



Article

The Network of Protected Areas (NPA) as an Instrument to Implement Cross-Border Public Services

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Abstract: Polycentric development, territorial cohesion, and territorial diversity are some of the main principles supported at the European level for reducing regional disparities and for making territories more resilient and diversified, which strengthens the competitiveness of Europe in the global economy. This research article, starting from the final results of the ESPON Linking Networks of Protected Areas to Territorial Development (LinkPAs) project, considers that the protected areas (PAs) are a territorial unit able to connect—in a polycentric approach—the different territorial aspects (economic, social, environmental) present in an area to implement cross-border public services (CPS) to share in a larger territorial context through a network of protected areas (NPA). Toward this aim, this paper suggests applying the NPA management model developed in the ESPON LinkPAs project to CPS to assess if a soft governance mechanism is able to efficiently and sustainably manage the CPS.

Keywords: network of protected areas; polycentric development; green infrastructures; territorial development; territorial cohesion; cross-border services

1. Introduction

The extension of protected areas in Europe is very large, and it has been investigated by the ESPON “Linking Networks of Protected Areas to Territorial Development” (LinkPAs) project. The evidence shows that the PAs are the “backbone” of the EU green infrastructures (GIs) strategy supporting the ecosystem services, green economy policies, and climate change mitigation.

Protected areas (PAs) management and territorial development strategies generally appear integrated into planning tools (in accordance with national/regional legislation) as well as the GI. According to a functional and polycentric approach, the PAs act as a pole of development within a larger area that need to be managed by a network. The PAs, organized in a network, are configured as a network of protected areas (NPA).

The soft governance mechanism for the NPAs developed in ESPON LinkPAs is able to go over the administrative and political borders of PAs (limit of territorialism) [1]. This final result is implemented here, looking at cross-border public services (CPS) (e.g., tourism, transport, healthcare, education, etc.) to share at international, national, and subnational levels.

Toward this aim, this paper considers the protected areas as *territorial units for territorial development*, and stresses the need to use the natural (territorial) border to better identify the specific territorial needs. Finally, the NPA management model developed in the LinkPAs project [2] will be linked to CPS to arrive at some general remarks and suggestions.