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# PILOT PROJECTS in ROMANIA, SLOVENIA AND UGANDA

## The final report

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Photo by Tilen Basle

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*The editor is not responsible for linguistic correctness of the record.*

# LOCAL PILOTS FOR BETTER SERVICE IN NATURE PROTECTED AREAS

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## ROMANIA

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We are going to present our outcomes in three steps, namely vision, infrastructure and advertisement.

### 1) VISION

Vision is a point in which we are going to present possible perspectives for the protected Calimani area in a situation where we aren't limited by any resources. Calimani national park has much potential. The park's diverse terrain offers possibilities for mountain biking (downhill), hiking, and the already existing horse riding trips could be further developed as well (carriages). One of the most obvious potentials of the area is its intact nature, mainly well preserved coniferous forests and pit bogs inhabited by many endangered animal and plant species. Biodiversity offers many possibilities for the development of ecotourism, consisting of birdwatching tours, wildlife photography (bears, wolves, lynx) and a guided insight into the park's flora. The park could also be more eventful by promoting the already existing events, such as rhododendron festival, and organising new events such as the market of local products (cheese, clothes), school trips and trail running. Locals could be included in making a mining museum in the abandoned sulphur quarry, as well as the above-listed activities.

### 2) INFRASTRUCTURE

To enhance the accessibility of the area, one might consider the restoration of the existing roads. The necessary infrastructure for the development of biking in the national park is biking trails, bikes for rent and bicycle sheds. Bikes for rent could also solve the problem of the park's inaccessibility (people, accommodated in the park's surroundings, would be able to reach the distant preserved area). Infrastructure for hiking is already sufficient, lacking only (interactive) information boards, which would transform the existing trails into learning trails. The infrastructure for ecotourism is one of the easiest to provide; people could build simple wooden observatories, from which tourists could observe the wildlife without disturbing the ecosystem. Birdwatching observatories could be set in pit bogs and vantage points in the preserved parts of the forest, while observatories for bear photography would be set in the forest clearings on which locals could occasionally bring attractive treats (apples, corn...). One of the most important, now lacking "infrastructures", better described as human resources, are qualified guides. The park should provide educated people with good knowledge of the terrain, which could offer guided tours where tourists could get to know the local flora and fauna. For the local market and the rhododendron festival, one should provide portable stands. For the outdoor mining museum, people who used to work there could provide photos and experiences for the information boards. Another important infrastructural element for the development of ecotourism is accommodation, most easily provided by the transformation of parts of the local houses into bed and breakfast stays.

### 3) ADVERTISEMENT

This is probably the most important step for making the Calimani National Park a tourist destination. Attempting to research the national park online in advance, one finds only meagre descriptions of the protected region, which fail to impress and attract potential visitors. A website ought to be created,

focused only on the National Park, where tabs would be divided to offer different activities for different target groups (families, sportsmen, Eco tourists...). Another area, in which one might consider to invest, is promotive ads - two-minute videos, distributed by Facebook, YouTube or Instagram. Through such videos, Calimani National Park could be more widely presented and might motivate more people to visit the park's website. The bed and breakfast accommodations should be advertised as well, most easily on the website and sites like Booking or RBNB.

#### 4) CONCLUSION

Development of the above-listed ideas would offer a variety of employment opportunities. New jobs would be opened in ecotourism (guides, personnel in the information centre), lots of people could remake parts of their houses into bed and breakfast resorts, where tourists could be accommodated. Bikes would be provided by local people in exchange for a fee, the horse riding tours would be payable as well. Markets and festivals would be an opportunity for the locals to sell their products and to entertain the tourists - people, attending the festivals, would not only buy local products but would also dine and drink, experience the traditional music and dances. All the listed activities would provide jobs and would bring capital in the area, which might encourage young people not to emigrate in bigger cities or abroad, but rather stay in the area or return to their homes once their education is completed. This way the problematic depopulation of peripheral areas, such as the surroundings of Calimani National Park, might decrease and the area might develop.

What is the current political and economic climate in Calimani National Park?

As told by the locals there really aren't a lot of government support or even an interest to improve the situation for the people of Calimani National Park. However based on the emigration of the young and the low life standard any form of support would be nice. Even though the amount of tourism has increased in the past years, if we were to have an organized management plan, we believe that tourism would be much more beneficial for the community.

What will happen if a plan is put into action?

We already created a plan which consists of three steps: vision, infrastructure improvement and advertisement. Ok, so let us look at how does this benefit the local community? Through ecotourism, new ways of income would firstly give the residents of the Calimani region a starting point under which they could create a better internal economy. When tourism increases more jobs would be available for the locals. This includes farming jobs, tourist guides, store employees, bartenders, waiters, etc. .. Consequently, the younger generations would start to return to the village. This happens because they left to search for a better job, but when they can get this at home there will be no need for migration.

