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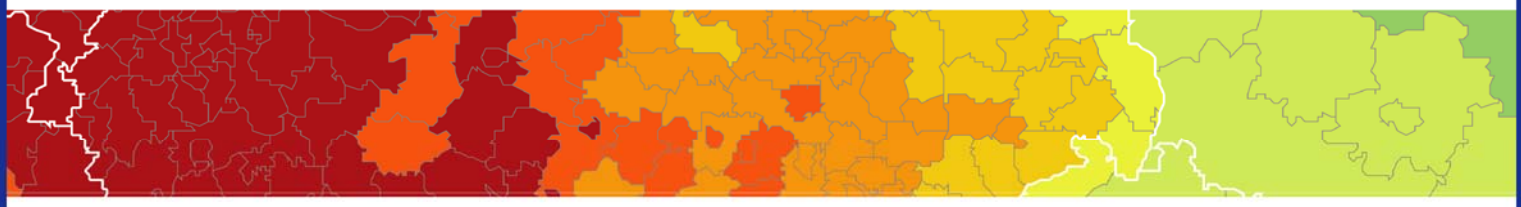

LinkPAs - Linking networks of protected areas to territorial development

Targeted Analysis

Synthesis Report

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Authors
Maria Prezioso, Maria Coronato, Angela D'Orazio, Michele Pigliucci, University of Rome "Tor Vergata" (Italy)
Massimo Sargolini, Maria Teresa Idone, Paolo Perna, Ilenia Pierantoni, University of Camerino (Italy)
Andrea Omizzolo, Luca Cetara, Thomas Streifeneder, Filippo Favilli, European Academy of Bozen-Bolzano – Eurac Research (Italy)
Michael Huber, Michael Jungmeier, Hanns Werner Kirchmeir, Institute of Ecology (Austria)
Andrieu Julien, Briche Elodie, Merad Myriam, Vignal Matthieu, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (France)
Miglena Zhiyanski, Margarita Georgieva, Maria Glushkova, Rositsa Yaneva, Forest Research Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Bulgaria)

Advisory Group
ESPON EGTC: Michaela Gensheimer (Project Expert), Akos Szabo (Financial Exper), Ilona Raugze (Director), Piera Petruzzi (Outreach)

