



Getting active for Wilderness in Romania

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Project Start: December 2014

Project Duration: 28.5 months

Bucharest and Zurich, August 2017

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1. Summary

'**Getting active for wilderness in Romania**' is a wilderness education program which prepares and empowers teachers and students (ages 14-18) to establish a sustainable network of active citizens who take positive action for wilderness in five high schools in the Southwestern Carpathians region. Over the course of two school years, **five Nature Clubs** were opened in each school and acted as hubs for youth-led learning about local nature and fundamentals of project management, group moderation and team work. As part of the curriculum of the **Wilderness Education Toolkit** the roughly 100 participants initiated **12 conservation projects** to support local National and Nature Parks. Participation in the Clubs increased students' sense of self-worth and optimism, as well as the conviction that they can make a positive change for nature. The students' learning process in the Clubs was enhanced by multiple **nature-connection experiences** (camps, wilderness treks), as well as belonging to a **network of active peers**. Surprisingly, the roughly 15 teachers involved in the Clubs attested to dramatic changes in their self-perception, as well as their attitude towards students and their teaching approach. The educational intervention was successful and it also serves as a **proof-of-concept**, that can now be implemented and adapted in new areas and on more diverse nature conservation topics, in Romania and internationally. To facilitate application outside of Romania, an English-language version of the Wilderness Education Toolkit was disseminated. It is likely that the approach will be replicated in Serbia and potentially in other parts of Europe.

2. Context and objective of the project

'**Getting active for wilderness in Romania**' is a wilderness education program designed to engage teachers and students (Wilderness Youth Ambassadors, ages 14-18) from five high schools adjacent to a proposed large wilderness area in the Southwestern Carpathians.

2.1 Context

The project was aligned with the EU Sustainable Development Strategy¹, which highlights the key role of education as a prerequisite for promoting the behavioural changes and providing all citizens with the key competences needed to achieve sustainable development. Such efforts are particularly relevant in economically depressed areas like the Southern Carpathians of Romania, which are characterized by limited development opportunities, migration of the able-bodied workforce, poverty and weak political institutions. On the other hand, the Southern Carpathians abound with natural capital: pristine forests, spectacular landscapes, high biodiversity and abundance of large predators that are threatened or extinct in other parts of Europe.

Sustainable development measures are an imperative for maintaining Europe's biodiversity hotspots, such as the few remaining true wilderness² areas. Such an area is represented by the 1.4 million ha Southwestern Carpathians in Romania, covered by an extensive network of 11 protected areas of different IUCN categories and Natura 2000 sites, which are in a near-natural state – providing an excellent basis for wilderness. The largest protected areas, representing the “stronghold” of wilderness in the region, are four National Parks and one Nature Park: Cheile Nerei-Beuşniţa National Park, Domogled - Valea Cernei National Park, Retezat National Park, Semenic – Cheile Caraşului National Park, Iron Gates Nature Park (see map in Annex A). At the same time these areas are threatened by unsustainable or illegal activities such as poaching, illegal logging, and ill-suited hydropower or infrastructure developments.

A pre-feasibility study commissioned by WWF DCP³ identified significant potential for securing these wilderness areas in the Southwestern Carpathians and concurrently promoting opportunities for local and regional development. The study also identified a number of drivers and restrainers of change (or threats and pressures), such as: *“Limited awareness and understanding of local people in the project area regarding the importance of natural habitats and processes and related opportunities for local and regional development”*. A key measure identified by the study was: *“Raising awareness and understanding of wilderness for local communities [and related] opportunities for local and regional development.”*

The project aimed to address the identified problem by raising awareness and understanding of wilderness in students from local communities, and by mobilizing them to act for the conservation of wilderness. As such, the students were expected to provide positive examples for the larger community, including relatives, friends and peers. The methodological approach utilized action-oriented interventions to strengthen self-confidence, problem-solving skills, collaboration within the group and external stakeholders, as well as activism on behalf of conservation. These competencies were expected to help foster the development of a group of empowered citizens in five towns bordering on the “stronghold” protected areas.

¹ European Commission Environment: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/>

² “A wilderness is an area governed by natural processes. It is composed of native habitats and species, and large enough for the effective ecological functioning of natural processes. It is unmodified or only slightly modified and without intrusive or extractive human activity, settlements, infrastructure or visual disturbance”, Draft Guidelines for the management of wilderness and wild areas in Natura 2000 (European Union, 2012). See: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/wilderness/pdf/guidance.pdf>.

³ Mantoiu, D. & M. Nistorescu, 2012: *Prefeasibility Study for the Establishment of the Southwestern Carpathians* (EPC Consultanță de mediu) – study commissioned by WWF-DCP with support from the Swiss MAVA Foundation.

2.2 Objective

The aim of the project was to develop **key competencies of students and their teachers that lead to active citizenship for wilderness**.

The project objective was to activate up to **100 students from wilderness areas** through teaching activities, and through **self-designed projects** developed within **Wilderness Youth Clubs**. These clubs served as a platform for students to interact and explore new ideas both within their groups, but also in interaction with the other Wilderness Youth Clubs. The pedagogical intention was that engagement for wilderness will **empower youths to become active within their communities and to strengthen their self-esteem**. Also, at least **ten teachers** were to receive trainings and a **wilderness education-toolkit** to introduce the concept of wilderness through innovative teaching methods. The teachers were expected to convene and supervise the extracurricular activities of the clubs within their respective schools. As mentioned before, each of the five schools is located near one of the main National and Nature Parks in the region.

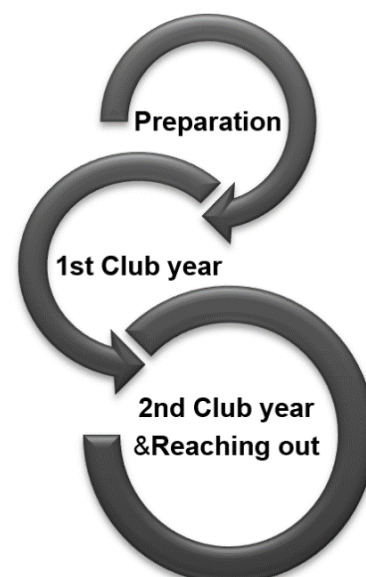
Expected outcomes

- ✓ At least **ten teachers** from five high schools trained on wilderness education by offering educational and pedagogical methods and resources.
- ✓ A **Wilderness Education Toolkit** as handbook for teachers **distributed in five schools** and offered through website as download for others.
- ✓ **Five Wilderness Youth Clubs** established and serving as a platform for students.
- ✓ At least **100 empowered and trained students as Wilderness Ambassadors** getting active for wilderness within Wilderness Youth Clubs.
- ✓ At least **five action-oriented** projects initiated by youth are implemented and involve at least **100 other peers** through these activities.
- ✓ A **'Train the Trainer' event** carried out to attract at least **20 potential multipliers (teachers)** from other schools and **ten wilderness/protected area staff members**.

3. Presentation of the work steps and the methods used

The approach pursued in the project was that teachers and active student representatives (core team) from five schools receive a series of trainings (in- and outdoors). The know-how gained served as a basis for establishing five Wilderness Youth Clubs and to follow a self-paced curriculum based on a Wilderness Education Toolkit, which included 17 chapters (roughly covering an entire school year). The Club's meetings were held as extra-curricular school activities in classrooms or outdoors. In addition, each Club participated in a guided three-day outdoor event (Wilderness Trek) in their National respectively Nature park. Clubs were visited by the project team at irregular intervals (every 2-4 months) or when requested. In the interim, contacts were maintained via Facebook or regular calls with the teachers. An effort was made not to "over-coach" Clubs to foster responsibility of local teams, and to allow them develop their own dynamics and pace.

The main work steps or stages of the project were:



- ✓ **Preparation:** Setting up partnerships with schools and Protected Areas staff, developing the educational concept and the Wilderness Education Toolkit (the “Guide”).
- ✓ **1st year of the Wilderness Youth Clubs:** Establishing the educational work in target-schools, training of teachers and student facilitators, unfolding of the activities, projects, support and outdoor activities, closing the year with a final event.
- ✓ **2nd year of the Wilderness Youth Clubs and focusing on the “legacy” – sustainability and multiplication:** Continuing club activities with senior members from the previous year acting as trainers for newcomers, multiplication focusing on schools and civil society actors (NGOs), locally and internationally. An Academy designed to reach out to additional local schools and to NGOs in the fields of education, conservation and development was organized in November 2016. A Closing workshop was organized with Club representatives and potential national and international partners in April 2017 to evaluate and to multiply the approach.

