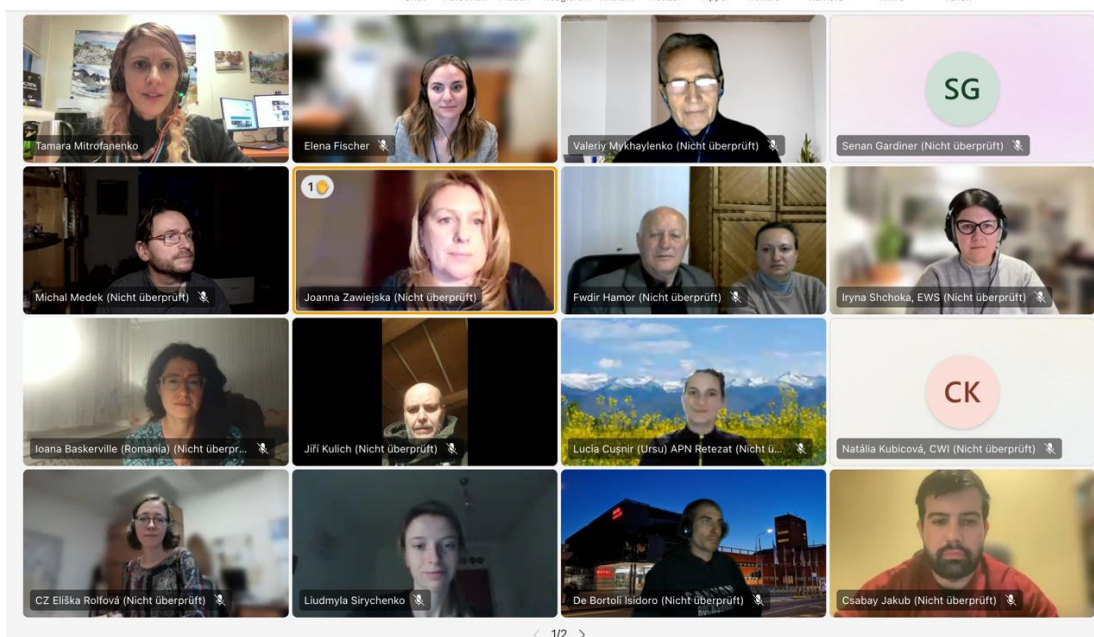


Carpathian ESD Expert Network (CESDEN) Meeting

Brief 2024 Update, Youth Engagement, Outlook for 2025

30 January 2025 | Online



Moderators: Tamara Mitrofanenko and Elena Fischer (UNEP - Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention)

Participants: Education for sustainable development (ESD) and nature protection experts from the seven Carpathian countries, Eurac Research, Leuphana University. See *List of Participants in Annex 1*.

Meeting Agenda: See *Preliminary Programme in Annex 2*.

1. Key Activities from 2024
 - a. Impressions from Steps Forward Education Festival – New Approaches to ESD in the Carpathians and Beyond | Košice, Slovakia, November 2024 (Tamara Mitrofanenko and Elena Fischer)
 - b. UNECE Forum for ESD and Youth (Tamara Mitrofanenko)
2. Engaging youth and young researchers in the Carpathian region
 - a. Carpathian Convention hopes of engaging youth (Tamara Mitrofanenko)
 - b. Youth engagement activities of European Wilderness Society (Iryna Shchoka)
 - c. Project Shifting Towards Ecotourism in Protected Areas through Heritage Interpretation (Valeriy Mykhaylenko)
 - d. Project ProBioTIC (Senan Gardiner)
3. Outlook for 2025 – Carpathian ESD and related activities
 - a. Linking biodiversity, pastoralism, cultural heritage via ESD in the Carpathian region (Tamara Mitrofanenko and Elena Fischer)
 - b. Updates from the Hungarian Association of Environmental Enterprises (Gary Hanko)
 - c. Updates from the Science for the Carpathians (Joanna Zawiejska)

MEETING NOTES

The Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention (SCC) expressed appreciation for the feedback and active participation of the Carpathian ESD Expert Network (CESDEN) members.

