



**EUROPARC**  
**Atlantic Isles**

Conservation Without Frontiers

Seminar Report

# Integrating Nature into Human Well-being

Haapsalu, Lääne County, Estonia, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014



## **Seminar Purpose**

There is a strong relationship between human health and the natural environment. It has become an important field of work for both science and policy. In today's world we are facing many challenges in terms of human well-being. However nature does offer solutions. This seminar offered an opportunity to explore some of these natural solutions together with protected area practitioners and policy makers.

In reporting on the day's deliberations emphasis has been placed on looking at policy (context and development), practice (implementation and case studies) and evidence (how we can make a robust case for the health benefits of nature, including protected areas).

## **Location**

The group was welcomed to Haapsalu and Lääne County, by the acting County Governor Kristel Jupits. Estonian poet Paul-Erik Rummo has said of Lääne county:

*Here you are born. On flat land. Here is your peace and balance.*

As such it was an eminently suitable place for the seminar on health and nature to take place.

## **Introductory remarks**

In her introductory remarks the Deputy Director of the Estonian Environmental Board, Leelo Kukk, welcomed the impetus that has been given to work in the field of health and protected areas. She highlighted the strong public perception of the positive correlation between clean nature and health, and emphasised the importance of maintaining people's connection with nature. The requirement for evidence was also stressed.

## **Part 1: Presentations**

### **A European and global perspective, Health and nature in Finland,**

Matti Tapaninen, Regional Manager, Metsähallitus Parks and Wildlife, Finland

#### *Practice*

In his contribution, Matti stressed the importance of understanding the connection with nature, with research and monitoring playing a part in (the developing of) this understanding and knowledge of the health benefits of protected areas and green spaces. He stated that another key focus was on accessibility and making access easy for people, reducing barriers to the use of nature. In the Oulu Outdoor Zone he explained that the project has been about the whole spectrum of green spaces from urban parks to national parks and wilderness areas, with the national parks also assisting urban communities.

#### *Evidence*

Although 'proof' is needed of the benefits of nature for human health, he stated resolutely that we do have it! Sometimes however there is a need for more 'hardcore' evidence. Nature does promote health. There is though a need to measure the effectiveness of our actions. In response to a question on what would constitute 'hard core evidence' he explained that the strongest proofs are in the effect on people's blood pressure, in mental health and also in preventive medicine.

#### *Policy*

Matti emphasised the need for leadership in demonstrating the connection with nature and in understanding the benefits. The health and nature theme is a particularly hot topic at the moment, and in the future health and nature will not be such separate policy areas. The importance of nature for health improvement is another reason why protected area services need to be maintained despite the current harsh economic climate.

He also highlighted the importance and value of strategic partnerships, between the public and private sectors, NGOs and business, and cross sectoral partnerships within the public sector. The further education and training of doctors and facilitating their connections to environmental organisations is another area where work is required. The overlap with tourism in protected areas was also noted, and although the work is complementary, working in this policy area needs to go beyond tourism. An Innovation Fund for developing policy was also important.

In the city and region of Oulu there are a number of important areas of work:

- mental health;
- rehabilitation, notably regarding the healing powers of nature in relation to immigrants who may have suffered torture;
- middle-aged overweight men.

Working in partnership with health professionals has been central to the initial success of their work. Investment has also become an important consideration; investing early in preventive medicine can save more later, for example in relation to social inclusion.

### Global

Matti also reported on the Healthy Parks Healthy People initiative that originated in Parks Victoria, Australia, and its promotion as a global platform under which Healthy Parks Healthy People programmes can be run. In Victoria it has resulted in big changes, not least that services provided by the parks are now free. A further interesting initiative is taking place in South Korea, where a similar initiative Healthy Parks, Happy People has been launched.

## **How to boost and implement the Healthy Parks Healthy People Initiative in Southern Europe**

Giacomo Benelli, Consultant, Italy

### Practice

The Parco Naturale del Monte San Bartolo, in the Marche Region of Italy, which is also linked to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, has built partnerships with professional associations of doctors and pharmacists, the Institute for Natural Medicine (works on using herbs and natural medicines) and the organic food sector. They also work in preventive medicine and through health education.

A second example from Italy was the Parco Nazionale Appennino Tosco Emiliano, which has run 'A Mountain of Health', a pilot community-based project. It was started by a health centre and involves a partnership that includes a cardiology rehabilitation centre at a local hospital. The importance of accessibility was again emphasised, as was encouraging activity through a culture of active living for physical and mental well-being.