The guiding **educational methodology and principles** of the project were embedded in all project events. These were the backbone of the Curriculum from the Guide on which the Club meetings were based:

- ✓ **Youth empowerment** on the topic of Wilderness.
- ✓ **“Learning by doing”** methodology.
- ✓ **Building trust and cooperation** in a school group formed by teachers and students.
- ✓ **“Peer-to-peer education”** methodology.
- ✓ **Role model learning**, to assume leadership or service roles, assume responsibility for trainings peers or to communicate with external audiences.
- ✓ **Reflection and self-assessment** as learning and development tools.
- ✓ **Individual learning strategies** and empowerment - setting personal learning goals and involving learners in developing the educational program.
- ✓ **Experiential, nature-based learning** - “hands-on learning” in natural settings. Building connections with the surrounding natural environment and pride over the natural capital in the vicinity of towns and villages.
- ✓ **Service learning** through self-initiated projects, with benefits to society or external stakeholders.

Students and teachers were treated as equals in all events⁴, and they mutually shared the responsibility for the Clubs. Students facilitated the Club meetings, were actively involved in project development, communication, fund-raising, organization. We fostered their learning process, in terms of conveying complex competences. This student-centred approach is exemplified in the above-mentioned principles.

As an umbrella for all WWF educational projects, when proposing the present project and educational interventions, the principles of ESD⁵ (Education for Sustainable Development) served as a guiding light (see box below). They were utilized to develop students' knowledge of environmental challenges and their abilities to promote sustainable development. They provide the foundation to formulate and solve problems and the ability to participate in democratic systems and to take responsibility for the well-being of our planet.

⁴ This is quite innovative and unique, because the educational approach in schools from the project area is „frontal teaching” and rather hierarchical, with students assuming a passive role.

⁵ The principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): As synthesized in TOMȘA, Gheorghe, ION, Georgeta, *Educația pentru Dezvoltare Durabilă – Ghid didactic (Education for Sustainable Development – Didactic Guide)*, Universitatea București, 2010.

Principles of ESD

The following principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) were closely considered during the conception of the project and for the development of the Curriculum for the Clubs:

- ✓ guided by a vision
- ✓ systems thinking
- ✓ critical thinking
- ✓ solution-oriented
- ✓ action-oriented
- ✓ student-centred
- ✓ partnerships
- ✓ participation
- ✓ focused on the real lives of students and their communities
- ✓ may lead to changes in schools and teaching styles.

The pedagogical concept involved several interventions aimed at creating engagement, conveying skills and shaping the participants' connection to nature:

A **summer camp** was carried out in June 2015 with five students from each of the schools (25 total). The purpose was to involve participants in nature activities and to convey basic information about their natural surroundings and wilderness. To convey the principles of ESD, basic moderation skills and a foundation on wilderness a week-long **Academy** held in October 2015, in which the teachers and three selected students ("core team") from each school participated. The Academy was expected to provide the impetus for the creation of the Wilderness Clubs in each of the schools during November/December 2015. In order to maintain cohesion amongst schools and to support core teams a second, week-long **winter camp** was held in February 2016. The participants ("core teams" from each Club) were tasked with developing and leading some of the activities to hone their facilitation and moderation skills.

During April and May 2016 clubs were tasked with developing **action-oriented conservation projects** in adjacent parks. The rationale being twofold: providing a permanent and substantive ("hands-on") contribution to conservation as well as empowering Club participants to conceptualize, fundraise and complete a project largely independently. In June 2016, near the end of the school year 20 students and 10 teachers were brought together to celebrate their successes and share experiences in a **final/celebration event**. During the summer months (June – October 2016) 2-day **Wilderness treks** were planned by each of the Clubs meant to deepen the connection with nature, enhance cohesion within the Club members and to create positive momentum for continuation in the upcoming school year.

To facilitate outreach to other Romanian schools and education experts a **Train the Trainer event** was planned for November 2016. Annex B depicts the workplan of the project and major events described above.

4. Results

The project achieved the expected outcomes and exceeded expectations, especially in terms of personal development of students and teachers, content and outreach of the Guide (Wilderness Education Toolkit), as well as further networking and multiplication.

☑ **Ten teachers** participated in the Academy, thus completing the training, and continued to be mentors and adult leaders for the five clubs. In time, the teacher teams in some of the schools grew, and at least three new teachers in three of the Clubs have become active in wilderness activities.

The conclusions of the Closing workshop in April 2017 indicate that the program was especially meaningful for the teachers not only for the training dimension (content and facilitation skills), but also for the personal and overall professional development it fostered. Even more, one lesson learned was that teachers need and want to experience the same experiential learning processes as the students, including nature activities (e.g. camps, treks).

☑ **A Wilderness Education Toolkit** (the “Guide”) was developed, but exceeded its original purpose as handbook for teachers – it was an instrument for youth empowerment, guiding the students in facilitating Club meetings and developing their own nature projects. The Guide was distributed in printed format in the five target schools, as well as five other schools and to 15 Romanian NGOs.

The curriculum covered various phases (see box below), beginning with the purpose and functioning of the Clubs, followed by a large block dedicated to wilderness and conservation, both at a cognitive and practical level (outdoor excursions, events and a guided Wilderness Trek). The culmination of the school year and the Club’s curriculum was the development of a project with support from the local protected area staff to make a practical contribution to the National or Nature Park. This project was meant to provide a lasting contribution by the Club and honed club members’ skills in planning, project management, fundraising and negotiation. It also required them to obtain internal consensus, define and fill various roles and to collaborate. As such it served as a practical implementation of the theoretical concepts conveyed during the early club meetings.

The Wilderness Education Toolkit (or “Explorers of Wilderness Guide”) was developed in Romanian, with the clear goal to be adaptable for a variety of places and topics. During the next years WWF Romania will adapt its content to the Danube Delta and for the Bison re-introduction area in the Northern Carpathians, and is actively promoting it in both Romanian and English language versions.

The English translation of the Guide was an outcome, which was not planned initially. It was made possible through the financial support of WWF Switzerland and it was valuable in sharing the contents and the methodology at an international level. In the meantime, it was distributed to several European WWF offices and shared and promoted within the Global WWF Educators community. Additional copies will be made available to wilderness education experts in Central Europe during 2017.

☑ **Five Wilderness Youth Clubs** were established and served as a platform for students to develop as trainers and project leaders, to form teams and to learn about and act for nature. The Clubs were located in the towns of Băile Herculane, Lupeni, Reșița, Anina and Orșova (see map in Annex A). Each of these schools is located in the immediate vicinity of the protected areas (National and Nature parks), which comprise the proposed wilderness area. The Clubs followed the Curriculum described in the Guide and held meetings at regular, but self-paced intervals. During the project phase (Club meetings 11 to 15, see box with the curriculum), or on special occasions (e.g. Earth Hour, field trips, park clean-ups, etc.) the Club members met much more frequently to develop and implement their projects.

The Clubs were initiated with a great deal of enthusiasm by teachers and the core teams (which were trained in a 5-day workshop at the outset of the project in autumn 2015). Maintaining the continuity of the Club in Anina high-school proved to be challenging where due to extreme poverty turnover of teachers is high and the general scepticism is stronger than the students’ passion for non-formal education. Looking forward, the project team has given specific attention to this Club in order to identify ways to continue, and to identify new resource persons. There is a new active teacher involved, but he is working in several projects and mixes content which can lead to a loss of focus. It should be noted that in Anina the students took over the roles of one of the teachers, which attests to their motivation, but also the need to offer such opportunities.

Summary of Guide's curriculum

Chapter 1: About the Wilderness Youth Clubs

1.1 What are the Wilderness Youth Clubs? * 1.2 How the club works and recommended activities * 1.3 The team of the Wilderness Youth Club * 1.4 The club's relations with stakeholders in the community and other clubs in the region.

Chapter 2: What and how do students learn in the club?

2.1 What do students learn in the club? * 2.2 How do students learn in the club? * 2.3 The role of the club meeting facilitator in the learning process * 2.4 Group dynamics * 2.5 Learning by experience and debriefing * 2.6 How to communicate inside the club? * 2.7 Practical advice for facilitators.

Chapter 3: The Wilderness Youth Club Curriculum

3.1 What is the curriculum? * 3.2 When to use the curriculum? * 3.3 Schedule and recommended order of club meetings * 3.4 Structure of the curriculum * 3.5 How do we read the meetings in this curriculum? * 3.6 What to consider when organizing a club meeting?