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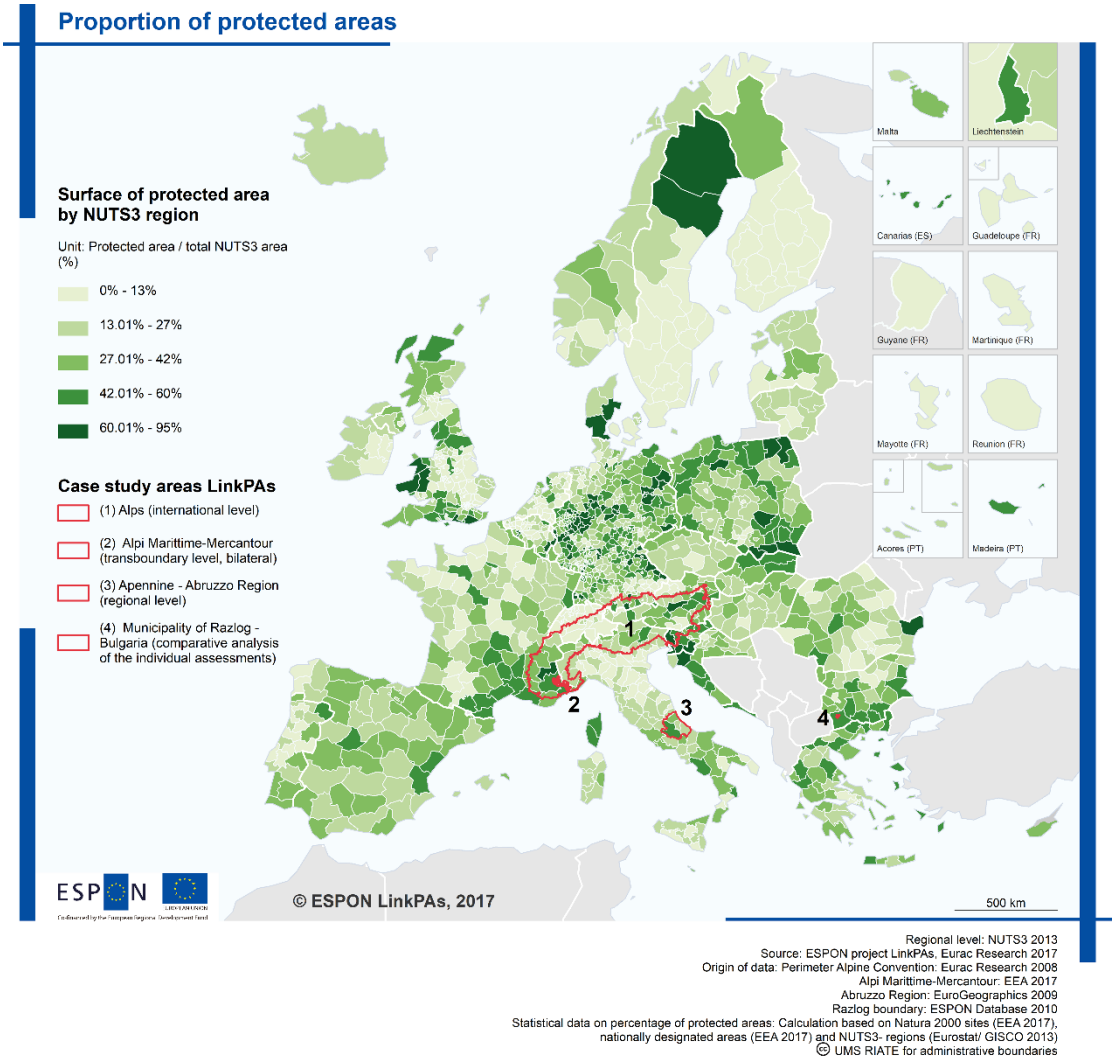
Contact: info@espon.eu

LinkPAs - Linking networks of protected areas to territorial development

From Protected Areas (PAs) to Networks of Protected Areas (NPAs): a soft governance mechanism to implement territorial development

Countries and regions have different ways of identifying and designating protected areas. PAs in Europe (Map. 1) are legally established in order to achieve different management objectives strictly linked to nature and biodiversity conservation.

Map 1: Proportion of protected areas



PAs are increasingly being designated and managed as systems, rejecting the traditional view that regards protected areas as ‘islands of nature’, fenced off from the dangerous outside world. The objectives of biological and cultural diversity are integrated by social and economic aims, e.g. the provision of ecosystem services for settlements and human well-being. The recent new Action Plan of the EU Commission (Action Plan for Nature, People and the Economy, EC 2017), devoted to reaching the EU 2020 goals on biodiversity, identifies the following as its priority: “ensuring better coherence of biodiversity conservation with broader socio-economic objectives”. In order to achieve this aim, in many cases Networks of PAs (NPAs) emerged as a governance instrument in the framework of territorial sustainable development.

NPAs are formed by PAs. The areas are considered the basic element in the planning rationale as the target of a specific rule as well as the elements of envisaged spatial structure. On the other hand, NPAs can also be considered as collective actors in the planning domain when they play as a territorial organization formed by managing authority of single PAs. So, NPAs can be considered a passive element or active element in territorial development strategies. In addition, NPA management and sector development strategies are generally integrated through planning instruments (according to national/regional legislation), which enable an NPA to adopt shared mitigation measures and policies so as to facilitate, in particular, climate change adaptation. These strategies are also able to help bio-diversity conservation across Europe, since they respect the specific characteristics of each area and its local identity. NPAs need to be politically sopported at European and national/regional level in order to encourage the local stakeholders' action in dealing with the challenges they currently face.

