

Internationalizing academic training in parks and protected area management through the EU's ERASMUS programme

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The management of natural resources and recreational activities in protected areas requires complex strategies and is an important issue for landscape and environmental planners worldwide. The areas concerned range from large, pristine wilderness areas to public park-like structures in urban areas. Conflicts are common wherever different land use activities occur in the same area. In order to successfully address these issues, planners need to acquire a profound knowledge of ecological and sociological methodological skills and the ability to work in multi- and interdisciplinary environments.

Students in the field of environmental planning and related disciplines are the future key players in this professional field. Thus, four European (Leibniz Universität Hannover, Universität für Bodenkultur, Wien, Mendel University, Brno and Wageningen University) and one U.S. university (West Virginia University, Morgantown) decided in 2011 to combine their efforts in internationalizing training in this field. The programme, conducted as a pilot course in 2011, is being funded under the EU's ERASMUS Intensive Programme (IP) scheme in 2012 and has taken place in Hannover and Harz National Park from July 23 to August 4, 2012. Overall, 30 students participated in this effort.

The objective of the course is to help students develop an understanding for the complexity of protected area management and for other disciplines than their own required to develop solutions for the most immanent challenges in this field. For the involved lecturers, the objective is to develop

and enhance teaching methods in a European (and transatlantic) context and to disseminate and publish the findings from the course. Topics covered are habitat management, wildlife conservation, recreational and visitor planning, environmental education, and human dimensions of ecosystem management.

Methods addressed and applied during the programme included ecological (e.g. habitat and species mapping and monitoring), geographical/digital (e.g. application of GIS, computer-based simulation) and sociological (e.g. visitor counts and surveys, conflict management) techniques and skills. Scientists and practitioners from all relevant disciplines, including Harz National Park managers, have contributed to the course.

Results of the course include the development of a joint learning platform with teaching materials on the topic of natural resource management and recreational planning in protected areas throughout Europe, and in the long run, the improvement of teaching methods based on the influence of European and transatlantic exchanges – exemplary integrated management plan for the study area. Overall, the programme intends to contribute to the advancement of protected area management in Europe and elsewhere.

The EU has already confirmed funding for 2013, so the course will be run again, then adding the University of Catania (Italy) to the list of partners.