Giacomo also discussed the idea of park prescriptions, with doctors prescribing outdoor activities, health insurance companies reimbursing patients for park visits, and parks making accessibility and the use of trails easier through better signage etc. Physical activity can be prescribed (instead of a pharmaceutical drug), with a personalised

outdoor programme. It is economically sustainable and offers an integrated, holistic vision. This innovative organisational model should be acknowledged.

The work of EUROPARC Spain was also described. They have worked on developing a large partnership in Castilla y Leon, and have been successful in getting health administrations involved in activities with protected areas. Their work is included in the EUROPARC case studies.

### Evidence

In the Tosco Emiliano project there has also been a demonstrable reduction in the number of hospital admissions and drugs used. There have also been changes in people's behaviour.

### Policy

Some background information on the EU's 7<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action programme was provided. Objective 3: speaks of a healthy environment for healthy people, "Taking care of the environment is taking care of ourselves". It stresses the importance of 4 'I's to achieve this: investment, information, implementation and integration.

### Discussion

Questions following Giacomo's presentation concerned the complexity of the players involved, how to gather and interpret data acquired as well as using feedback from patients / visitors. The possibilities for a citizen science approach to gathering information were also aired.

## **Developing Scotland's Natural Health Service**

Alan Macpherson, People & Places Group Manager, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)

### Policy

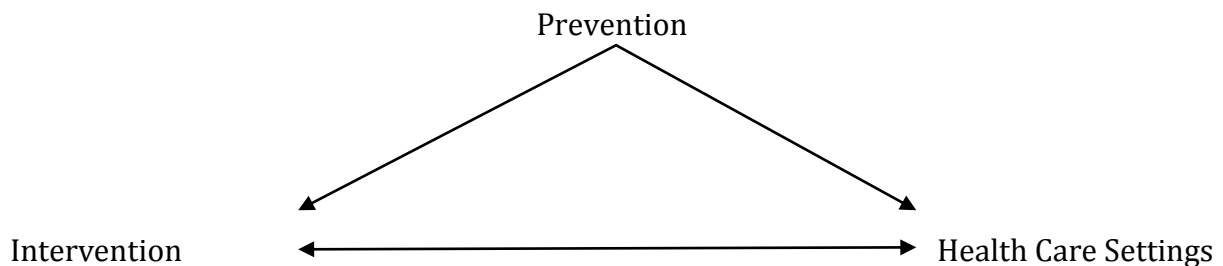
The NHS, the National Health Service, plays the central role in health provision in the UK. Responsibility for the NHS in Scotland rests with the Scottish government – as a result there are some differences in policy, priorities and funding from the NHS in other parts of the UK. The letters (NHS) can also be used to stand for 'natural' health service to describe the connection between nature and human health and well-being. This link has been made and the term referenced within the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity strategy document.

Over recent years, a strong policy framework has been developed in Scotland that supports this work. There is high level political recognition of the contribution of nature through the National Performance Framework with measures focused on the use of the outdoors, physical activity and active travel. The link between health and nature is being increasingly recognised in NHS policy and commitments and also in a range of

national policies and commitments as well as in a range of national policies and initiatives in sector such as transport, land use planning and biodiversity. Nonetheless, while we are seeing a policy convergence, there is still further work to do to translate policy into practice.

### *Practice*

Alan described current thinking on what a 'natural health service' would look like, suggesting that it had three inter-related components:



There is a 'preventative' element, around maximising the role that nature can play in providing healthy living choices that contribute to improved general levels of health and well-being in the population as a whole. The aim of this work is to increase the flow of public benefits and services from Scotland's natural assets (essentially ecosystem services) and improve the capacity of these natural assets to support delivery of these benefits. Ultimately, if successful, this is about reducing demands for some health services and reducing long term costs. Given Scotland's poor health record and inequalities there is a lot to gain here. Three recent initiatives (National Walking Strategy, Physical activity Implementation Plan and the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Planning Framework) are providing fresh impetus to this work.

The second component sees contact with nature and green exercise as a routinely and widely used intervention within relevant medical pathways in our health service.

Green prescriptions are one important area, but there are challenges in integrating this into the NHS systems:

- There is a need for a change of culture away from drug prescription;
- The integration of green prescriptions into the NHS funding system;
- Information and products to support referral are needed, as well as the capacity of environmental sector to deliver;
- There is also a need for a referral and feedback mechanism and quality assurance of green prescription schemes.

