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**GROUP OF SPECIALISTS -EUROPEAN DIPLOMA OF PROTECTED AREAS
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**Piatra Craiului
(Romania)**

Expert Report

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*Document prepared by
the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage*

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BACKGROUND

The purpose of the visit was to appraise the Piatra Craiului National Park (PCNP) suitability for the renewal of the European Diploma for a further ten-year period¹.

The visit took place from 28 June to 1st July 2010, on the basis of the aspects listed in annex 3² of the Regulations of the European Diploma of Protected Areas .

The expert spent 2 days on the visit of the area and he was accompanied by Mircea Verghelet, director of the PCNP and by other staff members ; he met M. Cotosman, Secretary of State in charge of biodiversity, on the 2nd of July, at the Ministry of Environment, Bucarest.

INTRODUCTION

This diplomed area is located in the Southern Carpathians, at 25 km from Brasov, close to the small town of Zarnesti, in the the center of Romania (Map 1).



Map 2 - Location of Piatra Craiului National Park. PCNP. National Park.

Figure 1 – Satellite overview of the

The European Diploma was given to the PCNP by the Resolution ResDip(2006)10 adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2006.

¹ Art. 9, §1, Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1 on the revised regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas.

² Letter of the Council of Europe, DGIV, DCPCN, Unité de la diversité biologique, EFG/mlI, 28 April 2010.

I ASSESSMENT

I-1 EUROPEAN INTEREST

The diploma was given to the PCNP for its outstanding geological formations, spectacular landscapes, very high biodiversity, unique local architectural traditions and other valuable cultural aspects and moreover.

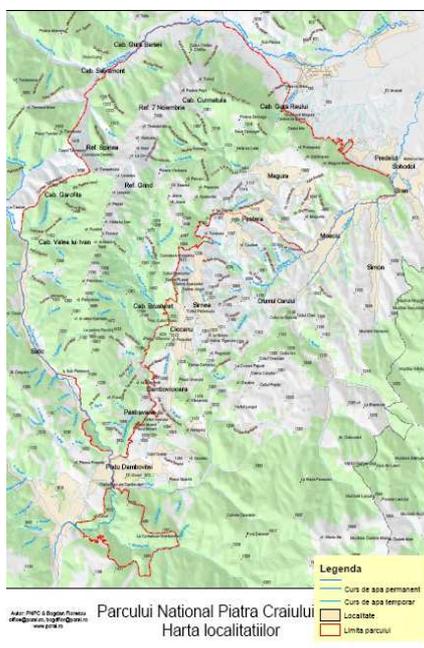
The Committee of Ministers estimated that this designation would also improve significantly the representativity of the European Diploma areas, in terms of biological and landscape diversity in Europe.

This diplomed area has conserved up to now the European interest on the basis of which it was awarded in 2007 ; it is still a unique area on a geological point of view but also due to its high biodiversity and its spectacular landscapes of outstanding interest for Europe.

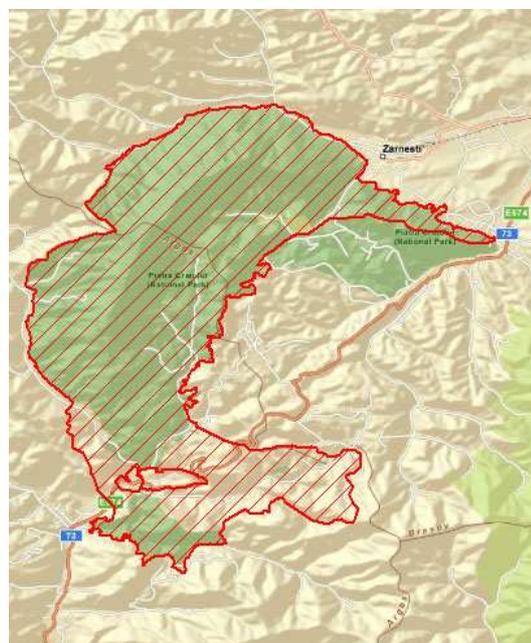
Since this nomination, Romania has joined the European Union in 2007 and has designated the diplomed area under the Habitat directive (NATURA 2000, ROSCI0194)³ (Map 4).

The PCNP has not suffer from significant damages since its nomination and it continues to play an important role in ensuring interconnectivities in this region, between ecosystems, habitats, species and landscapes of European importance across their traditional ranges, especially because of the presence of large animals requiring extensive home ranges.