Thus, with a starting point, with more jobs and better jobs, with more people moving into the region, this would greatly improve the economic situation. This would lead to an improvement of the villages' facilities for educational and medical purposes.

## **SLOVENIA**

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1. We would recommend some summer camps where children could get more familiar with the techniques of extensive ways of farming. This would include traditional mowing and hay harvesting, greying and cheese production. It would benefit the ecosystem, society in the park - new jobs and prevent children from using their cell phones too much.

2. Raising (a lot of) attention during education (primary and secondary schools) about TNP and its importance - lessons of geography and biology. We cannot have national parks in our state without public awareness of their existence. It would be advisable to invite National Geographic to film a documentary about Slovenia and include TNP. Such media could influence even wider audience and enable the protected areas to gain some funds via donations. The money could be spent by expanding the areas of special levels of protection e.g. buying Pokljuka plateau from the Church (vast forests are currently being badly exploited for commercial logging).

3. One of numerous abandoned villages in Posočje could be transformed into a unique type of museum. Old houses would be renovated and equipped in a traditional way and could serve both as apartments for tourists and museums at once.

We would propose the government to include lessons about TNP into primary school programs and organize state-funded camps in the park. Local community would benefit in new jobs and funds.

## **UGANDA**

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### **1. Wings of Uganda**

Wings of Uganda is a project where organizers (listed below) would provide education about birds which would result in people who would be educated enough to guide tourists interested in birds around Lake Bunyonyi. They would also provide trips for elementary and secondary schools where they would teach children about birds and other animals, plants.

Target group: teachers, secondary schools, universities, tourist centers, Bird life Uganda, environmentalists

Organisers: Bird life Uganda, DOPPS, biology teachers, ornithologists, different universities in Uganda

Programs offered:

- Introduction to ornithology (basic lessons about birds and how to recognise them)
- Classification of birds (colours, breeding, sounds, migratory, non-migratory...)
- Characteristic habitats of species - Evolution of birds
- How to use equipment suitable for bird observations
- Legends, stories about birds - Rules for observation
- Projects for conservation of birds in Lake Bunyonyi
- Crafts (bird houses...)

Equipment needed:

- Binoculars

- books/bird guides/bird atlas
- Telescopes
- Speakers
- Cameras
- Boats

Technicalities and employees:

- Accommodation for all employees and people visiting the school
- Services (food, cleaning, receptions, economists...)
- o Teachers (biologists, geography teachers, science teachers...)
- Drivers

How to promote the school and tours?

- Leaflets
- Brochures
- Website

Aims:

- Make tourist guides for birds.
- Organising an Excursions for schools (Ugandan and other).
- Developed and advertised local Crafts art.
- Connections with other countries and Bird life organisations
- Make information for tourists.

Money resources:

- Donations.
- Bird Life International.
- Bird Life Uganda.
- UNESCO.
- Ministry of education of Uganda.
- Tourist agencies.
- Applying for International calls

**2. Agandi to the art**

Agandi to the art is the name of art school or youth center. We would provide different programs for Ugandan and international students. Because international students would be included this would result in many experiences gained by children visiting our facilities and also international collaborations.

Program:

- Basic program
- Advanced program
- Summer school (international)

Each participant can choose between different art areas, such as music (singing - chore, playing on instruments - orchestra), dancing, painting, crafts and storytelling. Basic and advanced program would only be for Ugandans; however summer program would also be for international children.

Money resources:

- Ministry of education
- Concerts
- Sponsorship
- Donations
- Summer school for international schools

Aims:

- Conservation of culture
- Concerts at the end of programs
- Exchanges with world schools
- International connections

Experience gained:

- Living with Ugandan family (family would earn money)
- Exchanges – Pygmy people included
- Connections with well-known people

### **3. Ecological Farming**

This project would provide space for Ugandan farmers to share their skills and earn extra money. The knowledge about farming would be spread around and provide more information about local environment. Some hacks would be shared into group knowledge as different people from around the lake would meet. There would be a field for growing vegetables, an orchard, a factory and a field for animals providing many working places as well as transportation of the products.

Target population:

- Farmers
- Workers
- Educated/skilled people
- People looking for jobs/knowledge

Program:

- Workshops about effective farming.
- Workshops about making products from their harvest.
- Basic economy lessons for sellers.

Equipment:

- Computer /projectors

- Buildings, field
- Transport (car, boat, tractor..)
- Farming tools and seeds, trees, animals

#### Money resources:

- Sponsors
- World food organizations
- If the initial project would be a success, they would later provide for themselves.

#### Products:

- Home-made textile
- Home-made dairy products
- Fresh food (fruits and vegetables)
- Other products (jams, juices, seedlings...)

#### Aims:

- Provide new jobs.
- Better eating habits.
- Improved local farming.
- Sharing knowledge.