Pilot projects have been developed to show how, for example, ranger services can help deliver green and promote the available nature resources and opportunities available in an area health (see also the presentation of Susanne Rosenild).

To support the development of new initiatives SNH is developing a green exercise toolkit with different versions tailored for the health sector and the environment sector. Content includes key messages, summaries of evidence, key policy drivers, case studies, and characteristics of good projects to improve quality standards.

The third component of a natural health service sees well-designed and sustainably managed healthcare facilities (the NHS outdoor estate) being used to support clinical services and strategy as part of a health promoting health service.

The green exercise partnership has also been developed (see the EUROPARC case studies) to take forward this work and to encourage better working between the environment and health sectors.

Several examples from 'health care settings' were cited, and photos can be found in the presentation (via the link). Useable, quality green space in hospital grounds can deliver health benefits for patients, staff and visitors as well as assisting recovery and rehabilitation. A number of demonstration projects for health board areas have also been implemented.

### Evidence

Evidence from national population level surveys in Scotland (Scotland's People And Nature Survey) show that those who do engage with nature report significant benefits and that physical activity in the outdoors plays a significant role in helping people to meet the recommended physical activity guidelines in the UK

### Discussion

Several challenges remain. Making the case with health bosses that green exercise is core business to the NHS is difficult at a time when there are such significant pressures on the health sector. Embracing green exercise as a clinical intervention and investing positively in it has the potential to be the solution to these pressures. The different language used in the health and environment sectors also tends to complicate partnership working.

## **The MindSCAPE project**

Sarah Sawyer, Community Links Officer, Wye Valley AONB

### *Policy*

MindSCAPE is a four year project for people with early stage dementia. It is very much embedded in the landscape – as a tangible entity and as a concept. It is also linked to the AONB's management plan. Other important influences in the development of the project include the Outdoors for All work of Natural England as well as the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) Diversity Action Plan.

The project supports and interacts with local strategies and initiatives for 'dementia friendly communities' and draws on the intrinsic value of landscape. It works on the barriers to access and uses the therapeutic value of art.

Information was gathered prior to project on early stage dementia, how it is diagnosed and leads to mental decline, and then access to the natural environment becomes more difficult. Evidence for its need was built up, and the case for the project made. Being a little bit maverick helped to get things started.

### *Practice*

The project is very much at the 'coal face', it is practical and not a strategic level project. Nonetheless it's in line with the Zeitgeist in terms of funding arrangements and policy developments. Importantly, it builds local partnerships. An Artspace (an arts charity) project coordinator is employed by the project. Fortnightly activities for people with early stage dementia include walks and workshops. There is also training for carers and professionals in dementia. It has extended the idea of rural skills.

Activities are subject to rigorous evaluation and results are being monitored

Lessons from delivery and participation so far (the project is still in its first full year) have emphasised the social value of activities. The therapeutic value of the landscape has become clearer – it has also helped many sufferers to maintain a connection with the landscape, communication among participants has become particularly valued. It has also become a hub for information and help.

An extract from the project coordinator's diary shows how the partnership between nature, the arts and dementia groups works. This is from the first session:



*“Rachel’s second activity, in contrast, encouraged participants to ‘up-scale’ their focus. She showed the group a book of ‘land art’ by artist Andy Goldsworthy – his inspiring work uses natural objects like stone, ice, feathers and wood. His work is large in scale but temporary, made and set within the natural environment and often influenced by the elements – the work is created, then photographed. So, now we set off to seek out larger objects, fallen branches, sticks, pine cones, fern fronds, long bright green grasses, handfuls of fallen leaves. Participants arrange, stack and spread their finds, making shapes and designs on the floor, on the seats of the log circle – some participants decide to capitalise on the existing natural structures of the wood, and arrange their designs on the top of tree stumps, or around the base of trees. An important part of the process is photographing the artworks afterwards – Nikki and Rachel document the natural sculptures (these will be distributed to the proud artists at the next session!) The only shame is that we won’t get to stick around long enough to see the reactions from the public, the inevitable dog walkers who will stumble upon this stunning exhibition gallery that the woods have temporarily become!*

*One of the carer participants has attended with her 98 year old mother. Despite the fact that her mother is in a wheelchair and was less able to move around the site freely, she was able to work with her daughter, commenting and making decisions as they arranged their finds into an attractive design. Another participant chatted about his youth, growing up in North Wales. The landscape being such an integral part of his childhood, he has fond memories of getting up to mischief with his friends and playing from dusk till dawn on the hillside near his house. Another participant had become keen on photography since his diagnosis with dementia – what a great opportunity to take some wonderful photos with his camera which he had brought along to the session.”*

## **The health effect of nature**

Susanne Rosenild, Ranger in the Health Department, Municipality of Vordingborg

### Practice

Susanne reminded participants that nature is free, nearby, and there for ALL. She works with nature interpretation in green areas in a team of health staff (nurses and physical therapists) in preventive (and rehabilitative) activities for citizens and in patient education.