Introduction & team-building

Meeting 1: What is the club about?

Meeting 2: My involvement in the club.

Meeting 3: Discovering how to work together.

Wilderness

Meeting 4: What are "protected areas"?

Meeting 5: Introducing the concept of wilderness.

Meeting 6: Benefits of wilderness.

Meeting 7: Threats to wilderness areas.

Meeting 8: What can we do to conserve wilderness areas?

Meeting 9: Wilderness areas in our region.

Meeting 10: How does the future of wilderness areas in our region look like?

Projects for wilderness

Meeting 11: Introduction to project management: needs analysis in wilderness areas.

Meeting 12: Needs analysis and prioritization.

Meeting 13: Developing a project. Part 1

Meeting 14: Developing a project. Part 2

Meeting 15: Project writing and monitoring.

Meeting 16: Evaluation of club activity and planning of next year.

Meeting 17: Celebrating results and looking to the future.

☑ **100 empowered and trained students as Wilderness Ambassadors** got active for wilderness within Wilderness Youth Clubs, during the first Club year. This target was achieved, although it was difficult to quantify the exact number of participants. Reasons for this are that activities were voluntary and extra-curricular, depending on class work, other obligations and motivation. The average number of active members was 20 per Club, with higher numbers in Reșița and Lupeni. "Fleeting participants" also attended Club meetings, and some meetings had more than 40 attendants. Roughly 10 students worked actively to prepare the project in each of the clubs, but 30 joined the project field work. Roughly 20 students per club participated in the Wilderness Trek. Some of the most popular meetings were those when WWF staff and/or guests came to visit. The level of involvement was increased when students participated in nature-connection activities. Therefore, the Wilderness Treks played an important role in inspiring them.



Dissemination event, ©Doru Oprisan

During the second year, most of the core team of the Clubs remained the same. While a few of the older students (12th grade and preparing for university) stepped back, they made room for other active members to take the lead.

☑ More than **five action-oriented** projects initiated by youth were implemented and involved at least **100 other peers** through these activities. This target was exceeded, as a total of twelve projects were pursued over two years by the five Clubs.

During **the first school year**, each of the five Clubs developed a project in their National Park or in another natural area significant for their school and town. Given the project requirements, the choice of topics for the Club's action-oriented projects was not surprising: All Clubs chose to somehow promote their protected area, and to facilitate and improve visitor access by cleaning, marking or improving a trail, or a special place in the Park.

Club/Park	Anina / Cheile Nerei-Beușnița National Park
Trail	Anina – Brădet
Project achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Produced wooden information boards in the school workshop. ✓ Installed information boards on the trail. ✓ Refreshed the signs and markings.

Club/Park	Băile Herculane / Domogled - Valea Cernei National Park
Trail	Băile Herculane – Yellow Pavilion
Project achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Refreshed trail signs and markings. ✓ Painted the Yellow Pavilion, a shelter. ✓ Identified plant species on the way.

Club/Park	Lupeni / Retezat National Park
Area	Câmpușel-Soarbele area & Șarba spring
Project achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Refreshed the markings indicating the Park limits, on 4 km, in the Câmpușel-Soarbele area, the Southern limit of the park. ✓ Built a water fountain for the Șarba spring. The spring was previously un-managed.

Club/Park	Orșova/ Iron Gates Nature Park
Trail	Dubova - Ciucarul Mare
Project achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Promoted the Iron Gates Nature Park by organizing a knowledge contest for several schools in the protected area. Awards were offered by the Schools' Parents association. ✓ Refreshed 40 signs on the trail. ✓ Cleaned the trail and trimmed unwanted branches, to ease visitor access. ✓ Promoted the project in local media (a local newspaper published a two-page article in the September issue).

Club/Park	Reșița/ Semenic – Cheile Carașului National Park
Trail	Doman Valley (near Reșița city) to Ponor Peak
Project achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identified potential trail during field trip, which did NOT exist previously and is an optimal route to a vista point. ✓ Conceived trail concept ("The Enchanted Trail") and developed stories for the information boards (the trail has the shape of a dragon and every stop on the way is related to the story of the dragon). ✓ Built and painted information boards. Developed a unique stencil for trail markings (pink butterfly). ✓ Marked the trail, installed information boards as a public event where external guests and younger students were invited. ✓ Promoted the trail in the school, especially for didactical purposes.

The story of the Enchanted Trail

The Reșița Club identified a trail that students called “The Enchanted Trail”, along which they installed information boards. Step by step, the boards tell a fairy tale created by the youth and showcase the key places from the story. The symbol of the trail is a pink butterfly. The trail is occasionally used as a route for mountain bike competitions. The competition route following the trail is officially called „The Pink Butterfly route”.

The fairy tale was sparked by the similiarity between the trail and the contour of a dragon. And the story goes like this...

Fairies’ Glade

It is said that among these lands full of magic, there was a glade called the Fairies’ Glade, where fairies and children played together and the animals of the forest were people’s best friends. There were flowers everywhere, birds singing and butterflies flying. But not everyone could reach the Fairies’ Glade. The way to it led along the **Enchanted Trail**. But why the Enchanted Trail? Because you can only follow it if you have a pure soul. If you are mean and wicked, the trail becomes tricky, foggy and hidden.

This trail was also known to the Reshgar dragon, who, expelled from his world, was flying through the sky searching for a place full of life that could become his shelter and source of food. And then he found the Glade. Starving, spitting flames, the dragon was rushing with all his forces over the creatures of the Glade, when suddenly a little **pink butterfly** appeared. It annoyed the dragon with its playful flight. Wanting to kill the small creature, Reshgar was attracted to the Land of the **Giant Ferns***. These ferns had been created by the fairies of the glade, to protect it from enemies. So, they had magical powers, which they used to tie up the dragon. But Reshgar escaped and furiously continued to follow the tiny butterfly, which bravely drew him into the **Sleeping Forest***. Without knowing that this Sleeping Forest was magical, the dragon rushed towards the pink butterfly. But suddenly the trees of the Sleeping Forest turned into giant vines, caught the dragon and tied his mouth so he couldn’t spit flames anymore. Then, they put leaves over his eyes. But even then, he had the illusion of seeing the butterfly.

And, perhaps, this could have been possible because the leaves were from the **Land of Illusion***, so the dragon was seeing what he wanted to see, and not the reality. But still...Reshgar was a mighty dragon who couldn’t give up. He was the biggest, the most powerful and dangerous creature of all times. With his last drop of power, he pulled himself away from the vines that kept his feet tied up and tried to fly, but exactly when he thought he was flying to freedom, he was constrained. A magical vine was still stuck around his foot. The dragon tried to burn it and rip it but he didn’t have enough strength left. With a frightening roar, spitting his last flames, he tried to fly again, but fell to the ground. The crash almost killed him. The weight of the dragon and the power of the fall left a huge hole in the ground. Close to death, the eyes of the dragon were begging for mercy and forgiveness.

The queen of the fairies, Ița, seeing the dragon’s suffering, flew above him and poured the magic powder of forgiveness, of kindness, loyalty and love onto him. Reshgar came back to life, but this time as a guardian of the Fairies’ Glade, and the place where he fell to the ground became known as the **Ravine of the Dragon***. Over decades, people discovered important ore deposits there, which, as they say, formed from the rock that was melted by the dragon’s breath. And the hill where the Fairies’ Glade laid is nowadays called **The Hill of Emptiness*** (Dealul Golului), in the memory of the moment in which the dragon burned everything with his flames. Who knows, maybe even today, after all these centuries, Reshgar still guards both the Fairies’ Glade and the city that was founded because of the rich ores, a city whose name is a combination of the names of the Reshgar dragon and the fairy that saved him: **REȘ-IȚA**.

*Each of the locations in the fairy tale signify vista points along the trail.