Governance Model: a crucial issue

The role of the NPAs in defining and implementing sustainable territorial development strategies and policies has been investigated by LinkPAs Project focusing on the relationships between the different NPAs and the territorial system, analysing existing institutional contexts and governance models adopted. The LinkPAs project has compiled an overview of the different situations that have been reviewed across Europe. Four main types of institutional set-ups have been observed: 1) Only one national network depending on a single agency is present; 2) More than one national networks depending on different agencies are present; 3) One or more national and subnational networks are present; 4) Only subnational networks are present.

The models of governance for NPAs can be characterised by: different levels of relationships between PAs; the presence of an institutional framework for NPAs activities and the ability to involve institutional bodies as well as other actors, be they public or private and reflecting different interests; the specificity of the activities in terms of themes and scope. In this sense, NPAs refer to a **general model of multi-level governance** able to involve a large number of interdependent actors such as NGOs, the private sector, scientific networks and international institutions.

By looking at the Stakeholder territories under scrutiny, this LinkPAs targeted analysis has identified 4 different governance models that can describe the different types of NPAs (formal and informal) that can be found across Europe. NPAs can be international (e.g. ALPARC), transbourdary (e.g. ALPI MARITIME – MERCANTOUR), regional (e.g. ABRUZZO REGION) or local (e.g. RAZLOG MUNICIPALITY).

Main goals, challenges and recommendations at International Level: ALPARC

The **ALPARC**'s interests have focused on sharing experiences among PAs and regional and local bodies in charge of environmental policies as well as on obtaining inputs for development of pilot actions at the pan-Alpine level, also through existing platforms (e.g. Platform Ecological

Networks of the Alpine Convention) and contributions in the implementation of the EUSALP Action Plan. The LinkPAs project framework has allowed to list those elements that can help to develop ALPARC's action, and other similar NPAs. Hence, generally speaking, this type of NPAs can be encouraged to trigger further regional development, if in turn they reinforce their network's members' active participation in common projects and cooperation activities (be they transborder and local) to develop and disseminate the main goals and results achieved. Moreover, such NPAs need to be formally acknowledged and their institutional role in establishing working boards with the Regions needs to be reinforced. This in turn can ensure they obtain adequate funds. Such relations may increase awareness among regional and other authorities regarding the impact that policy actions can have on these NPAs. Other communication and dissemination activities as publications, conferences and workshops could help to raise awareness among stakeholders. In this context, NPAs can prove their strength in demonstrating how stakeholders can take advantage from sharing common interests, exchange experiences and technical and scientific competences to as to tackle the same issues they may face. It goes without saying that NPAs can consequently bring together different public and private stakeholders, thus representing a wider range of protected areas, and expanding their scope beyond the single PAs. As a result, NPAs can facilitate the relations between single PAs and regional authorities and their participation to the planning and regional development processes. Lastly, NPAs encourage the development of EU projects, for and with PAs, and the procurement of funds that otherwise could not be obtained. The main weakness of these NPAs is the scarcity of dedicated human and economic resources that consequently implies the discontinuity of the network's activities and thus the absence of long-term program and still little project and planning work, in relation to which networks usually do not take leading role. Moreover, whilst the heterogeneous participation in the NPAs is an advantage, it also implies administrative and legal differences hard to overcome, as well as incoherence with the PAs' main institutional goals (mainly conservation) that are often overlooked. Also, these NPAs seem to struggle in participating in networks at regional level, which instead would facilitate an overall view also of the local realties. As for the effective communication of the outcomes of these NPAs, common promotional activities have demonstrated to be worth considering. For instance, using the web (and social media) to improve the PAs network is a viable solution: official websites of regional authorities and other entities as the Alpine Convention and national and international associations have already been used in this sense. Moreover, publishing technical and scientific publication reporting on these NPAs' achievements has also demonstrated to be important, along with the promotion of NPA-related events and exhibition, seeking the involvement of the wider public, institutions and the media. Shared and coordinated communication strategies targeting local and external actors are therefore highly recommended.