The structural elements, both human and physical, were stressed, but while the physical infrastructure is important, the importance of multidisciplinary and empathetic professionals relating to the person (in treatments) cannot be underestimated.

There is also an emphasis on documentation, sharing of experiences and evaluation of actions, while the partnership between the Municipality Health Department and the Danish National Forest Agency facilitates and strengthens the access to green areas.

Much of her work helps through practical activities to build the knowledge of human beings about nature, and uses the feelings of being within a landscape to make different

connections to handling the challenges of a strenuous life. The presentation was focused on a human level and included several case studies, including:

- Non-smoking courses, using the fresh air of the outdoors;
- Building the confidence of young mothers and new families for outdoor activities;
- Nature and sensory paths in green surroundings of activity centres for old people / old and young meeting;
- Patient education in nature for people with obesity, cardiac disease, cancer, lung disease, back pain, stress.

### Policy

From 2015 nature will be fully integrated in the health policy of the municipality of Vordingborg. It will be important to share knowledge, inspiration and the continued development of the concept.

Policy in the municipality is holistic. The Department of Health employs one ranger. It has a multidisciplinary staff to provide a range of services to the citizen. There is policy cooperation with other sectors.

### Evidence

Susanne emphasised the evidence that she experiences in her work that nature is good for health. In particular she noted results both from focus group interviews in her work and in research. Physical aspects in relation to blood pressure and pulse measurements are significant. On the mental side there are particular benefits in relation to stress, depression and anxiety.

## Part 2: Additions to Health & Protected Areas Toolkit

*In a short workshop entitled “What’s useful for the toolkit”, participants worked in small groups and examined how the EUROPARC Health and Protected Areas Working Group’s proposed toolkit could be useful to them. The list of contents for the toolkit was revised in the light of the discussion and will be further refined by the working group and partners in the coming months. There was a feeling that the toolkit should be a “living platform”.*

### EF - Health & Protected Areas Toolkit a draft framework

**Audience:** EF member organisations – especially those involved in recreation & visitor management policy; recreation managers and managers of Protected Areas.

**Purpose:**

- to provide a helpful information resource;
- to encourage EF members to contribute to the Green Health agenda by establishing appropriate policy frameworks;
- to support the management and promotion of Protected Areas as health-promoting assets;
- to stop everyone searching for & summarising the evidence and re-inventing the wheel

**Format:** short; simple structure; English, but easily translatable;

Section -	Contents -
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• purpose of Toolkit;</li> <li>• outline of Green Exercise and health benefits;</li> <li>• role of Protected Areas</li> </ul>
Policy context	<p>IUCN/WPCA – Healthy Parks Healthy People (HPHP) concept;</p> <p>EU &amp; European Commission – policy / statements on Health &amp; environment;</p> <p>EUROPARC Federation - Health &amp; Protected Areas strategy;</p> <p>Generic policy areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecosystems services – hphp</li> <li>• Health inequalities</li> <li>• Physical inactivity &amp; Mental ill-health</li> </ul>

	<p>Include information on national organisational policies / strategies, health structures in different countries.</p>
<p>Key Messages</p>	<p>Required for different audiences in the health and environmental sectors, as well as for broader political context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biophilia</li> <li>• Salutogenesis</li> <li>• Nature Deficit Disorder?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green space can help tackle two biggest health issues: physical inactivity; poor mental health</li> <li>• Protected Areas – their Unique Selling Point re: valuable contribution to Health agenda</li> <li>• Protected Areas – a part of the wider role of green space in promoting better public health</li> <li>• Preventative spend; Social Return on Investment; WHO HEAT??</li> </ul>
<p>The health benefits of Green Exercise</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical health &amp; well-being;</li> <li>• Mental health &amp; well-being</li> <li>• Social health – reduced isolation; community cohesion; inter-generational connections</li> </ul> <p>Use of the environment for: prevention; treatment; care Refer to Detailed Evidence base – see <b>Annexes</b></p>
<p>Ways to use Protected Areas as health-promoting assets</p>	<p>Site management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to encourage people to visit parks incl. communication techniques - eg WT postcards</li> <li>incl. basic welcome &amp; visitor facilities</li> <li>incl. easy-going routes designed for people in poor health / disabilities &amp; associated info</li> <li>incl. Volunteer programmes eg ‘Green Gym’</li> </ul> <p>Outreach programmes / initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to take the Parks to the People</li> </ul> <p>Identify target audiences: pre-school; young people; older people; women; disadvantaged / social inclusion groups – BME / immigrants; health groups;</p> <p>Identify partnerships – local partnerships with Health</p>

