

# Ten years of experience in providing wilderness experience opportunities in Europe's certified PAN Parks

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**Abstract** — Today ten years ago, the first steps were taken to realise a marriage between conservation and the tourism industry in the most important wilderness areas of Europe. This initiative awards wilderness areas that meet the highest standards of management for conservation and sustainable tourism development strategies with the PAN Parks quality seal. It can be considered as a gold standard for well- managed protected areas. Based on the PAN Parks principles and criteria and the verification reports, park managers are encouraged to increase the management effectiveness of their protected areas and to plan, provide and maintain high quality recreation opportunities inside the park. Five principles make up the PAN Parks verification scheme, three of which deal with visitor experiences: Visitor management (principle 3), Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy (Principle 4), and Partnerships (Principle 5). Tourism development is used as a means to give economic value to wilderness areas and to create support for conservation. By creating unique and high quality opportunities for wilderness-based recreation, the marriage has proven to be successful as it results in benefits for nature, for communities in and around the protected area and in unique experience opportunities for visitors. This is measured by using mixed methodologies in the Analysis of Perceptions and Attitudes (APA) studies done in 3 of the certified areas. After ten years of working on the development and implementation of the concept in different European countries that cope with different and similar opportunities and obstacles, we can draw interesting lessons learned. Among them: The value of the network and the certificate to the park, local businesses and local people, the principles and criteria as management tools for planning and managing of tourism, providing the (certified) European wilderness experience for different types of tourists, generating revenues through tourism, communication and cooperation with stakeholders

**Index Terms** — Wilderness, network, experiences, Europe, tourism.



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