Main goals and recommendations at transbourdary level: ALPI MARITIME MERCANTOUR

The EGTC European Park Alpi Marittime Mercantour is particular interested in reinforcing the mandate of the EGTC, also fostering transborder cooperation in relation with the dialogue among protected areas and territories at local level, implementation of existing policies and strategies for nature conservation, develop pilot actions at regional and cross-border levels (Italy-France) for the creation of green jobs. The LinkPAs project has highlighted that EGTC is the right tool for managing trans-boundary Protected Areas Networks. As a matter of fact, starting with preliminary collaboration activities, and then creating a real European Park, the Marittime-Mercantour has by now set the example in terms of trans-boundary management of biodiversity and natural resource. Within this Park, its protected areas have built a network based on an EGTC, while the main economical actors have built their own network via a European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) called “EUROCIN, Le Alpi del mare-les Alpes de la mer”. This group is driven by share economic interests, but it does not focus particularly on SMEs as such, nor it does on green economy. Yet, they already display and support some level of mobility, which is also linked to sustainable tourism. Creating stronger links between EGTC and EEIG is highly recommended in order to conceive a long term, sustainable economic management. However, these protected areas have well-defined missions that cannot be extended because of their lack of authority in this regard. In addition, they are already under a good deal of pressure as they try to reach their objectives via continuously shrinking public budgets. For this reason, it is very important to remark that protected areas are territorial reference points but not actors of economic development. They attempt to encourage good practices as developed by municipalities regions, or economic actors, but they are not directly responsible for economy or political decisions.

Main goals and recommendations at Regional Level: Abruzzo Region

The **Abruzzo Region** is interested in how to implement national strategies on green economy at regional and local level; this can be achieved by formally establishing a regional NPA that can coordinate national, regional and local PAs (multilevel governance). This institutionalised organisation may act as a lobbying body to covey PA-related topics to a broader policy audience; in addition, it can offer technical support to measure territorial impacts of existing strategies for mountain areas (e.g. Italian Strategy for Inner Areas). The exiting NPAs could be encouraged to contribute to triggering regional development further, in particular by promoting activities and projects that can help to achieve common goals and obtain funds. The NPAs should therefore acquire more negotiating power and be allowed to participate in and address regional planning processes. Moreover, more effective and efficient management of the resources, creating employment as well, could be provided by these very NPA.

In order to make regional and other authorities more aware of the impact that policy actions can have on NPAs, it is necessary to promote and facilitate the relations between PAs and Italian regions through consultations, debates, permanent working tables, etc. In general, the NPAs should strengthen their communication and promotion strategies so as to support their

members and disseminate the results they have achieved. This targeted analysis has brought the importance of defining the institutional role of NPAs to the fore, as it can in turn help to formalise their involvement in the planning processes and ensure that their activities are financed. As for the Abruzzo Region's willingness to develop a trans-regional network in the Apennine area, it is suggested that Abruzzo look to the example set by ALPARC in promoting pilot actions in the Alpine area.

Main goals and recommendations at Local Level: Razlog Minucipality

The **Razlog Municipality** can seize the opportunity to develop territorial strategies based on best practices (e.g. in the tourism sector and management of biodiversity), strengthen cooperation between two national parks within its borders (National Rila Parks and National Pirin Park) and expand into wider international networks of mountain areas (e.g. Network of Emblematic Mediterranean mountains). To do this, the Razlog Municipality should focus on:

- laying down a more clearly defined set of regulations and norms guarantee territorial conservation (as they are currently lacking or deficient);
- better referring to and integrating the acts and laws that set the legal framework of the NPAs;
- introducing additional measures to support climate change mitigation in their plans;
- implementing better regulation management processes to enhance tourism and construction activities, for instance by establishing well-defined restrictions regarding the number of visitors and vehicles that are granted access to the glacier area called "Seven Rila lakes" and its surrounding territories;
- disseminating their park-related activities among the local populations via social media or organizing regular seminars, workshops, lectures (with the involvement of scholars and researchers);
- establishing a network of (experimental) observation plots that will assess the dynamics and the ecological conservation status of forest habitats - more efforts are needed to identify specific measures for overall environmental improvement.