The Enchanted trail, ©The Resita Wilderness Club

During **the second year**, at least seven projects were launched by Clubs, including small projects, events and nature connection activities. The teams were more mature, proactive and better connected, as in 2016. The initiatives were:

- ✓ An Earth Hour⁶ event organized by the **Reșița Club**⁷ (March 2017).
- ✓ **Reșița-Lupeni** organized a field trip in Retezat National Park (May 2017).
- ✓ **Băile Herculane Club** carried out tree planting, on the occasion of the International Day of the Trees (March 2017).
- ✓ **Lupeni Club** installed information boards in Retezat Park. The Club applied for funding to a private companies' grant program. Although the project proposal was not funded due to high number of applicants, they continued. In the meantime, they have found a private donor (a local businessman) who will support them – the activity is planned for August 2017.
- ✓ **Lupeni Club** held a clean-up of the National Park (April 2017).
- ✓ **Lupeni Club** prepared a demo session of a Club meeting (May 2017) for the Open Days event of their high-school.
- ✓ **Băile Herculane Club** organized a seminar about the importance of active citizenship and taking care of local nature for 5th grade students (May 2017).
- ✓ **Anina Club** started to plan for a Christmas event, with a public talent show and a Christmas fair in the local cultural centre. The income would have paid for a field trip to the National Park during summer vacation. Unfortunately, a few weeks before the event, the cultural centre was closed due to plumbing repairs. The students' enthusiasm sank and they could not mobilize in time to find an alternative location.

☑ **Thirty participants at a Train the Trainer event.** The workshop was organized to present the project and offer experiential learning sessions to potential multipliers, in order to disseminate the education methodology. The event brought together **25 potential multipliers** active in nature education, coming from the areas surrounding the five protected areas: 15 new teachers, five National Park representa-

⁶ Earth Hour event Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/events/439108956421310/?active_tab=discussion

⁷ Earth Hour video with student playing acoustic guitar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFaODKfNATs&app=desktop>

tives, one school headmaster, four representatives of local NGOs (two are also teachers), plus representatives of the Clubs and the authors of the Wilderness Education Toolkit. We had initially planned to have 30 multipliers present, but we had difficulties in finding active NGOs in all five target areas, given the low degree of civil society participation in the region. On the positive side, New Horizons Foundation (NHF) representatives were part of the facilitation team and thus an important NGO active in the entire region through its local branches (the IMPACT Clubs) was present and informed. The NHF also participated in the Closing Workshop (see below).

In addition, a **Closing Workshop** – not planned under the original project – was organized in April 2017 to evaluate the project and to explore improvements in the approach looking forward. It was attended by the project partners, some of the teachers and core team members of the clubs, as well as representatives of **4 external NGO** (3 Romanian, 1 international) who have the potential to integrate the results of the project into their work. This provided a candid and open review by Club representatives, project partners and external experts. Main conclusions and proposed actions are provided in Annex D.

Participants of both events considered the experience meaningful, and expressed their interest to continue either the Clubs as such, or to integrate parts of the Curriculum of the Wilderness Education Toolkit in their work. For example, teachers mentioned they might develop an optional school curriculum based on the Guide, or use some activities in their normal classes. NGO participants found the collection of activities from the Guide very valuable, as well as the methodology and lessons learned.

5. Discussion

5.1 An overview of project objectives

The objectives of the project were reached and Club projects and continuing activities are proof that **students and teachers have developed key competencies that** lead to active citizenship for wilderness. Each Club has held at least 15 Club meetings per year, meaning at least **150 “peer-to-peer” training sessions** were organized over the duration of the project. Besides the Club meetings, the learning and training experience included seven nature-connection experiences (camps and Wilderness Treks), two Academies, one Final event as well as one Closing workshop. The Club meetings were attended by more than the 100 active members (an average of 20 active members per Club), the number of participants exceeded 200 youth, over the two Club years. The projects and events attracted over 200 additional people as audience or beneficiaries.

Twelve action-oriented projects were developed and implemented in the Clubs, with tangible and visible results, such as trails being identified and marked, or an Earth Hour event being organized in the city center of Reșița. This result exceeded the original goal of five projects. The most active youth (core teams of each Club) were also involved in side-events where they represented the Club and further trained or engaged other people. These experiences include participation in a youth exchange with New Horizons Clubs (Lupeni Club), a training session and connection with possible future partners in Serbia, or Club members leading a field trip for roughly 20 regional staff members of WWF’s Danube-Carpathian Programme.

While the facilitation of Club meetings enhanced students’ self-confidence, public speaking and facilitation skills, developing and executing the action-oriented nature projects consolidated **their self-esteem, their community engagement** and overall optimism, exemplified by an “can-do” attitude. This conclusion is based on feedback from teachers, external partners and team members, but also greatly on students’ own (repeated) feedback. Their individual development over time, since entering the project, is visible, sometimes spectacular, and directly proportional to the degree of involvement in the above-mentioned activities.

Students' stories: How's life after the Wilderness Club?

- ✓ Starting August 22nd, **Giorgiana** Negoïtescu (now 18 years old), a student from Orșova Club will be a trainer in a national event organized by New Horizons Foundation. Giorgiana has discovered her passion for training since the Academy in 2015. She pursued this passion by practicing during the Club meetings. And she applied for this trainer role after learning about this opportunity on the Facebook group. Although it is a one-time event, this can serve as a first step for her becoming an independent trainer in a highly competitive and professional environment.
- ✓ **Isabella's** Facebook profile proudly states that her job is at WWF. While she may not be working for WWF, Isabella Ciută (now 17 years old) does earn money during her first summer job as a tourist guide in Băile Herculane. Summer jobs for young people in Romania are extremely rare, or even unheard of. Isabella thus helps to fill in a local need – the need for guides – and is, implicitly, supporting local tourism. Isabella has the necessary skills: A good command of English, a pleasant personality, good knowledge of the area's cultural and natural heritage and an ease in communicating with groups. The last two skills were developed in the Club, as Isabella herself often mentions. She is grateful to the Wilderness Clubs for facilitating her growth process and for opening a door to a potential career path.

The WWF project manager, Cătălina Murariu, continues to be contacted for academic and professional advice, for recommendation letters for summer schools or universities abroad, or for good news regarding extra-curricular successes.

The **Club network** is strong, because they have not only organized joint activities (e.g. the joint field trip organized by the Reșița and Lupeni Clubs in Retezat National Park in May 2017), but they have formed friendships and visited each other in their free time. The students published photos of evening outings on the project's Facebook group. The more formal activities such as the longer hiking trips were usually initiated by teachers. Students from different clubs also undertook several initiatives to visit each other – they either publish common photos on the Facebook group, or send them privately to the project manager.

A Christmas story: Students' connections go deep

Before Christmas 2016 a group of students from all five Clubs asked the Project Manager Catalina Murariu for help. The group, comprised of students who form the editing team of the Facebook page (not to be confused with the Facebook group) of the project, asked Catalina to support them in organizing a Secret Santa within their group. The project manager was tasked with mixing and matching the givers and receivers of gifts. Later, the project manager also helped deliver the secret gifts from one Club to the other during the December Club visits.

Some **elements that have led to the strengthening of the network** are: bringing representatives from the five Clubs together at the common events seven times (camps, academies, evaluation events), encouraging them to work as editorial team for the Facebook page of the project (different than the Facebook group), and always treating them as one network in both external and internal communications.

One important role for internal communication was played by the **common forum for discussions** – the **Facebook group** – which helped to deliver updates, announcements, celebrate successes and make people visible and meaningful to each other. The “Active for Wilderness” closed group currently has 212 members – most of them are students, but also teachers, project team members, external trainers and other guests who worked with the group. Through their posts and photo stories, Clubs inspire and mobilize each other to act. These updates also help the project team to take the pulse of the group. When posts got scarce occasionally, the project manager or another mentor published an article or a call to action which energized the teams. The Facebook group continues to be an excellent platform to announce various opportunities for students and schools such as training offers, contests, funding opportunities etc.

13 teachers have been trained and have practiced the role of adult leaders for the Clubs over time. As such they have introduced the concept of wilderness in schools through innovative teaching methods. The Clubs started with ten teachers (two teacher-teams in each high school). The Anina duo dropped out and a new teacher stepped in for the second year, while in both Orșova and Lupeni a third teacher joined the teachers' team during the second year.

Besides the actual topics in the Club's curriculum and the activities detailed in Club meetings, the biggest impact and implicit behavioural shift was invoked by teachers taking on the roles of mentors and "context" creators, rather than meeting facilitators. The concept of youth empowerment and the student's reactions were new and surprising for them, and this improved the quality of the relationship with the students, according to feedback from both sides. In addition, they were very open to conservation topics and nature experiences and would like to have more access to them, similarly as many of the students did. At the Closing workshop **teachers stated** that they feel that **they are the ones who learned a lot** from the project and that it had **a very strong personal impact** on them. Moreover, they recommended that in future projects they literally are treated as students, and are offered the same type of training as the student core team members.

5.2 Adaptive management in project implementation

Overall the main activities and results reflected in the project proposal were achieved (see above and the overall workplan in Annex B).