## **A TRANSFERABLE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH FOR EFFICIENT TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT**

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Pedagogical approaches could include education about local traditions from agriculture area: dancing, cooking, grazing, harvesting. Some sport activities can also be taught to the visiting children. These are just wide ideas, but each park should adapt to its own conditions when it comes to activities for children. Here are some suggestions:

- Camp: Back to nature (survival camps for different old children).
- Cam: Conservation of nature as an opportunity (developing understanding of why biodiversity keeps us as human beings).
- Inclusion of field work and outdoor activities into the school curriculum as a tool to educate young about the importance of preserved nature and opportunities it offers to locals as an investment into the future (learning through observation and field measurements).
- Day trips and excursions, thematic days (3 times per year)
- Move school to nature environment (one week long, every second year)
- Capacity building for local protected areas.

Involvement of local youth into protected area management (rangers, guides, volunteers, supporters...) through the organization of thematic youth camps (Science, Art, Sport and culture camp).

Thematic camps would last a week and would involve a group work on different topics. Management authority would build a strong volunteer network among locals and skilled potential employees. The program would also raise awareness among locals in a way of:

- Thematic trails. Set of educational trails for different target groups and demands. Trails would allow visitors to follow trails in a number of nature-friendly ways (hiking, horse riding, mountain biking) while learning about important topics.
- Using Nature as teacher. The program would attract active and responsible visitors while expanding economic opportunities for locals. Trails could also connect local communities around protected areas.

## CONCLUSION

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**This project was fighting against racism, xenophobia, inequalities, and social discrimination through activities that enable sharing the knowledge, skills, and equipment, require interpersonal cooperation and promote the exchange of good practises and innovations.**

In Uganda, the visit of Pygmy village gave us a shocking insight into controversial conditions in which they live. We noticed multiple similarities between the Pygmies, banished from the cut-down forests, and refugees in Europe these days, which do not have their own place to settle down. The project helped to exterminate racism also in wider public, as our work was presented during exhibitions, movie nights and literary activities.

It is natural to be afraid of something that's unknown to you, however with getting to know other countries and nationalities, in this project, we lost fear. This was also achieved with different workshops, where we had to cooperate with each other. All workshops contained participants from all 3 countries, which are why we also had to speak in only common language, English. So each participant had to put effort in that and think how she/he is going to say things in English.

In the project economic/social background of participants families involved were not important. That's how this project fights against social discrimination. Different connections were made throughout the project. We recognised the things we have in common and that are how we made connections. With learning from each other we deepen mutual understanding and respect. For instance, music is enjoyable by everybody and that's where we bonded the most, through dance and singing. Music was most of the times also our "ice breaker". Throughout the activities we also shared our knowledge/skills about different things with others. We shared formal (studies) and informal (manners, values, skills...) knowledge.

We have learned about countries through legends and myths, that's how we got better understanding of behaviour in countries. We think that this project also had a broader impact. Beside the influence it had on all participants, it also influenced our families and our friends. Because we shared our experiences and things we learned in other countries, we could influence what our families/friends thought about

them. Throughout we realised that we are very similar, even though we perhaps thought that we are very different.

The experiences may act as a starting point for further projects resulting in decreased xenophobia and more equality. It was enjoyable by everyone and a lot of international connections were made.



Photo by Zdenka Keuc

## STUDENTS REFLECTION ABOUT THE WORKSHOPS AND FILEDWORK

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Written by Katja Zeilhofer

Each stairway, no matter how steep, leads to another stairway; from one depth to another. There is no final clearing and no last word which would appear as our saviour. Everything is merely an endless pilgrimage through the catacombs of our hearts. And that is precisely what we concerned ourselves with on our fifteen-day expedition to Uganda. We uncovered the hidden fragments of ourselves, we tried to fix and strengthen our tired souls. By what means? In the framework of an Erasmus + project, conveniently titled Never Lose Your Soul, six workshops were constructed in order to approximate the foreign culture. We were discarding western stereotypes while experiencing the country through the eyes of its citizens, therefore it was only to familiarise ourselves with the aspects of their everyday lives, with the essence of their existence.

Music is the entity itself, people are merely an intermediary. To let yourself go, move your hips to the rhythm of the song on the African sand. But no matter how hard we tried, we never fully managed to internalise the beat. Our jumps ended with an awkward landing, but they never seemed to land at all. They soared higher and higher until they reached the heavenly notes scattered around the skyline. It was not until the light-hearted song slowly dripped into our souls that we realized how cold and detached we truly are. When was the last time you spontaneously began singing in a crowded place? When was the last time you danced just for the beauty of it? Precisely.