Understanding NPAs to integrate them into territorial policies

In the framework of European NPAs, LinkPAs investigates Protected Areas (PAs) within four stakeholder regions - ALPARC, Alpi-Marittime Mercantour; Abruzzo Region, Razlog Municipality - that have joined different NPAs) according to their specific *territorial characteristics* (e.g. PAs typologies, biodiversity, cultural heritage and tourism, ecoservices, etc.), *institutional structure* (e.g. legal status, governance models, …), *geographical specificity and diversity* (e.g. mountain with low accessibility, the population, poor services of general interest) and *geographical location* (within the scope of application of an international treaty).

Examining 16 of the networks available across Europe has highlighted that:

1. *NPAs are the main tool for implementation of Green Infrastructures (GI) as they often include stepstones and nodes within the GI-networks. NPAs are able to play a key role in GI implementation policy at European, national and regional level.*

2. *A clear definition of the role, mandate and function of NPAs is crucial for transcending their boundaries in influencing territorial sustainable development. GI policy can strengthen the role of PAs, and the formal involvement of NPAs (e.g. through statutes, assigned observers, recognition as stakerholder) is crucial (Observer, Working Group Leader, Macroregional Strategies, Regional Strategies) to improve PAs' strategic frameworks.*
3. *NPAs make use of joint projects to create their own identity and build new partnerships within other policy sectors*
4. *If NPAs are recognised as part of public administration structures, they may be entitled to establishing advisory boards involving regional stakeholders (at local or regional level). This can be an effective means to improve communication among policy sectors.*
5. *NPAs should strengthen their role as agents to promote sustainable/green economic sectors, particularly their core sectors, i.e. ecological connectivity and knowledge exchange. NPAs can play an important role in defining common standards for tourism, hiking, green labels, Natura 2000 management. Stakeholder territories should make use of their NPAs to create strong sustainable and regional tourism brands in line with their own territorial objectives.*

Trans/International EU funded projects are among the most efficient instrument for NPAs implementation projects, particularly within transnational and transregional areas. Programmes with an intersectoral focus, explicitly addressing NPAs or addressing specific natural spaces (e.g. forests, wetlands) would strengthen NPAs substantially. Related calls could also be linked with the macroregional strategies (e.g. EUSALP, EUSDR).

In transboundary areas with similar natural challenges, NPAs are a promising tool to overcome administrative boundaries and often the only option to develop joint transboundary standards.

6. *NPAs should support the adoption of ecoservices accounting within the framework of territorial diversity* . NPAs, particularly within mountain areas can play a key role in the ongoing debate regarding ecoservices accounting as instruments to ensure sustainability at regional level. Therefore, as core bodies within the GI policy, NPAs could be well suited to disseminating best practices and encouraging the exchange of experiences, as well as supporting the development of appropriate project solutions favouring access to European programs and funds.
7. *NPAs should support the designing and/or implementation of policy instruments (Regulatory instruments (command & control), Economic instruments, Information) to involve local business in territorial development*

Each NPA model of governance described above can help to implement and/or design some specific types of policy instruments, be they regulatory, economic and information and communication-driven. This can be done in cooperation with regional/national authorities and according to specific development strategies (e.g. Smart Specialisation); however, each NPA needs to ensure they have adequate governance capacities to manage the already existing policy instruments.

8. *NPAs should promote professional and vocational training to improve capacity building within their institutions, which can in turn support the development and growth of SMEs within PAs and their surrounding territories*

The NPAs are often the only bodies able to transfer best-practices from one area to another. This is particularly relevant for NRM topics. In this context, a reinforced role of NPAs in training activities is also useful to increase employment opportunities (e.g. by eco-services related development). The training function will gain in weight in future as territorial strategies tend to focus on integrated and macroregional areas (e.g. GI-Strategy, river basin or watershed-based strategies).