Some individual activities were delayed in relation to the original work plan, or changed as adaptive management:

- ✓ One of the proposed camps was moved to a later date to better accommodate the school's schedules.
- ✓ The completion of the Wilderness Education Toolkit was delayed by three months, but did not have an adverse impact on the results.

Due to cost-savings it was possible to extend the project duration by four months from December 2016 to April 2017. This allowed for an extended time to coach the Clubs in their second year of existence and the realization of a Closing workshop to evaluate the project.

The departure of the original project manager, Irina Lapoviță, luckily only caused a temporary delay, as her successor, Cătălina Murariu, was already involved in previous phases of the project and the development of the toolkit.

With respect to the Clubs and their dynamics, the project manager and coaches were confronted with a broad spectrum of progress and engagement, depending on the commitment of the teachers, as well as the student core teams. Some, like the Lupeni and Reșița Clubs, "over-achieved" the original expectations, both with respect to meetings, but also initiatives (i.e. an Earth Hour event). This was strongly influenced by enthusiastic teachers, who managed to motivate and inspire Club members and who also created goodwill within the faculty.

On the other hand, the Anina Club represented the greatest challenge in the project, as it was rather unstable. Based on the self-assessment of the Club members, the behaviours and conditions that led to this fluid state of the Anina Club were derived from the socio-economic status of the area, an officially declared "poverty area". Consequently, school activities were much more constrained and the fluctuation (e.g. one teacher preparing to retire, another teacher looking forward to move back to Reșița city – which occurred during the second project year) left the Club hanging. Even though a series of measures were taken to consolidate the Club and even though there are activities happening in Anina, at this point, the continuity of the activities in Anina beyond the 2016/2017 school year is questionable. That said, during the first year the initiatives by the core group of students compensated for the lack of teacher engagement. An assessment of the situation and possible measures to ensure continuation in Anina is presented in Annex C.

The situation in Anina exemplified the strong dependency on schools, which can ideally magnify the impact, but – as in the case of Anina – act as a constraint. One key lesson learned for the future that was also raised and discussed at the Closing workshop was to consider having Clubs hosted by other types of organizations, beside schools.

The **Translation the Wilderness Education toolkit in English** represented another deviation from the original project plan, in a positive sense. Although a translation had not been planned, resources were made available to translate the Guide with positive consequences:

- ✓ easier access to the contents and methodologies by anyone in the world, thus multiplying the know-how to build capacity in other organizations (e.g. schools, NGOs),
- ✓ easier to adapt and use for other topics and areas, possibility to find partners and develop international collaborations.

5.3 Cooperation: a key to project success

5.3.1 Cooperation with project partners

The most important cooperation occurred among the project partners: **WWF-Switzerland, WWF-Romania, WWF-Austria**. **WWF-Switzerland** played a key role in defining the strategy and education approach (e.g. the wilderness treks were encouraged due to the Swiss experience), in the project management and promotion/replication the project internationally, as well as defining the expectations of the Closing workshop. **WWF-Austria** brought in experience in youth empowerment (content and methodology), powerful contributions at events that helped motivate and bond the participants and partners (e.g. Academy, Club visits, Closing workshops) and a strong support in the international outreach. **WWF-Romania** as main implementer had the field knowledge and connections, maintained and supported the Clubs, defined and developed the methodology and the Guide, organized the events and the nature-connection experiences, and promoted the project in both the Romanian and international education communities.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- ✓ Diversity in a project team is always a winning formula – different countries and different types of expertise, with similar goals, enrich the project and catalyze innovation. In the Romanian team, for instance, it was very valuable to have education experts, field experts, conservation and communication experts.
- ✓ An international dimension increases the appeal of the project for its beneficiaries – it helps in promoting the project, but also increasing the quality of the events.
- ✓ No matter what the composition of the partnership is, it is essential to have field and local experts from the project area on the team. Having someone close by, helps immensely during crises to maintain contact, and to ensure continuity.
- ✓ Recommendation: consider including students from all partner countries in the project, even at a later stage where local beneficiaries can become hosts for foreign students. To this end, further funding is necessary.

5.3.2 Cooperation with the educational partner

The main educational partner, sub-contracted for the project, was the Romanian **New Horizons Foundation** (NHF), who has established over 100 Youth Clubs in the past decade or so. The NHF was a perfect complement to the WWF team, with their specific education expertise and good trainers to join the events. Their role was essential in conceiving the flow and methodology for starting-up a Club, with flexibility to adapt and integrate WWF's conservation know-how and contents. Since youth empowerment is their main approach, successful implementation empowers youth not only to become active for wilderness (the primary objective of this project), but also to become articulate and vocal citizens. At the same time, NHF acquired conservation know-how which they plan to integrate into parts of their work.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- ✓ As WWF is not primarily an education organization, it is recommended to have educational partners in education initiatives, especially to tap into their know-how and networks.
- ✓ Have partners with complementary expertise and with wide networks.
- ✓ With such partnerships, WWF can magnify its educational impact, as the partners' know-how tends to amplify the focus on nature and conservation focus.
- ✓ Sub-contracting versus having the partner as formal project partner can offer more flexibility in establishing the form and dimension of the collaboration. On the other hand, partnering could have brought more commitment from NHF in promoting and continuing the project.

5.3.3 Cooperation with schools

The schools were important partners because they created the opportunity to recruit the participants, assigned teachers responsible for the Clubs, hosted the Clubs and offered visibility and continuity to the project, the Clubs and the promoted topics. The attitude of the school principals differed among the five schools. They were generally in favor of the Clubs, but not especially supportive. The main interfaces with the school were the active teachers, so the school management was more in the background.

In some schools, such as Băile Herculane high school, the project was a very welcome alternative for students' free time, as there were limited offers for youth in their towns. In other cases, such as Reșița, the Club was just one extracurricular activity out of many, so there was a competition for getting the time and attention of active students. Busy students usually chose the Club due to nature activities, to the direct contact with WWF staff whom they saw as role models, and to the youth empowerment approach: the fact that they could facilitate meetings themselves.

One general challenge appeared when parents or other teachers perceived that students preferred to work on the Club project instead of preparing for final exams. In these situations, the teachers in charge of the Clubs (the adult leaders) played an important role as mediators, talking with both students and parents, or fellow teachers. The main message was that Clubs were meant to help students develop extra skills and not to adversely affect their school work.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- ✓ Schools are valuable partners, as hubs and part of bigger credible networks.
- ✓ By working with schools and, implicitly training teachers to become active promoters of nature and youth empowerment, the project had a positive impact on the entire educational system.
- ✓ Motivation and enthusiasm of teachers is crucial, as are potentially competing extracurricular activities.
- ✓ Recommendation: Invest more time in convincing school principals and to secure the commitment of motivated teachers at the outset of the project.

5.3.4 Cooperation with Protected areas staff

The partnership with local National and Nature Parks was important for establishing a clear geographical scope, offering Club members access to field expertise and providing support in defining and implementing conservation projects. Park staff responsible for education or community engagement took part in all major project events. Also, they were directly involved in some of the school projects. The level of involvement of the Park staff in the overall project and individual Club projects varied, according to the contact person's time and commitment to education. Although the rangers or the education staff were genuinely involved (in most cases), they did not integrate the educational approach in their work. This is probably due to the fact that educational staff often do not have a specific educational background, nor do parks offer in-depth educational programs. The park staff usually offer guided tours and nature interpretation to school groups. Nevertheless, protected area staff are willing to work with young people on specific projects that can help solve punctual problems in their parks. The lesson learned is that it is important to have both protected area staff and teachers or non-formal education experts involved in such a complex educational approach. This way they can complement each other.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- ✓ Keep partnerships with Parks, as they are the places where wilderness is likely to occur. They define the area and the overall goal of the Clubs, they bring positive symbolic associations, they provide real help in project implementation.
- ✓ Recommendation: When defining roles and expectations see them as supporters, not key players in education projects – education is not their priority, but when they can, they do get involved.
- ✓ Recommendation: Develop personal connections with Park staff members (often-times the „real” partners are not the top management or the head of education, but a passionate ranger).

5.3.5 Other forms of cooperation

This type of project is collaborative in its very essence, as it encourages innovation, outreach and network building. The Club members were trained to engage with stakeholders and form partnerships. Over time, various collaborations were developed by the project team and individual Clubs:

- ✓ Wilderness and pedagogical experts who contributed to the Guide,
- ✓ Various local, national, international NGOs active in their towns or nearby,
- ✓ Supporters of the Clubs: local businesses, local authorities, local media.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- ✓ Maintain an open approach, new cooperation partners will join in and support the cause.
- ✓ Keep the youth empowerment approach – this will multiply the partnerships, as each team/Club will become a local hub, maintaining and expanding local networks.