To conclude, the European interest of the PCNP is still well documented and recognized, in the sense of the European diploma regulation.



Map 3 – PCNP boundaries.



Map 4 - ROSCI0194 (NATURA 2000 site).

³ Ministerial Order 1.964/2007.

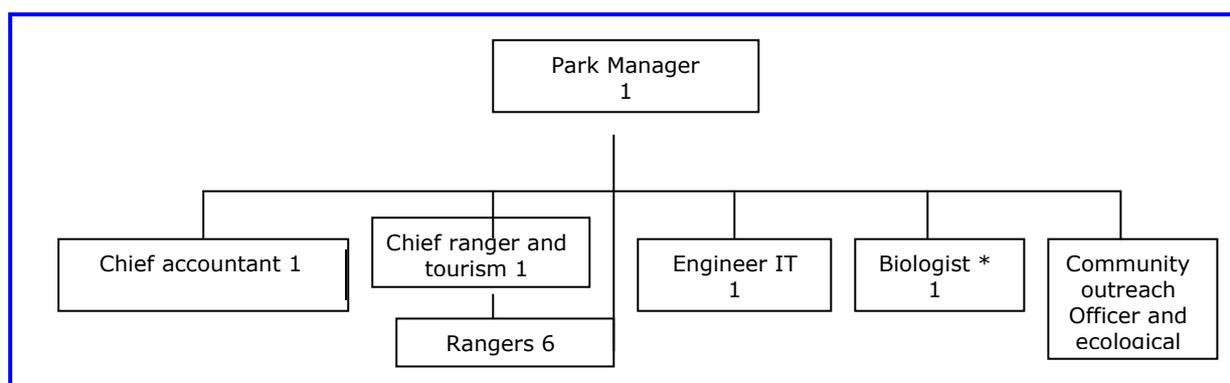
I.2 PARK MANAGEMENT

I-2-1 Administration and management of the PCNP

I-2-1-1 Organisation

The main change occurred since 2007, has come from the reorganisation of the National Forest Administration (NFA) in 2009⁴. Since this date, the PCNP is an autonomous legal organization, directly subordinated to the NFA central administration, instead being under the direct authority of the local NFA county branch, in Brasov. This position gives the Park administration a greater autonomy.

The professional team comprised 12 staff members in 2010. This figure shows a stability since the last mission (Table 1) ; those members are placed under the direct authority of the Park manager who is a NFA-Protected area Department civil servant, as well as the chief ranger.



*this position was not filled in December 2010.

Table 1 – Park Administration, year 2010 (Source : PCNP).

⁴ HG 229/2009.

I-2-1-2 Budget

The PCNP budget has significantly decreased on the period 2006-2010 due to the absence of external resources. **Table 2** shows the financial contribution of NFA and the external contributions during this five year period. The NFA contribution slightly increased but did not compensate the lack of external resources.

Budget	Budget foreseen	NFA contribution	External contributions	Budget spent
2006	102 500	82 374	56 149	138 524
2007	102 500	108 124	12 254	120 377
2008	102 500	105 536	2 912	108 448
2009	142 816	101 739	0	101 739
2010 (Jan-May)	142 816	58 165	0	58 165

Table 2 – Financial resources (period 2006-2010) (Source : PCNP).

Staff salaries and other rights represent around 75% of the total operating costs but they have been drastically reduced of 20% in 2010. Those tendencies show that the PCNP budget is still very dependent from the external resources (however, most of those resources have been allocated in 2006 and 2007 to the completion of the new headquarter) (Pictures 1 and 2).



Picture 1 – PCNP headquarter (West).

Picture 2 - PCNP headquarter (South).

As said in the last report, this situation should be secured in the future, so that the PCNP administration has appropriate funds to manage this outstanding protected area. Those resources cannot come from the direct incomes drawn from the park activities which decreased continuously during the five last years due to the bad economic situation ; they represented 4 000 Euros in 2006, 12 000 Euros in 2007, 6 400 in 2008, 4 569 in 2009 and only 1 520 Euros in 2010 (Source : PCNP). They cannot also be expected from the local stakeholders (the Brasov County Council gave 5 000 Euros to

the PCNP in 2006 used for trial management and security). If feasible, the Environmental National Fund (ENF) should be used for funding the national parks in general and the PCNP in particular.