9. *NPAs should enhance their role in implementing Integrated Territorial Investment, Structural Funds (ESIF) and EU Infrastructural Plans to help PAs management in mountain area.*

The service sector attracts private investment, especially when dealing with research, agriculture, tourism and cultural heritage valorisation. An NPA's organisational structure should include experts able to manage economic and financial instruments linked to the economic valorisation of natural resources (e.g. support local employment within natural resources sectors). In a new scenario in which the NPAs' role is formally recognised, their *territorial capability* can be legitimated through national/regional policies, particularly by sectoral policies with a major impact at the regional and local level. Frameworks can be provided to help regional and national programmes to: address development opportunities and challenges within PAs; encourage cooperation between programmes that operate in the same mountain ranges.

How to integrate the management of NPAs into sectoral development strategies

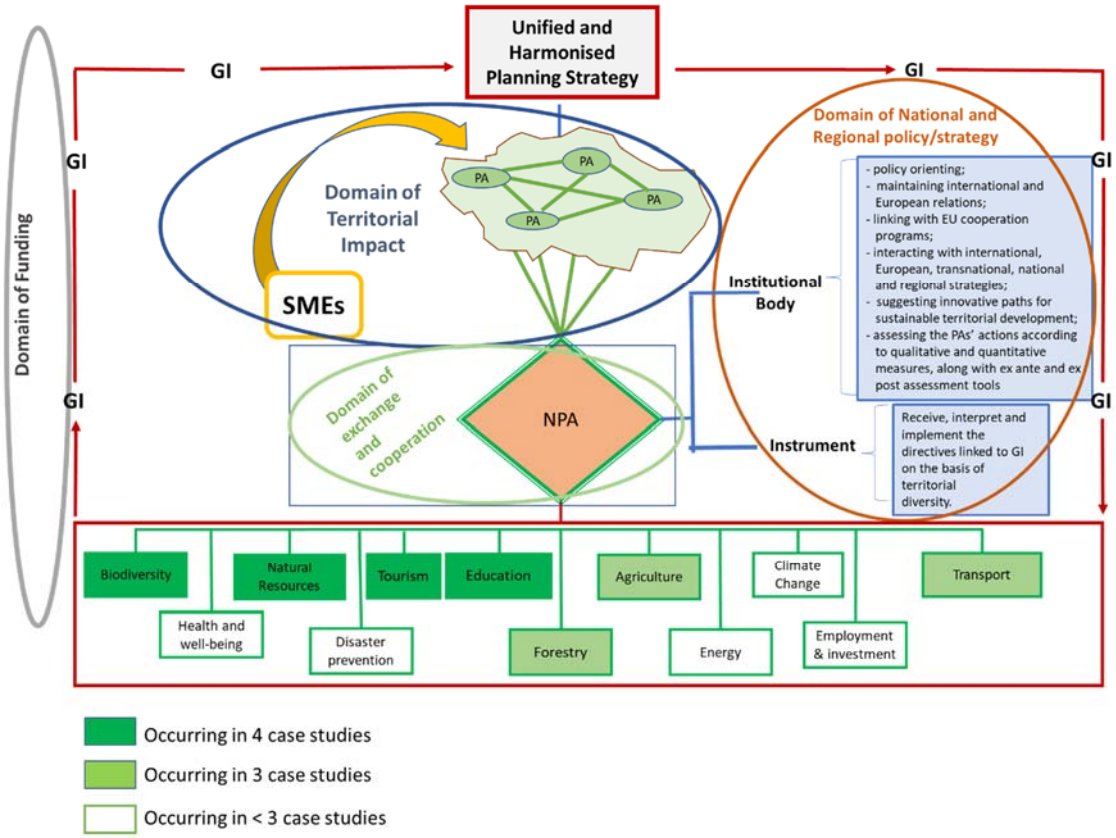
The LinkPAs Project has analysed the existing NPAs within different case studies by considering the following common domains: **territorial impact; policy and strategy; cooperation and exchange; funding.** The objectives of the GI strategy can be better achieved if the NPAs become fully involved in decision-making processes; however, this may be possible only if NPAs are recognised as institutional bodies that can work to implement government policies (Fig. 1).

