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NATURE INTERPRETATION - PROVIDING PEOPLE WITH NEW PERSPECTIVES

Regional workshop in Varna, Bulgaria will train experts and environmental activists how to create popular nature trails in protected territories

A regional workshop entitled 'How to Interpret Black Sea Nature' will bring together experts, nature lovers and environmental activists from six countries in Varna, Bulgaria on 20 - 21 April 2012. The event is organized by the Black Sea NGO Network, environmental NGO from Varna, Bulgaria and is part of the project "Interpretative Trails on the Ground - Support to the Management of Natural Protected Areas in the Black Sea Region (InterTrails)" funded by the European Union through the Joint Operational Programme "Black Sea Basin 2007 - 2013". The project includes activities associated with management and conservation of protected territories on regional scale.

What is nature interpretation all about?

It is an answer to the rapid growth of nature-based tourism and an effective means of managing the tourist use of natural resources. Tourist operators being well aware of the awakening interest of people in the environment and wildlife offer a variety of attractions based on the recreational use of nature. Protected territories and especially parks of nature increasingly employ indirect mechanisms of management which do not place physical or legal barriers before visitors. Opening up for tourists, the park managements rather seek to reduce inappropriate behaviour of visitors on voluntary basis through education. Using nature interpretation, an interactive educational activity, to manage nature-based touristic activities is widely utilized.

Since the late 1950s various definitions have been provided about 'nature interpretation'. In general, the definitions stress on the interactive presentation of knowledge, aiming to reveal meanings and relationships between original objects of the natural surroundings. Interpretation involves first hand experience, not a simple account of information and facts. The use of interpretation has become a widespread management technique in the park management profession and is now a specialist subject within many natural resource management disciplines.

The focus of the project

is to design and create interpretative trails in protected territories in the Black Sea region. The meaning of the name given to the trails implies that the visitors to the parks need to have the significance of nature interpreted to them. The trails are routes inside the park which comprise nature landmarks and specific items of interest to be shown and their significance explained to the visitors. Those can include



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plant and tree species specific to the region or the area. If there are endangered species of plant and animal life, they can also be included in the interactive presentation. Explanations about habitats, voices of birds, footsteps and traces of animals can also form part of the 'interpretation'. Each trail can include about 20 or more points to be addressed in the interpretative explanation. It can be delivered in foreign languages as well depending on the interest in the trail.

Tourist operators in the Black Sea countries, especially in the coastal area, are responding to the increasing demand for enjoyable nature-based attractions. For the time being these attractions are not a big section of the market. In terms of sustainable use of the nature resources, it seems that the aim of the private tourist operators and the government environmental agencies have one common objective - to allow the proper recreational use of the environment while taking care to protect that environment from deterioration and degradation. The achievement of the right balance between the recreational use of the environment and its protection remains a true challenge.

At the workshop

the participants will be acquainted with the principles of interpretation and its learning concepts and will be provided with examples of best practice from round the world. The partners will have the opportunity to share plans of the trails in their own countries, ideas for their design and future use. The trainers envisage the elaboration of a draft concept for one trail for every country. A study trip to the Shoumensko Plateau Nature Park and its visitors' centre with interactive exhibition and outdoor interpretative site 'Fairy Tale Trail' and outdoor classroom for children will finalize the event. Both the workshop's participants and the project in general will benefit by gaining new insights into the complex world of interpretation. Once having understood what good interpretation is all about, one is on the right track for telling compelling stories, developing rewarding programs and creating popular nature trails.

Partners in the project are five non-governmental organizations from the Black Sea basin countries. Beneficiary is the Black Sea NGO Network (www.bsnn.org) and the partners are NGO Mare Nostrum, Constanta Romania, the Black Sea Branch of the Ukrainian Environmental Academy of Science of Odessa, Ukraine, the Foundation for Sustainable Development of Cahul, Moldova and the Black Sea EcoAcademy of Batumi, Georgia. The length of the project is two years and its total cost is 396 912.00 euro. The project motto is Nature without borders and its website is at www.trails.bsnn.org . The project aims to raise public awareness of the coastal environment and its problems, including human interactions and effects. It can also help people in the regional communities utilize better the opportunities for sustainable development and protection of nature and the historical and cultural heritage through management of protected territories.

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