At the time of the mission, an application should be done to get funds from the European structural funds in order to carry out a series of activities related to improve the conservation of biodiversity in the PCNP, through awareness and information activities and a GEF project was under implementation on the Improving the Financial Sustainability of the Carpathian System of Protected Areas ; the PCNP was concerned by this project, amongst other areas.

In general, the national authorities should pay more attention to the diplomed areas that do represent the “must” of the protected areas in Romania. This issue was raised at the meeting with the Secretary of State who agreed that an effort should be done to build a special program to support the management of those areas ; funds should be sought from the private sector.

I-2-1-3 Technical aspects

On a technical point of view, a management plan (PMP) has been approved in June 2005, for 5 years. As part of this plan, a Biodiversity Monitoring Plan (BMP) has been elaborated and various publications and works have also been completed since the last appraisal mission.

A new management plan has been finalized by the PCNP Administration and should be approved by the Ministry of Environment in the near future ; this plan should address the forest management and restoration specifically (see below, b.2).

The strict nature reserve has been extended in 2007, upon request of private owners (247 ha) ; the same owner asked also to include in the PCNP 350 ha more located currently outside the border of the diplomed area. Those measures will contribute to preserve the forest in the long term.

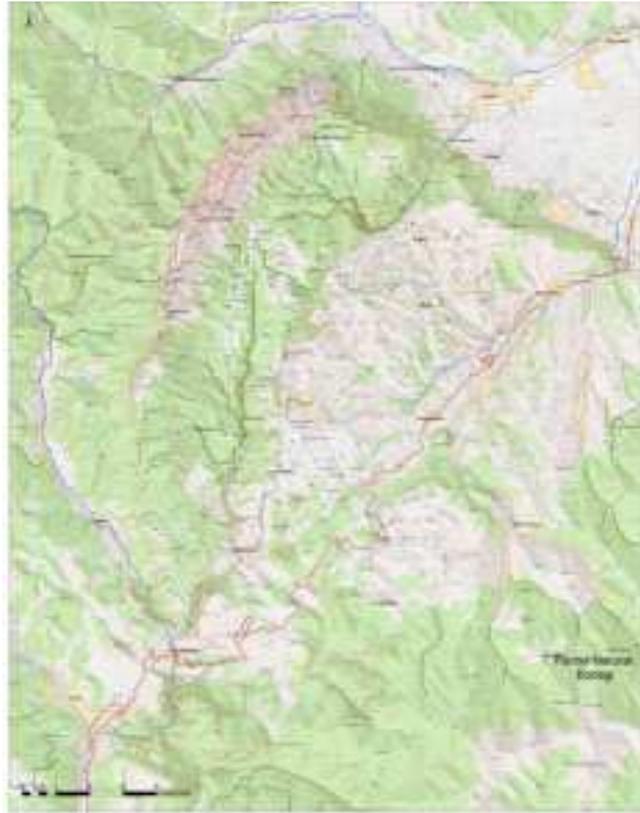
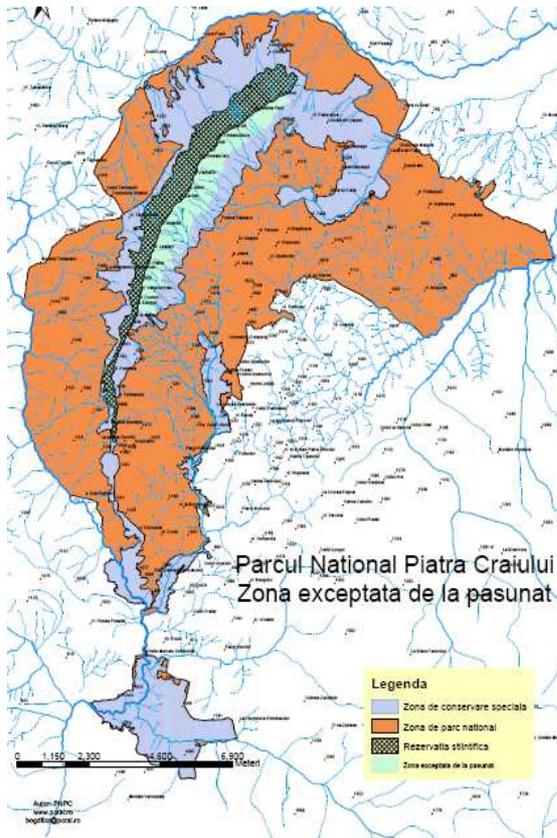
I-2-2 Regulations and effects of the main socio-economic activities

I-2-2-1 Tourism

Tourism is a challenge for the long term preservation of this area. Around 110 000 visitors come every year to visit the PCNP ; 48% of them are 18-29 years old and 45%, 30-49 years old.