The NPAs management model developed in Figure 1 considers how to integrate NPAs in regional and national policies/strategies (NPAs as institutional bodies and NPAs as instrument); moreover, it evaluates how to best integrate the SMEs (and local actors) within PAs into a mechanism of cooperation and change to implement those activities (sectors) that seek to foster territorial development.

The sectors where NPAs impact on are related to the GI insertion in mainstream policies. These policy areas include: Nature/Biodiversity; Spatial planning; Urban policy; Agriculture; Forestry; Tourism and leisure; Transport infrastructure; Energy; Water/flood management and disaster risk reduction; Marine and coastal policy and Climate change. Considering that the NPAs are

the backbone of European and national ecological networks, the NPAs play a major role in the agriculture, forestry, soil conservation and water sectors, underscoring those functions that have increased tree cover on land, which can prevent erosion, and flooding, as well as the protection of water supplies. Some policy sectors, on which the NPAs seem to have a significant impact, within the stakeholder regions, emerge: Biodiversity; Conservation; Tourism and Recreation; and Education. In addition, close links can be found in relation to Agriculture and Forestry in order to promote multifunctional resilient agriculture and forestry.

Fig. 1: The NPA structure according to a unified and harmonised planning strategy framework



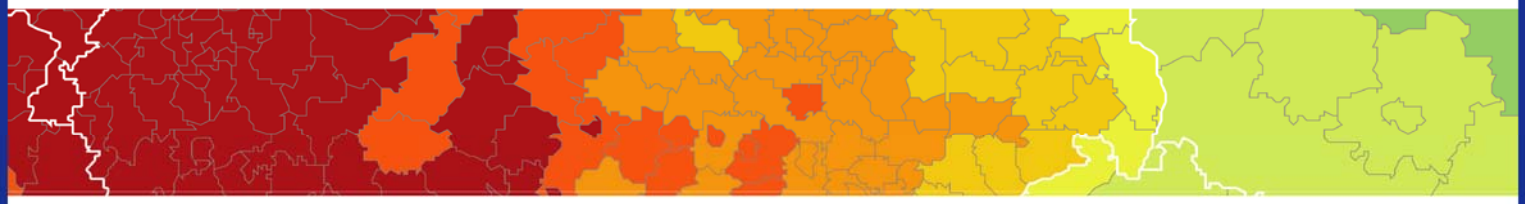
Source: ESPON LinkPAs project eleaboration 2018

NPAs are also linked to investment and employment when it comes to promoting a better image of NPAs themselves; NPAs contribute to enhancing Transport by encouraging sustainable travelling (e.g. multimodal links and integration of transport systems). Lastly, NPAs are connected to the ecoservices accounting in order to improve the territorial resilience.
NPAs can influence policy-making processes in several ways and at different levels. Two major issues clearly emerge from the analysis of EU and stakeholders territories: *how to preserve territorial diversity* and *how to develop a common territorial policy (or policies*).

NPA policies must always take into account the geographical diversity inherent to mountain regions and make sure to invest in it. Climate change adaptation policies have certainly contributed to this so far. NPAs seek support at the EU/national level for reinforcing social models by means of eco-services, reducing tax pressures on SMEs within the PAs, particularly

in mountain areas. To achieve this goal, it is important to consider the role that SMEs can play in exploiting eco-technologies, which should be harnessed in order to enhance the quality of life and renewal of contiguous areas. NPAs should therefore help to design and implement policy instruments that can be used to involve the private sector, particularly SMEs related to policy sectors on which NPAs exert some influence.

The active role of PAs by NPAs implies moving towards a joint capitalization. In few words, NPAs should try to harmonise the currently fragmented situation affecting their territorial natural capital. To do this, it is necessary for the many existing actors to work together and commit to ensuring their full involvement in project development and planning.



ESPON 2020 – More information

ESPON EGTC
4 rue Erasme, L-1468 Luxembourg - Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
Phone: +352 20 600 280
Email: **info@espon.eu**
www.espon.eu, **Twitter**, **LinkedIn**, **YouTube**

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