

## “Integration of specially protected nature territories of Latvia in spatial plans»

### Framework

Latvia wishes to develop a system that improves the integration of protected areas into the spatial planning system. The Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia is leading a project on this issue. A part of the project is to exchange experiences with experts and stakeholders within this field in Norway. Oppland County Council is the partner in Norway. About half of the project is implemented per today. On behalf of the Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia the consultancy firm Grupa93 has written the report *“Development of concepts and methodology for the integration of SPNT nature protection plan requirements into local municipal spatial planning documents”*. Eastern Norway Research Institute has been asked by Oppland County Council to comment on this report. We are researchers within planning and geography with thorough knowledge of environmental and spatial planning in Norway. We do not have any earlier experience with Latvia, so our comments are based on the information given in the mentioned report and our experiences from Norway, and also from some other European countries.

### The report

The report gives a description of specially protected nature territories and the spatial planning system, results of an evaluation (including assessment of documents and a survey), and, and some conclusions and proposals/recommendations. On a general level the report seems to be a solid work with reasonable judgments, conclusions and recommendations. We have these main comments to the report:

- Latvia has 683 SPNT, many of them small and/or where very little activity is supposed to take place. The development of NPP, and integration into spatial plans, should focus on more extensive areas with relevance for land use, recreations, and tourism etc; in short activities of importance for rural/regional development. This also seems to be the case in Latvia. In nature reserves, at least in Norway, “nothing” is supposed to happen, so there is not much need for planning and integration, except for basic regulations, and that these regulations and areas are mapped in local spatial plans and known of by planners etc.
- The report is skillfully devised, but also quite “technical” in terms of finding a system where the documents (NPP and SDP documents) are better integrated through for

example including chapters from NPP-documents into SPD documents. This also makes the timing of planning processes in time important. In Norway this “practical” integration is solved by showing protected areas in spatial plans as “zones requiring special consideration”, and in the regulations it is given a reference to the at any time prevailing plans and regulations for the protected areas (given in NPPs). No part of the plan and regulations (NPPs) are written into the local spatial plan. This makes local planning simpler, and eliminates the problem of coordination in time. What is fundamental though, is that local stakeholders (politicians, land-owners, developers etc.) have easy access to the NPPs, and the NPPs are well known and informative for local spatial planning processes and policy decision making.

- The static, inflexible or “frozen” state of the NPPs is known to be a challenge also in Norway. Also in Norway there are no regulations/laws that secure regularly reviews of NPPs. This is a problem and probably a challenge in all countries, as one must accept that knowledge, nature, human activities etc. are in constant change. By logic it follows that NPPs – contrary to what is current practice – needs to be updated and reviewed on a regular basis, just at local spatial plans needs to be and is in fact updated.

## Politics and integration of land use

On a more general level we wish to make two comments to the project/report:

- Experiences from Norway and many other countries show that to involve and empower local actors (in partnership with national and regional governments) is vital to achieve a sustainable development (concerning both protection and regional development). It will improve the knowledge-base for the processes, and the ownership and legitimacy of policies and plans with local stakeholders (including local politicians). Without a strong legitimacy of plans and regulations it can be difficult to implement the plans, and it is a danger that they will “only” be documents with little significance. We therefore believe that the *politics* of planning (involvement, process etc.) is just as important as the technical solution. These involvement, legitimacy and political issues should be addressed more in depth in the project to strike a better balance between the technical aspects involvement aspects.
- Within research and management on protected areas in Europe there an increased awareness of the importance a more “integrated approach”, just as this project in Latvia. This approach highlights the importance of a better balance between environmental protection and local development. This has resulted in other types and

new types of protected areas. Examples are Biosphere Reserves, Regional Parks and the new National Parks in Scotland, as well as some traditional protected areas increasingly integrating conservation and development functions. This has been labelled the “dynamic-innovation” paradigm, which is contrasted to the traditional “static-preservation” approach. The dynamic-innovation paradigm focuses on the integration of functions (protection and use) and of areas (both of different zones within the protected areas, and between protected areas and adjacent areas). Certainly in Norway, and it seems also in Latvia (if we have understood this correctly), the present system of planning seems to be quite traditional and static, as protected areas and “other” adjacent areas are seen as separate, have their basis in different laws, and are managed by different institutions. A stronger integration could be promoted in different ways, either through laws or by the political/management system. The Scottish National Parks may serve as an example here, where this is solved by giving the National Park Board the responsibility for managing both protected areas and adjacent development areas (villages etc.), and for implementing regulations given by both European, Scottish and local governments. These developments could also be interesting and inspiring for Latvia (as they are for Norway), and maybe give inputs for putting integration on the agenda on several level, in addition to the focus on planning documents in this current project.

We hope this comments can be of use for the further work in this project.

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## Some relevant references

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