6. Public relations

6.1 Dissemination of results

Communications and outreach was carried out throughout the project, by WWF but also by Clubs themselves.

WWF-generated communications included:

- ✓ Project presentation materials and channels: factsheet in English, webpage on the WWF Romania website, video after the first year of the Clubs, posting the Guide in English on the WWF Danube-Carpathian website, WWF-Romania’s newsletter reported on the Wilderness Academy.
- ✓ Six press releases (PRs) announcing project milestones: April 2015, announcing the project and local school partnerships⁸, April 2015, announcing the project participation in the non-formal education week⁹, July 2015, the first camp¹⁰, October 2015, the Wilderness Academy¹¹, November 2015, launching the Guide¹², July 2016, following the Celebration event, a summary of

⁸ April 2015, press release announcing the project: http://wwf.ro/resurse/comunicate_de_presa/?243453/Cinci-licee-din-Banatul-Montan-se-pregtesc-s-devin-ambasadori-ai-naturii-slbaticie

⁹ April 2015, press release: http://wwf.ro/resurse/comunicate_de_presa/?243670/n-sptmna-coala-altfel-WWF-imple-mentez-metode-de-Educaie-pentru-Dezvoltare-Durabil-n-coli-din-10-judee

¹⁰ July 2015, press release: http://wwf.ro/resurse/comunicate_de_presa/?248871/Activi-pentru-protejarea-naturii-sal-baticie-din-Carpati

¹¹ October 2015, press release: http://www.wwf.ro/resurse/comunicate_de_presa/?254754/Elevi-si-profesori-pregatiti-sa-deschida-cluburi-pentru-protejarea-celei-maiintinse-zone-de-salbaticie-din-Europa

¹² November 2015, press release: http://www.wwf.ro/resurse/comunicate_de_presa/?256673/Exploratori%2Dai%2Dslbticiei%2Dn%2DCarpaii%2Ddin%2DSud%2DVestul%2DRomniei

the first year and announcing the second year¹³. The PRs generated interest mainly in local and regional media.

- ✓ All PRs and other project events were promoted on the WWF-Romania Facebook page which has over 110.000 followers
- ✓ National television (TVR) broadcasted one TV show presenting the wilderness youth camp organized in February 2016¹⁴
- ✓ The project had a dedicated article in Blue Air Magazine (airline company), in a section which presents WWF Projects.

Club-generated communications included:

- ✓ A dedicated Facebook page created together with Club members. The editorial team is comprised of representatives of all five Clubs, and is responsible for the page content and promotion. They also created project-branded cards. There are currently 760 followers, most of which are youth, but also teachers, NGOs or people who wish to find more about nature. The team of students is working under the supervision of the communication specialist at WWF and the Project Manager.
- ✓ Media coverage generated by Clubs:
 - Reșița Club representatives were invited to TV shows¹⁵,
 - the Anina Club had a story in the local newspaper,
 - the Băile Herculane Club invited a local radio host to their first club meeting.
- ✓ Communication related to Clubs' projects and initiatives. Here are some examples:
 - The Reșița Club organized the local Reșița **Earth Hour** (EH, March 2017) event in the main square and the Club team publicized it. Given it was the only EH event in the city, it drew a lot of attention.
 - The Lupeni Club organized a demo-Club meeting for their **Highschool Open Days** event in May 2017 for roughly 30 participants.
 - The **youth-exchange camp** organized by New Horizons Foundation **between Wilderness Clubs and IMPACT Clubs** (September 2016) in partnership with WWF was also used for raising awareness on the value of volunteering in the Jiu Valley region.
 - **Protected Areas** also promote on their Facebook pages the actions organized together with the Clubs.

The permanent **outputs** of the project are the Romanian and English versions of the Guide, or Wilderness Education Toolkit. The approach was also presented at an international wilderness education workshop in Austria in October 2016. Active international promotion is underway:

- ✓ In September 2015, the WWF Project Manager (Irina Lapoviță at the time) presented the project at the annual meeting of the **European Wilderness Society** in Austria.
- ✓ In April 2017, the current WWF Project Manager, Catalina Murariu, held a workshop for **WWF Danube-Carpathian regional staff** and offered copies of the Guide to regional offices. At the same meeting, students from the Băile Herculane Club guided WWF regional staff on the trail that they marked in their project, and presented their Club. The reactions were positive and the direct contact with the youth was very impactful.
- ✓ The project has been promoted in the **Global Educators Network of WWF**, with the help of WWF Austria, and one webinar describing the project took place, after completion of the project on June 20th 2017, with participants from several continents.
- ✓ In May 2017, two teachers and one student from the Orșova Club were invited to the **WWF Serbia Nature Academy**, and played the role of mentors and student-facilitators. After the event, the team met with staff of the **Djerdap National Park** (the Serbian side of Iron Gates Nature Park) and three schools from the Park area to brainstorm concrete cross-border partnership ideas.

¹³ July 2016, press release: http://www.wwf.ro/resurse/comunicate_de_presa/?272372/Natura%2Dsalbat-ica%2Ddin%2DCarpatii%2Dde%2DSud%2DVest%2Dprotejata%2Dde%2Dtineri%2Ddin%2Dcinci%2Dlicee

¹⁴ February 2016, TV broadcast on National Romanian Television: <http://www.tvrplus.ro/editie-drumuri-aproape-432006>

¹⁵ June 2016, TV broadcast on regional Banat TV with Resita Club representatives: <http://www.btv.ro/cafeaua-de-dimineata-2016-06-11/>

Four months after the end of the project communication on the Facebook group continues, and participants are still announcing activities organized. The former WWF project team is keeping the group active on a voluntary basis.

6.2 Beneficiaries of the results

- ✓ More than 200 students who participated in the Clubs or engaged via the Facebook pages – with their new competencies that they use both in the Clubs and in other contexts.
- ✓ Between 10 to 15 teachers who participated in the Clubs – they continue the Clubs but also use the new pedagogical approach and benefit from the improved relationship with their students.
- ✓ Teachers who learned about the Clubs and the curriculum – they are using the methodologies in regular classes, other non-formal education initiatives and are also considering opening Clubs in their schools.
- ✓ Several Romanian NGOs whose staff participated in the events are using the Guide as a teaching resource and the methodologies (nature-connection, youth empowerment) as inspiration in their approach. They are also actively searching for opportunities to partner with WWF.
- ✓ WWF-Romania – will adapt the Guide to new topics to replicate the Clubs in other Priority Conservation Areas in Romania: the Danube Delta (adapt the Guide by the end of 2017) and one is the bison re-introduction area to the North in the Țarcu Mountains (ibid).
- ✓ WWF's international network can use the Guide to set up their own Clubs or use the methods for other programs. WWF Austria is actively searching for partners to set up a youth-led camp in the project area, to tap into the pool of young trainers from Romania and to continue the youth-empowerment and peer-to-peer learning processes.



Wilderness Trek, ©Vasile Moisa

6.3 Continuation beyond the project period

The project ended formally in April 2017, and no capacity is available to support the Clubs beyond this time. That said, the Clubs will certainly complete the current school year. WWF Romania will monitor whether and which Clubs are active in the 2017/2018 school year. So, while the continuation of all five Clubs within the project area is uncertain, a number of interventions were undertaken to ensure the multiplication of the educational concept:

- ✓ To facilitate the international dissemination of the wilderness education approach, WWF Switzerland supported (financially as well as through technical consultation and editing) and WWF Romania implemented the translation of the *Explorers of Wilderness*¹⁶ Guide into English.
- ✓ With this new English tool and nearly two years of experience with the Clubs, a Closing workshop was organized in April 2017 to evaluate the project and to set the stage for continuity and potential partnerships. The main results of the evaluation, the recommendations and next steps are summarized in Annex D.
- ✓ A variety of cross-cooperation and Club initiatives unfolded over the reporting period and beyond, locally and internationally (see previous page).
- ✓ Moreover, as mentioned previously, WWF-Romania will open Clubs and adapt the Guide for the Țarcu Mountains Natura 2000 site and the Danube Delta.
- ✓ There are plans underway to organize an international WWF youth camp in the project area during the summer of 2018 with participants from Switzerland. The idea is to involve Wilderness Club members as guides in some of the activities and to foster exchanges.
- ✓ Based on discussions with teachers and Club members the Clubs located in Lupeni, Orșova and Reșița will continue in the next school year. They have continued with activities during summer vacation. The continuation of the Club in Băile Herculane is uncertain, based on information in early August 2017. It's doubtful that the work in Anina will continue. This is quite unfortunate given the socio-economic situation there and the overall lack of attention given to students by the faculty.