The PCNP has a visiting strategy seeking to apply the concept of sustainable development and a new tourist map has been recently printed.

The expert wishes to encourage the PCNP to improve the marks of the area, as well as the trails opened to the visitors, to make them more visible and more respected hopefully.



Map 5 – PCNP zoning (Source : PCNP).

Map 6 – Tourist map (Source : PCNP).

I-2-2-2 Forestry

The forest preservation remains a key issue for the future of the diplomed area.

As shown on Maps 7 and 8, many private forest properties are located inside the diplomed area ; those private properties cover around 30% of the total territory of the PCNP ; 5 390 ha are in the hands of 300 private owners, compared to 9 708 ha of forest in the whole PCNP.

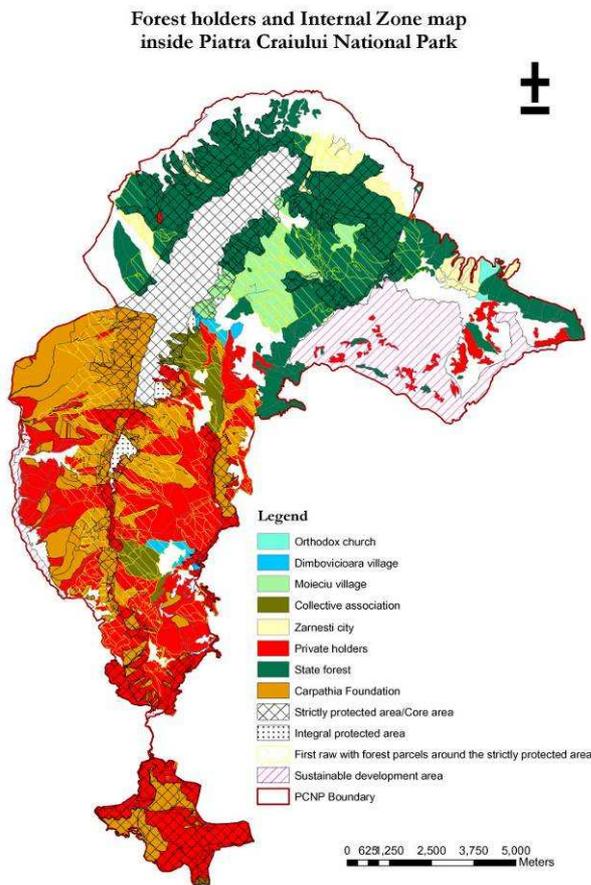
When the restitution laws were adopted, clear cuts have affected the park territory, just before the area was awarded, in 2004 and 2005 (Picture 3) ; 330 ha of forest are estimated to have been heavily degraded by clear cuts on the PCNP territory, of which 60 ha have been purchased more recently, by a private foundation, for protection ; part of those degraded forests have been included in the diplomed area, some of them in the core zone.

Thanks to its natural capacity of regeneration (Picture 4), the forest is recovering rather fast from this degradation and no specific restoration plan will be needed probably, except in some very local sites where the natural regeneration miss.