Dancing is not the only traditional element they are keeping alive. A great effort is made in the area of traditional medicine, which is closely connected with botanic. However, only a few can brag with extensive knowledge in the aforementioned field, the Healer being one of them. When he met his first wife, whose first daughter is now eighty years old, he started practising the art of traditional healing. He is now 105 years old and left with only three younger wives since two had already passed away. Each one gifted him with multiple children, bringing the final count to fifty, although five of his sons have already crossed to the other side. His youngest son is twelve and was born when the man reached the respectable age of 93. The power of healing, as well as the knowledge of herbs, was entrusted to him by God and he will pass them on to his sons.

An important feature of the Lake Bunyonyi area is the Punishment Island. Mrs Mauda, who is now presumably eighty-six years old, was taken to the Punishment Island at the age of twenty after she became pregnant out of wedlock. She had nothing to do but wait for death. Luckily faith had other plans. After four days, a fisherman drove by and she screamed for help. He was a poor man and, knowing the girl's situation, he picked her up, introduced her to his family and married her. And that is precisely what the storytelling workshop concerned itself with, the intertwining of traditions and legends with everyday life.

A much more scientific approach, if we can even talk about science in the given circumstances, was the interview method chosen by the demographic workshop. They took interest in the demographic changes the area is facing, namely, the youth is actively leaving and abandoning rural areas, as well as the country itself due to the lack of job opportunities, which results in an ageing population. We have examined and compared certain trends within different cultural contexts and concluded that in order to tackle the problem, international collaboration is needed.

Our every day began with the first sun rays gently touching our noses. Having to feed a group of twenty five people requires a high level of organizational skills and thank God have we mastered them. Waking up at seven o'clock in order to prepare the dough was not a nuisance but rather became a form of socializing – if one can label a conversation while high a sleep and elbows deep in flour as socializing. By the time chapattis were slowly baking on heated pans, pineapple and mango were cut, bringing freshness and a pop of colour to our table. Add a cup of coffee and a lakeside view and our mornings were complete. Washing up was a peripheral concern.

In the background, birds were chirping and singing - a paradise for the birdwatchers. Over half of all bird species in Africa can be found here, making it one of the richest birding destinations on the continent. Crammed into this diminutive country is an astonishingly rich diversity of habitats, from the scenic shores of Uganda's many great lakes to the lush forests in the north. It is no coincidence that Bunyonyi

means the place of little birds, so it's no wonder those are exactly what we continuously ran into. Thus the birdwatching group disappeared for hours at an end.

Lake Bunyonyi is considered the crossroad of cultures. Since we have familiarized ourselves with the Ruchiga people, we have deemed it only fair to embark on a forty minute boat ride towards Congo in order to reach the Pigmy village. Upon arrival we were swept up in a tornado of smiling children who grabbed our hands and started pulling us up the hill, higher and higher until we reached the very top where the lake and the sky kissed. After catching our breath we continued with a tour of the village. Here is the school, here is the square, here is the chief's first house and there the second. Our tour commenced with a display of their traditional dance, which we got to join.

A boat ride and a short drive led us to a nearby town, where we familiarised ourselves with the local heritage by visiting the museum of the Ruchiga people. However, in order to get to know the country, you first need to meet its people. Second stop: The local market. African market places are primarily used for marketing and trading, however they are often visited for other purposes as well. Local markets provide a place to meet a significant other, settle a legal dispute, catch the latest news, or for religious activities. In our case –to familiarise ourselves with the locals. Our urban adventure proceeded with a visit to the local orphanage, part of the so called KASA program. Once more we were overflowed with children of all ages. Seeing them running around, chasing a ball and dancing in circles around us lured smiles to each of our faces.

One might think that with the transition from the dreamlike greens of Lake Bunyonyi to the dry Savanna, this would change. However, trust us, it did not. It just took a different form. The water's blue became the sand's yellow, the green leaves became cactus spikes and the cows turned into chimpanzees hidden in the treetops. Discovering the Savanna was, first and foremost, tiresome. How could it not be, the fresh mountain air disappeared and our lungs were suddenly filled with something hot and heavy. The difference in vegetation was once more observable at our final stop, the botanical garden, where we forgot all about the heat and rather soaked in the smells of different spices. Our African adventure was nearing its end. The last dinner, the last shower in our dysfunctional showers and the last 8-hour drive.

Respect follows from trust. Respect towards the people, whom we did not only share goods with, but also the lack of former and, more importantly, respect towards the people, whom we shared our time with. Humour, which reduces tension, when it reaches its critical point, grows from hope. It reduces our endless need for knowledge, control and having. If we learned anything at all, it was the unnecessary of material goods. Somewhere in the middle, we figured out, that it is not pessimism and optimism who walk hand in hand, but rather our uncontrollable need to judge and to impose our ideas on others, claiming it is all for a greater cause. Therefore, opening our hearts to those, who are already happy if only they are not hungry and cold, did more good to us than you could ever imagine.