

Nature and Society

Connecting people and nature

Knowledge of ecology is not enough to stop the decline of biodiversity – we need to understand society

Protecting nature and biodiversity means dealing with social processes and dynamics:

- Sustainable management of biodiversity requires changes in individual and institutional behaviour;
- Support for nature conservation varies from group to group and from country to country, and is linked to social, cultural and economic factors;
- Implementing biodiversity and nature management plans usually involves communication and negotiation with a wide range of stakeholders;
- Europe's cherished landscapes and biodiversity developed over centuries through the interaction of social practices and ecosystems.

Many organizations involved in the protection of nature and biodiversity have realized that they need to know as much about society as they know about ecology to be effective. Nature conservation is already becoming more social: communication is considered essential, and more efforts are made to involve stakeholders at an early stage. Increasingly, the social sciences are becoming involved in investigating issues related to nature and biodiversity.

Bridging the gap between society and nature is not always easy

- Nature conservationists are looking for clear guidance and advice on how to communicate with different stakeholder groups;
- Conflicts concerning the management of nature and biodiversity can run deep – mediating and facilitating towards a solution can be a difficult and slow process;
- Nature conservation professionals are often unaware of what social sciences can offer;
- On the other hand, many social scientists still think that they have nothing to contribute to nature conservation and biodiversity management.

What ECNC can offer

ECNC has fifteen years of experience in working on the interface between the social and the ecological. ECNC has organized programmes to train professionals working in nature conservation and biodiversity in communication and stakeholder involvement. ECNC works with a network of experts that have an outstanding track record in applying insights from the social sciences to problems related to the management of nature and biodiversity.

ECNC can:

- give advice on the development of effective communication programmes;
- organize and facilitate stakeholder consultation processes;
- provide training in communication and negotiation for conservation professionals;
- carry out research and studies that combine social and natural sciences.

Examples of activities as part of ECNC's 'Nature and Society' programme

...ECNC organizes and facilitates communication and public awareness programmes. ECNC has achieved significant gains in the levels of involvement of regional and local authorities in Europe within the framework of the Countdown 2010; to halt the loss of biodiversity by the year 2010.

...ECNC provides training in communication and stakeholder involvement. For instance, ECNC's capacity-building programme in South-East Europe focuses on training the staff of nature conservation organizations in the professional use of communication as a policy tool.

...ECNC coordinates interdisciplinary research and studies that combine social and natural sciences for the sake of biodiversity conservation. ECNC identified the priority needs for policy-relevant knowledge in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem management.