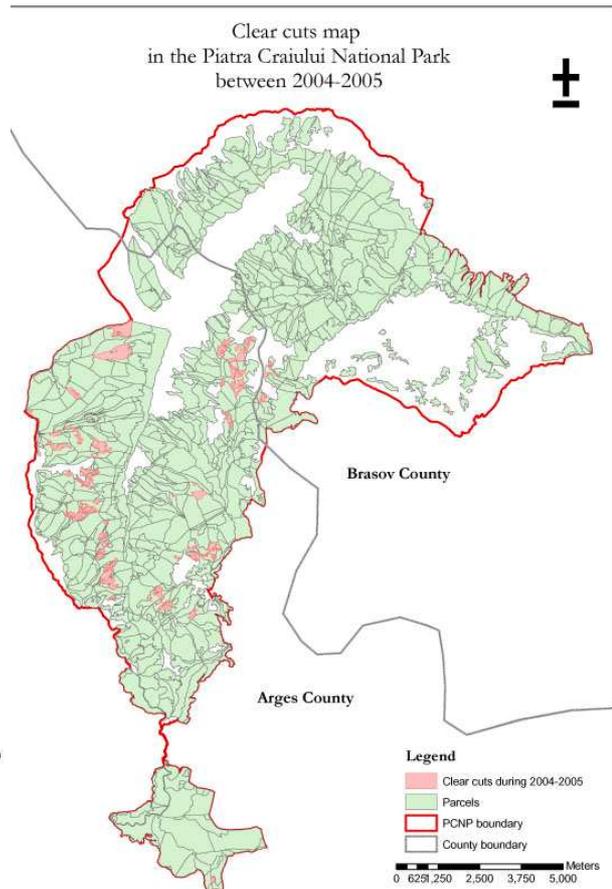


Picture 3 – PCNP, ancient clear cuts.

Picture 4 – PCNP, natural regeneration.



Map 7 – Forest holders distribution (Source : PCNP).



Map 8 – Clear cuts distribution (2004-2005)

(Source : PCNP).

The article 5 of the Ordinance n°139-5/October 2005 on forest administration in Romania, gave the possibility to the PCNP Administration to control the forest activities more efficiently.

Henceforth, this regulation obliges the forest owners to present a management plan for approval on surfaces not smaller than 100 ha, and all forest owners, regardless the type and the size of their properties, must contract the forest management with an authorized forest district.

In addition, the Ordinance n°57/2007) on protected areas and biodiversity preservation was also adopted ; this new regulation implemented all EU directives, especially the Birds and the Habitat Directives, at national level and it gave the PCNP Administration more power on forest management ; all management plans of forests located in the strictly protected zone of the PCNP were revised to be fully compatible with it objectives and all forest private properties situated outside the strictly protected zone but in its close vicinity, received the same status of protection as those situated in the strictly protected zone.

According to the law, the park manager must establish appropriate conservation measures and the land owners must be received compensations from the National Agency for Protected Areas (that has not been still set up) and those persons will not pay the tax for land, according to the Emergency Ordinance n°265/2006 adopted in application of the Law n°345/2006 on environment. Finally, the Order n°22507/2006 establishes the methodology to be used for the calculation of the compensations of the private owners, whom the land is submitted to special regime of protection.

All those measures can be considered as improvements and will certainly contribute to a better preservation of the diplomed area in the future, would they be enforced appropriately.

However, the forest management outside and around the diplomed area puts the PCNP area under heavy pressure, due to lack of enforcement of the forest law ; the diplomed area is a part of a network of huge forest and subalpine areas and its long term preservation also depends on the preservation of the surroundings areas, especially because this area host large animals that need and are distributed on larger areas.

A recommendation will be made to invite the national and local authorities to pay more attention to the land and forest management around the diplomed area ; the recommendation to enforce more strictly the forest regulation nearby the Park was already made in the first appraisal report, it will be reiterated.

I-2-2-3 Grazing

There is nothing to say specifically in relation to this activity, compared to the first appraisal. The Park staff still continues to monitor periodically the meadows and the expert was not told that this activity has become an important issue during the last five years. The decision was taken in 2007 to forbid all grazing activities in the the alpine and subalpine areas ; this regulation contributed to decrease the grazing pressure on the meadows and to facilitate the control of those activities by the PCNP rangers.

Recommendations were made in the last report on several other issues : water pollution, litter collect and treatment, as well as conservation and promotion of traditional architecture and other cultural values. Those issues will be tackled when the implementation of recommendations and conditions be addressed here below.

II IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONDITIONS

The diploma was given to the PCNP on the basis of a series of recommendations and conditions :

II-1 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **To guarantee the park budget, from internal sources preferably, especially the operating part**

As mentioned previously, the budget of the PCNP cannot be considered as being guaranteed sufficiently for a diplomed area (Table 2).

The expert was also told recently that the park staff faced unacceptable problems with regard to the level of their salaries that have been significantly reduced in 2010, as well as to the payment of those salaries that would have not been done on a regular basis during the last years.

This is a recurrent issue for most of the protected areas, not only in Romania and the economic crisis has probably not simplified this situation. However, the annual budget of the diplomed areas does not represent a huge funding and efforts should be done, for attracting new sources of funding from various sources, including the private sector. The PCNP and its surroundings are more and more frequented by people from Brasov, putting an increasing pressure on the diplomed area ; the county and all other local collectivities should be also invited to contribute to this funding.