	<p>sector;</p> <p>Benefits for protected areas.</p> <p><i><b>NB</b> – this is not new work, it just continues &amp; builds on established policies re: promoting the value &amp; benefits of Protected Areas</i></p>
<p>What makes a good Green Exercise project</p>	<p>Clear aims &amp; objectives; planned in co-ordination with health sector; risk assessment; target setting &amp; progression; monitoring &amp; feedback mechanism;</p> <p>Good staff; stable funding ie from Health sector</p> <p>Communications: how to start, a checklist of what does and doesn't work.</p>
<p>Key messages for the public</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green Health – concept; benefits</li> <li>• Value of Protected Areas</li> <li>• How to find info about Protected Areas</li> </ul>
<p><b>Annexes</b></p>	<p>Detailed Evidence base, incl. research on ecosystem services, and other academic research e.g. on health economics to support key messages</p> <p>EUROPARC Federation Case Studies (kept up to date)</p> <p>Useful Resources: web links; key documents, good practice in surveying visitors; good practice in use of data and GIS.</p> <p>Guidance for agreements and partnerships.</p> <p>Guidance / Examples of communication strategies; how to promote ideas.</p> <p>List of contacts</p> <p>Updated information on sources of funding for Green Health projects: EU, national etc</p>

## **Concluding remarks**

Richard Blackman, Development Adviser, EUROPARC Atlantic Isles

In a short summary of the day's presentations and discussions Richard reflected on a number of prominent ideas and themes that had emerged:

### *Connection*

The idea of connection took the following aspects:

- Maintaining our connection with nature and understanding the basis for human health (salutogenesis);
- The importance of having a different connection or a reconnection with nature;
- Policy convergence: connecting different areas of public policy;
- Linking with other persons, professions (health), and organisations.

### *Partnerships*

This links to the concept of connection, but the following aspects of partnerships were highlighted during the day:

- Much of the work in this field, including delivery, is not possible on our own;
- Success and overcoming challenges are dependent on building and maintaining partnership;
- Mainstreaming or integration of nature into health policy requires partnership;

### *Understanding*

Helping people to understand the role of nature was also seen as vital:

- As protected area practitioners we need to convey an understanding of nature and help build that in others;
- Data collection of project results was raised by a number of participants in order to help build the robustness of the evidence base;
- Increasing the understanding of nature in prevention, intervention and health care settings.

### *Accessibility*

Experience from a number of projects has shown that we need to make it easy for people to get to nature and also easy to use.

### *Leadership*

A number of speakers mentioned our leadership role, and this takes the following forms:

- We need to take time to convince people of the benefits, and to change mindsets;
- It is also important that we set out the value of what we are doing;
- Leadership is also a prerequisite for funding acquisition.

**Annex 1**  
**Participants List**

Vita Belavniece, LA Valgums, Latvia  
Giacomo Benelli, Consultant, Italy  
Richard Blackman, EUROPARC Atlantic Isles, UK  
Sandra Eglāja, Nature Conservation Agency, Latvia  
Leelo Kukk, Environmental Board, Estonia  
Evija Kvante, Centre of Disease Prevention & Control, Latvia  
Alan Macpherson, Scottish Natural Heritage, UK  
Riikka Mansikkaviita, Metsähallitus, Finland  
Elle Puurmann, Environmental Board, Estonia  
Susanne Rosenild, Municipality of Vordingborg, Denmark  
Sarah Sawyer, Wye Valley AONB, UK  
Viesturs Serdans, LA Valgums, Latvia  
Nele Söber, EUROPARC Nordic-Baltic Section, Estonia  
Andris Širovs, Nature Conservation Agency, Latvia  
Matti Tapaninen, Metsähallitus, Finland  
Kati Vähäsarja, Metsähallitus, Finland  
Māra Vilcina, Jurmala City Council, Latvia  
Veikko Virkkunen, Metsähallitus, Finland