Story:

- ✓ Adrian Grancea, the Reșița-based Local Clubs coordinator of WWF, has established very close personal connections to the Clubs. Adrian uses a part of his free time, both during the project and after the project ended, to interact with the Clubs. The Clubs in turn see him as a mentor in terms of wilderness and outdoors activities. He is a favourite guest invited by Clubs to their outdoors activities.
- ✓ In May 2017 Cătălina Murariu, the WWF project manager, held a workshop on the topic of ESD and the project for 1st year students (whole generation) from the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, future teachers and trainers. At the end of the workshop, students had to develop an advertisement for the Guide. Below are some spontaneous responses of participants:

"It is attractive and it makes you feel like you are really traveling in Southwestern Carpathians." „It has an amazing design and real students appear in the photos.“ „It is already tested and it includes activities that you will surely want to test“

7. Conclusion

7.1 Success of the intervention

The working assumption of the project *Getting Active for Wilderness in Romania* was that it is vital to combine nature-connection with youth empowerment to inspire students to become active for wilderness and their surrounding environment. The approach combined elements of experiential education, ESD and nature appreciation. Indirect evidence showed that it proved successful with respect to the original targets:

- ✓ Roughly 100 students and 10 teachers invested their free-time for Club activities.

¹⁶ The Guide, in English, is available for download at this link: http://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/wilderness_explorers_guide_en.pdf

- ✓ At least 12 community service projects were initiated.
- ✓ Students became active in local media and on a dedicated Facebook page.
- ✓ Clubs organized exchanges with other Clubs and other organizations.
- ✓ The Romanian and the English versions of the Wilderness Education Toolkit have been and are being disseminated to interested organizations involved in environmental education.

Unfortunately, we did not have the capacity to formally evaluate Club members' skills and attitude changes within the scope of this project. However, we have evidence from the evaluation during the Closing workshop that Club members and teachers were profoundly influenced by the project. We were particularly surprised by the openness of the teachers, who indicated that their engagement with this project fostered self-reflection, personal growth and will certainly impact their teaching approaches to become more inclusive and participatory. Given their role as multipliers these changes will certainly influence future students, irrespective of whether they are in Wilderness Clubs or not.

With respect to the students, their **written evaluations** confirm the repeated verbal feedback. Their awareness about nature benefits and threats increased, as well as their motivation and skills to act for nature. *“Anything made towards its protection is very important”* stated one student at the Final Event in June 2016. Students also deeply appreciated the possibility to develop projects and to receive guidance in the process: their feedback covers skills and information they acquired (*„to know the connection between cause – effect – impact”, „logical plan of conceiving the project”, „a project should be well created to get the expected results”* etc) as well as motivation and inspiration for the future (*„It is quite difficult, but it worth it.” „Nothing is impossible.” „It can help you discover a new world” „It will help us in the future: university, job.”*)

One important part of the students' learning experience was **being part of a Club** and working constantly as a team. The feedback on this topic is rather personal and indicates interesting shifts of perspective, such as:

- ✓ *The democracy, team-work. Near you, my totalitarian approach diminished.*
- ✓ *The activities are more efficient, pleasant and satisfactory when you are part of a team.*
- ✓ *It is an unforgettable experience, helps us in personal development.*
- ✓ *It helps us in personal development and it also strengthens the collaboration with the other members.*
- ✓ *The more involved we are, the more efficient the results.*

Students considered the project as a transformational experience on a **personal level**. They reflected on what the project helped them to develop and to discover about themselves:

- ✓ *I love nature and all that it contains. In nature I feel better than anywhere else.*
- ✓ *I have the skill of spacial orientation.*
- ✓ *The love for nature, team spirit and the desire to get active.*
- ✓ *It's good to help others.*
- ✓ *I shouldn't be pessimistic about the future.*
- ✓ *I am capable of fitting in.*
- ✓ *I learned to be more communicative.*
- ✓ *I was more shy in the beginning.*
- ✓ *I can do more than I would have ever imagined.*
- ✓ *How to believe in myself.*
- ✓ *I can love without limits.*
- ✓ *I can be the change.*



Closing workshop, ©Mihai Lupsan

Although developed for a specific topic – wilderness – and the Southern Carpathian region, the project and its instruments have a universal value and are adaptable to other areas and contexts. Various efforts are underway, locally and internationally to replicate and/or adapt the approach to local conditions. Two concrete ones foresee opening Clubs in Țarcu Mountains and the Danube Delta. WWF Serbia and its network of active schools are also very involved in this process. While there is always room for improvement and fine-tuning, the project has proved successful in getting youth active for wilderness in Romania's Southwestern Carpathians.

7.2 Exploring steps beyond the project

No changes to the overarching objectives are necessary. However, four points deserve further thought and exploration:

1. **Role of schools:** Schools provide access to students and through extracurricular activities provide a platform for Wilderness Clubs. At the same time experience shows that success of Clubs hinges upon the motivation of teachers and their workloads. A recommendation of the Closing workshop was to explore if other organizations are interested and willing to adopt the approach.
2. **Long-term sustainability:** The duration of the project was 28 months and too short to “institutionalize” the approach. Due to funding constraints, it is not possible for WWF Romania to continue supporting the Clubs. Two potential ways to institutionalize the work could be through incorporation of key elements into non-formal education curricula of schools, or funding from external sponsors. However, neither schools nor sponsors are likely to initially buy into an unproven concept. As such, this project will serve as a “proof of concept” for future efforts and its success makes it more likely for further support to be secured. Efforts to replicate this approach elsewhere should include measures to ensure long-term continuity.
3. **Building continuity with individual Clubs:** As students graduate or leave the schools, a capacity drain occurs with respect to skills acquired in the Clubs and from the Wilderness Education Toolkit. An effort should be made to establish “intergenerational core teams” spanning two or possibly three classes. This would imply a deeper focus on having students from lower grades participate in some activities, so the brain drain by graduating Club members is reduced.

4. **Incentivizing teachers in the long-term and “broadening the faculty base”:** In order to get more teachers per school to participate, or keep them engaged for 4-5 years, a number of possible scenarios, or useful tactics to keep the teachers onboard on the long term, while keeping their involvement voluntary, are listed below:
- ✓ **Constant contact.** Having a permanent, assigned contact in WWF to mobilize them and regular (annual) training sessions and field trips.
 - ✓ **Formal engagement.** Renewing the “formal framework” – signing or extending a school partnership, signing volunteering contracts.
 - ✓ **Various (non-financial) benefits.** Opportunities such as joining a field trip with WWF staff, offering them a certified Training of Trainer course (via external education experts), offering teachers the possibility to join any type of international travel (e.g. an exchange with peers in Serbia, Central Europe).
 - ✓ **Symbolic rewards.** These could include diplomas, interviews with teachers to be featured on WWF magazines, web pages or in local media, offering some form of award.
 - ✓ **Maintaining the network format.** This makes the project more high-profile, as it emphasizes a regional focus. International networks or affiliations would also help a lot in this respect.