In conclusion, the recommendation of securing the budget of the diplomed area, should be reiterated.

2. **To monitor the water ecosystems in order to maintain or improve water quality and to organize an awareness campaign dedicated to river and water conservation**

The water quality has been studied in the main rivers of the PCNP⁵ since the last mission. Existing and potential water pollution sources have been assessed⁶, on the basis of various parameters⁷. Those investigations showed that the level of water pollution would be still low, but slightly increasing in the Southern sector, nearby the villages⁸.

Based on those results, recommendations of monitoring the water ecosystems have been included in the general monitoring plan of the diplomed area. A series of other activities have also been performed :

- an awareness campaign dedicated to river and water conservation, has been organized to make the local people more aware of this issue ;
- a leaflet has been printed and a number of meetings with the local communities have been also conducted, as well as various educational activities in the local schools ;
- garbage collection campaigns have been organized along the main rivers of the PCNP, on the occasion of the Water international day⁹ ;

⁵ Bârsa Mare Basin (6 sampling points), Râul Mare al Zărneștiului (2 sampling points), Dâmbovița (6 sampling points), and Dâmbovicioara (3 sampling points).

⁶ Life Natura Project "Natura 2000 sites in Piatra Craiului National Park.

⁷ Assessment of the impacts of the existing buildings and review of the sewage facilities; bio and physico-chemical analysis.

⁸ Organic pollution coming mainly from households and sheepfolds.

⁹ 2 tons of litter were collected in each location.

- the park rangers Have started control field activities together with the Water Administration service, in order to identify the polluters and eliminate the sources of pollution.

Efforts have also been done to collect the litter at the local level (Picture 5).

An two year action plan for the management of litter and garbage has been adopted in 2007 ; several meetings Have been held locally with a large participation of the local officials ; specific activities have been implemented by each municipality and/or village. Zarnesti, Brand, Moieciu, Dambovicioara and Rucar took part in this plan as well as the two counties concerned.

The results led to significant and encouraging progress ; those progress should be strengthened, monitored and follow up by further efforts to improve the situation that is not fully satisfactory.

The expert considers that this recommendation has been implemented by the PCNP Administration. However, because litter and water pollution are a recurrent problem locally (Picture 6), this recommendation should be reiterated and appropriate further measures be taken, on a permanent basis, to address those issues and to improve this situation sustainably.



Picture 5 – Litter container.
river.



Picture 6 – Garbage and plastic bottles in the river.

3. To fully implement the Park Management Plan, Article 21 and to finalize the guidelines on architecture and building activities

Guidelines for architecture and buildings have been adopted ; they give specific rules for designing, building, renovating and removing building and annexes inside the PCNP. Any construction should be theoretically submitted to the Scientific Council of the diplomed area, for approval ; it should also respect a series of characteristics 8eg.: height, minimum size of the plot, land occupation ratio, materials of the roof, ...).

Around 80 projects of construction have been submitted to the PCNP Administration since 2007 ; 15% have been refused, because they did not fulfill the requirements and 65% were have been modified and improved.

Practically, the situation is not fully satisfactory ; the expert was told that several buildings have been constructed without being submitted to the PCNP Administration and many of them have been built in the immediate vicinity of the diplomed area, without respect to the traditional architecture (Picture 7).



Picture 7 – New building at the border of the PCNP. **Picture 8** – Traditional landscape and local architecture.

More efforts should be done by the local municipalities and private owners to pay attention to the authenticity and the integrity of the local landscape and architecture features.

The expert recommends that a specific high profile program be implemented by the PCNP, together with the local stakeholders, to promote, save and restore when necessary, the local landscape and architecture, and make this region, visited by millions of tourists every year, the paragon of the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

4. To fully implement the sustainable tourism strategy and to monitor those activities

There is no additional comment to make on this issue ; the PCNP has a strategy devoted to tourism and its Administration has completed many activities related to tourism in the diplomed area, during the five last years.

The only recommendation will be related to the construction of the headquarters. Due to lack of funding, the exhibition room and other visitor accommodations have not been set up to date and efforts should be done by both the central and local PCNP Administration to raise the appropriate funds and complete the construction and the equipment of this building as soon as possible.

