds. Economic value/social value- support in research/ evidence - evidence catcher
- How do these impact upon our protected area?
- Challenge - reaching out to youth; capacity building
- Health outcome- raising the awareness of activity for wellbeing (communication)
- Enjoyment of protected areas- passive engagement PAs as a venue for socialising, precision about health outcomes inclusion for all
- Maximising the impact of PA
- Re-engaging rural communities - challenge is to establish ways to relate with communities and assess contribution for local rural populations
- Engagement with health sector

- Protected landscapes have facilities/resources
- Fit for purpose- access networks
- Using sustainable hubs eg transport
- Evidence/ research tools
- Well being toolkit being developed under Leader
- NEF/CCW/Welsh wellbeing toolkit
- How can we improve/engage evaluation?
- Sharing of good practice especially community engagement; promoting and selling the product
- Communication with other sectors
- Signposting
- Initiatives
- Understanding barriers to use: non users - how can we open up to non users?

Challenges

1. How to form partnerships to gain funds for the agenda (political)
2. How to gain local public/partnership support/ health agenda (public support)

Approaches

Health authority+ local government + private sector -link strengths/skills of each to form strong partnership? Partnership is the missing dimension?

Private sector input more likely as in kind/other contributions?

Start with potential group where positive results most likely? Mental health agenda - fruitful possible partnerships - 2020 depression major issue.

How to engage the primary care trust's agenda? Join local users groups? Prescriptive treatment opportunity? (drug + walk!) Risk health sector 'value of evidence' issue go NICE v transport (85p v £14) noted

Links with key local govt players - to engage with people? To use outdoor opportunities/benefits

Effective alternative?

Celebrity champion – emerge?

'Go outside!' 'Have fun!' Feel good!

Graduation of space – exploration?

Positive examples – there – to be promoted? Campaign – how? John Muir award – return interest high

Connecting with 2012 (less London-centric) Health agenda – Las/Pas – engage

Breakout session two: Now to action...

Opportunities for networks to take health agenda forward:

- Europarc 2009
- German Nature and Health conference 2009
- International conference in Switzerland in May
- EU agenda – sharing experience – DG SANCO public health programme; DG research FP7

Actions:

1. Identify the gatekeepers at national, regional and international levels
2. Identify policy hooks – European Landscape Convention, CEHAP
3. Take forward projects – then map to policies – share your learning
4. Sharing, capturing good practice – ‘speed dating’ – practitioner-based – link EU funding/exchange C.O.S.T; INTERREG; must include health sector
5. Valuing (economic) of protected areas in the language of the sectors (health, transport, education)
6. Working with private sector to support initiatives

7. Euro region declaration on health and protected areas (action EUROPARC)

Local actions in PA:

- Work more in partnership with transport hubs to link health/PAs ie look at whole journey – rail, bike, etc – package
- Reset language used – be jargon-free and unpatronising
- Values? Relate to/recognise values in play – N.I.C.E.
- Rural community health centres giving info/advice/guide point to green health opportunities available (resource-intensive?)
- Therapist example – catching interest/attention of first few on list – good/response (not too resource intensive)
- Language – use health sector language eg ‘cardio-vascular’ when suggesting benefits
- Campaign – a set of champions across the country (a network) which will promote from practical experience in a co-ordinated way – embedded in health care
- EAI working group health?
- Cairngorm example – partnership comprising Highland health board, wellbeing alliance, LA, SNH, Cairngorm NPA + health watch co-ordinators

- Grant-funding body – requirement to consider wellbeing in application
- Relevant skills – all board members!
- Crossover – PCT + PA; PA + PCT – on each organisation
- Requirement from EN that AONBs have wellbeing and health within their management plan guidance
- Encourage PLs to capture and share the benefits of what they already do, but don’t think of as health-oriented.

Further reading

Towards a natural health service

David Stone Page 5

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Nature conservation and preventative health protection in Germany – a strong partnership?

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