8. Bibliography & online resources

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European Commission Environment: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/>

Explorers of Wilderness in Romania’s Southwestern Carpathians, complete edition: http://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/wilderness_explorers_guide_en.pdf

Public relations

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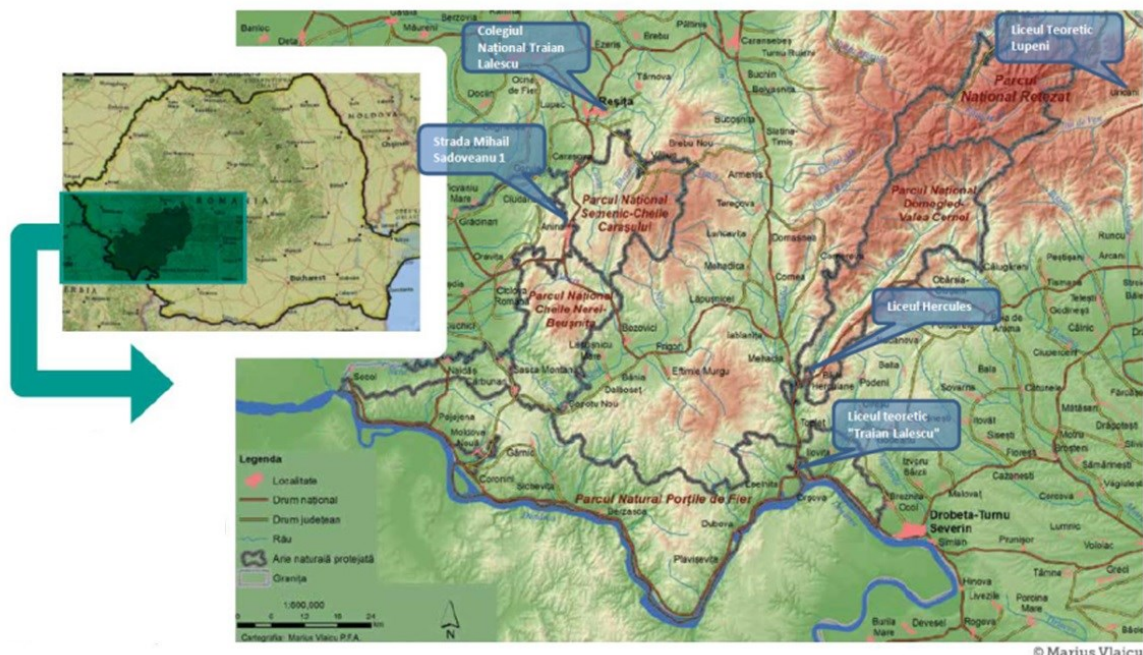
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9. Annexes

A: Maps



Southwestern Carpathians, highlighted on map of Romania, © Marius Vlaicu.



Geographical Location of the Schools relative to the protected areas comprising the wilderness (delineated in blue)

B: Depiction of the overall workplan & deliverables

Activities	2015												2016												2017			
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	
1. Coordination and project management	project management - an ongoing coordination of the project on the project team preparation meeting/work plan monitoring and evaluation intermedia and final Reporting																											
2. SCWSDI Summer Camp	visit communities/high schools, present the project, draft/trign partnerships with directors & teachers prepare selection process of the students attending the camp visit high school, present the project/camp and the selection process to students select students design & prepare camp (venue, agenda, supplies, facilitators) 2 Wilderness Camps take place																											
3. Wilderness Educational Toolkit	preparation and team meeting contact partners, wilderness specialists, build work team work plan/content writing/editing/proofreading find translation, layout, printing/supplies/Sign contract/Work plan, print the toolkit																											
4. Wilderness Academy for students and teachers	preparation and team meeting agenda, prepare training material for teachers and for students, facilitators logistic (venue, catering, transport, materials) Wilderness Academy takes place follow-up activities																											
5. Wilderness clubs in high schools	prepare structure, resources, materials club opening kick off meeting in each club, support clubs to start planning activities Follow project development with reporting procedure visit clubs - an ongoing support for wilderness clubs (2015-2017) and monitoring wilderness clubs																											
6. Contribution to SCWSDI Wilderness strategy	present the SCWSDI strategy to teachers establish work plan with teachers for the strategy present the education component to SCWSDI																											
7. Final Event and results & next steps	preparation meeting design agenda/resources/materials logistic (venue, catering, transport, materials) event takes place follow-up																											
8. Wilderness Train the Trainer Program	preparation meeting select new schools, contact directors/teachers design agenda, materials, facilitators logistic (venue, catering, transport) Event takes place follow-up activities																											
9. Communication	preparation of presentation materials (short film, fact sheet) development of the Club's visual identity together with youth production of t-shirt, cap and other elements of visibility first press release, announcing the project second press release - the Academy third press release - the opening of the Club fourth press release - final event Press release Train the trainer event Newsletter 1 Newsletter 2 launch of the Club's Facebook page website creation put in place Brochure presenting the results of the project Video for final event Video for Train the Trainer event Ongoing support for developing toolkit, preparing and attending meetings, constant media and social work																											
10. Closing workshop	Define concept, short list, date Organize & coordinate logistic Workshop takes place Follow-up activities																											

C: Anina Wilderness Club. Assessment and proposed ways forward

Summary of problems mentioned by the teachers of Anina and solutions identified together:

- ✓ Students' full class schedule not allowing them to meet during school hours. **Solution:** the Club members found a meeting time outside the school schedule.
- ✓ Only a small group of students facilitated Club activities. **Solution:** for 2nd year, try to adopt the Reșița model and empower every member to facilitate at least once.
- ✓ No stable meeting room. **Solution:** find a new permanent Club meeting room. The initial meeting room was changed.

- ✓ First generation of teachers had tensions with other teachers and the principal. **Solution:** address causes of tensions, try to find solutions in the Anina teaching team and with the support of WWF.
- ✓ Local media asked for money to cover Club's story. **Solution:** found alternative channels, i.e. social media, direct communications, communicating via WWF.

Problems detected by the project team:

- ✓ Lack of involvement from the teachers, which also affected students' enthusiasm. The teachers had been appointed by the principal, without a democratic process. One teacher was old and close to retirement, the other one was very young and inexperienced. They accomplished to lead the Club through the first year, but they were not the types of teachers who could inspire students.
- ✓ The overall lack of human resources and optimism in Anina, was due to the fact, that teachers usually avoided to teach at this poor and remote school (that was quite empty, during our visits). This means that 1) teachers came to Anina only for short periods and strived to move on to better locations 2) Anina teachers usually were forced to teach in other schools located elsewhere to maintain a full-time job. Consequently, no deep connection was built between them and their students. **Solutions and lessons learned:** For the second Club year the project manager went to the school and started recruiting a new teacher. A local, rather young, very involved and enthusiastic teacher was recruited. The down-side was that he had not been exposed to the same training experience as the other teachers.
- ✓ We also identified a local NGO, the Italian-founded association called Il Giocattolo (<http://ilgiocattolo.org/>), that might play the same role as the school in hosting and supporting the Club, if it's impossible to continue.

D: Closing workshop. Summary of results

The Closing workshop created a space for project beneficiaries to express themselves, and for project team and partner organizations to: conclude starting from beneficiaries' reflections, develop individual follow up actions and partnership ideas.

The key outcomes of the workshop were structured into:

- ✓ Key learning points.
- ✓ Action plan for individuals from various organizations (WWF and partners, nationally and internationally).
- ✓ List of potential partnerships: punctual actions or joint projects.

The key learning points regarding the educational approach with all its components – Clubs (youth-led, project-focused), the Guide, support (nature-connection events, training of trainers etc) – should focus on:

- ✓ The essential role of nature-connection.
- ✓ Learning by doing and reflection.
- ✓ Meaningful actions: projects solving real conservation problems.
- ✓ Efficiency of youth empowerment.
- ✓ Constant focus on involving newcomers (i.e. younger students).
- ✓ Treating teachers as students / learners.
- ✓ Establishing personal connections with Park staff / rangers when partnering with them.
- ✓ Finding new contexts and partners for opening Clubs, not just schools.

The elaborated action plans were mostly related to:

- ✓ Continuing the relationship with present Clubs and Club members, offering them new opportunities and motivation, e.g. participation in the European Youth Summit 2018, becoming peer-to-peer trainers to New Horizons Clubs.
- ✓ Connecting present Clubs and Club members to partners' initiatives or Club networks such as NHF's IMPACT clubs.
- ✓ Promoting the project and the Guide as an instrument, to be further used and integrated in new projects and activities – within New Horizons eco-tourism Club network (nationally), WWF's network (internationally).
- ✓ Opening Youth Clubs on other conservation topics prioritized by WWF Romania – Bison-focus, Sturgeon/Delta-focus.
- ✓ Pursuing new project ideas: initiating a new project on nature learning for Romanian non-formal education week, a youth-led international camp in the Wilderness area.

Being a very complex educational intervention the project requires resources in order to be replicated elsewhere. Experiences of the project team need to be included for replication elsewhere.

The key ingredients for continuity are:

- ✓ An adapted version of the Guide for local circumstances.
- ✓ Nature-connection activities.
- ✓ Support for Clubs, such as training of trainers and solid local partnerships.

As mentioned previously, WWF Romania has taken steps to replicate the project in the Țarcu Mountains and the Danube Delta. New opportunities are still to be identified. The educational approach or elements of the project are very relevant and useful as a foundation for initiatives developed by WWF and other NGOs outside Romania. Concrete proposals are being elaborated by most participating organizations.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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