5. To pursue inventories and mapping of species and habitats, not only in the future NATURA 2000 sites but, as far as possible, in the whole territory of the park

Inventories and other scientific works have continued on a regular basis since the last mission. Those works have been made possible with funding mostly from the GEF and from the EU (LIFE project)¹⁰ and they contributed to extend and improve the knowledge on biodiversity in the PCNP.

An habitat map has been produced for the whole territory of the PCNP ; others more detailed maps have been completed for the alpine and subalpine habitats as well as a series of distribution maps for over than 50 important species of birds including those listed in the Bern Convention and UE Habitats and Birds Directives ; a field guide of birds in the PCNP have also be published amongst many other publications¹¹.

One new plant species has been discovered for Romania in 2006 as well one new vegetation association for science and more than 100 new plant species for the PCNP 's area.

¹⁰ Natura 2000 sites in Piatra Craiului National Park.

¹¹ Eg : 10 scientific articles and two books on parks : Motoiu Maria D., 2008, *Avalanșele și impactul lor asupra mediului (Snow avalanches and their impact on the environment)*, Ed. Proxima.
Constantinescu T., 2009, *Masivul Piatra Craiului – Studiu Geomorfologic (The Piatra Craiului Massif, A Geomorphological Study)*, Ed. Universitara .

In conclusion this recommendation can be considered as implemented ; those efforts should be pursued on a regular basis and they could address also the ecological importance of the diplomed area for the whole region ; as said before, the PCNP is a part of a global network of areas that are part of the same functional ecosystem and it is crucial to consider its long term preservation, at this regional level. This is the reason why attention should be paid on the management of the surroundings areas, especially the forest management, that are ecologically linked to the diplomed area.

II-2 CONDITIONS

1. To improve the forest legislation regarding the management of forests and the control of forest activities inside the PCNP, especially on private land

This issue has been addressed in detail in this report ; the forest law as well as the law on environment have given more power to the PCNP Administration to control the forest activities inside the park territory. As requested by the Council of Ministers, a report on the measures taken, has been sent to the Council of Europe in 2007 and details on the current situation have been provided here above.

This condition can be considered as implemented.

However, the forest management remains a key issue for the PCNP, on its fringe and at the regional level where the law is not enforced appropriately. This situation has been reported to the Secretary of State when he met the expert and more attention should be paid by the central and local forest services to tackle this problem in the future.

2. To elaborate by the end of 2006, an action plan on litter and garbage collection, dumping and treatment

As reported above, this plan has been elaborated and implemented ; all municipalities and the two counties have been involved and the results have been presented in this report. A copy of this plan has been sent to the Council of Europe and another one provided to the expert.

This condition can also be considered as respected.

The management of litter and garbage requires a long term commitment from the local stakeholders ; there are still some progress to make. It is strongly recommended to pursue those efforts and to engage a new phase of activities that could be facilitated by the PCNP Administration.

CONCLUSION

The expert recommends the extension of the period of validity of the European Diploma to the Piatra Craiului National Park for ten more years, with the following recommendations, attached to the renewal decision :

Rec.1 : to secure the budget of the diplomed area so that the PCNP Administration be able to manage it appropriately and get all financial resources needed in order to pay the staff on a regular basis ;

Rec. 2 : to complete the construction and the equipment of the headquarters, especially the exhibition room and other tourist accommodations as soon as possible, and make particular efforts to raise the appropriate funds ;

Rec. 3 : to elaborate and implement a specific high profile program devoted to the promotion, preservation and restoration of the local landscape and architecture features ; this exemplary program should be performed with the relevant specialists and contribute to make this region, the paragon of the preservation of natural and cultural heritage ;

Rec. 4 : to pursue the scientific works and monitoring of biodiversity in the whole PCNP ; those activities should assess the status and tendencies of species and habitats, considering the diplomed area as part of a functional ecosystem and consequently use appropriate methods and indicators that keep the PCNP Administration aware of the global changes of the whole ecosystem ;

Rec. 5 : to pay more attention at both, central and local levels, on the enforcement of the forest law on the fringe and in the surroundings of the diplomed area ; the measures taken and the results obtained should be reported to the Council of Europe, on an annual basis;

Rec: 6 : to pursue the efforts made by the PCNP Administration on addressing the litter and garbage issues and to engage a new phase of activities that could be facilitated by this Administration ; a detailed report on the results of those activities should be sent to the Council of Europe every two years ;

Rec. 7 . to complete the on-going process of approving the new management plan by the end of 2011.

St Cergue, 3rd February 2011