1. KEY ACTIVITIES FROM 2024

Impressions from the Steps Forward Education Festival – New Approaches to ESD in the Carpathians and Beyond

The Steps Forward Education Festival took place in Košice, Slovakia in November 2024. The SCC colleagues, Tamara Mitrofanenko and Elena Fischer, encouraged meeting participants to visit the [Steps Forward Education Festival webpage](#) on the Carpathian Convention website and shared their main impressions from the event, including:

- Links between the Slovak organizations working in environmental education with experts from other Carpathian countries;
- Cross-sectoral references to links between education and pastoralism, biodiversity (e.g. co-existence with large carnivores), tourism, landscape interpretation, cultural heritage, and engagement of marginalized groups;
- Active support from international experts, particularly the Chair of UNECE Steering Committee on ESD, Dr. Aravella Zachariou, who shared inputs from international ESD frameworks and her experience on behalf of Cyprus;
- Keen interest from several participants in actively participating in Carpathian Day and engaging with CESDEN.

Following inputs by the SCC, meeting participants who also attended the Steps Forward Education Festival were also encouraged to share their impressions:

- Appreciated the in-person format, making connections and sharing activities and experiences.
- Impressed with the number of attendees considering the challenging topics. There was significant interest from Slovakia representatives, but many participants from Slovakia are no longer in their positions in the ministry due to the political situation.

In response, the SCC emphasized that, based on feedback from partners, it is all the more important in today's environment to utilize and engage with the CESDEN to remain connected.

UNECE Forum for ESD and Youth

This UNECE Forum took place in Limassol, Cyprus in June 2024. Tamara Mitrofanenko informed participants about the SCC's efforts to support the participation of Carpathian youth and Carpathian examples in ESD and Entrepreneurship at the Forum. The SCC also shared insights from moderating a discussion on multilateral partnerships during the World Café, "Amplifying youth voices for ESD" at the Forum.

2. ENGAGING YOUTH AND YOUNG RESEARCHERS IN THE CARPATHIAN REGION

Carpathian Convention hopes of engaging youth

Tamara Mitrofanenko, SCC, reminded participants about the Carpathian Convention's mandate to make efforts on youth engagement received, where the Carpathian Convention 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP7) *"Invites the Parties to explore the possibility of establishing "Carpathian Convention Youth Focal Point" in order to increase the engagement of young people in this process"* (DECISION COP7/19.4).

Towards this mandate, the SCC aims to build on several ESD events and initiatives, including those organized by the Science for the Carpathians (S4C), such as:

- Exploring options for collaborating with the UNECE Youth Delegates, youth-related processes in Carpathian countries, and representatives from the German Youth Panel;
- Collaborating with partners and initiatives working with young scientists, such as the Student Conference on Conservation Science (SCCS) and ProBioTIC project;
- Promoting Carpathian Day events as occasions to involve youth;
- Promoting discussions about marginalized youth and ways to engage them, envisioning Forum Carpaticum 2025 as an event where these topics can be raised.

The SCC invited contributions from the CESDEN members on how to enhance meaningful youth participation in the Carpathian Convention activities and gave the floor to the speakers.

Youth engagement activities of European Wilderness Society

Iryna Shchoka, European Wilderness Society, discussed several initiatives that the organization coordinates or is involved with regarding youth engagement. The SMARTOUR: SMART Tourism Skills Initiative was a project that created educational materials in several languages in partnership with educational institutions from the Carpathian region on accessibility, sustainability, digitalisation, cultural heritage and creativity, and cooperation and marketing. They also work with European Solidarity Corps (ESC) in hosting youth volunteers from several European countries, including Ukraine, to support them on several activities. They also organize an annual Youth Green Conference, focusing on topics such as the environment, climate change, rural areas, waste management, and more. This year, it will take place 22-27 September 2025 in Biosphere Reserve Lungau, Austria. Another event that Iryna Shchoka highlighted is the [final conference for their LIFEstockProtect Project](#) in Austria. Other relevant projects and initiatives that the European Wilderness Society is involved in can be found in the presentation.

After the presentation, participants inquired about the potential for engaging ESC volunteers in Carpathian Protected Areas. According to Iryna Shchoka, the application includes a quality label, and in 2025, there will be a new call for partner organizations. The ESC program lasts up to 12 months for a volunteer and covers aspects like accommodation and transportation. Other participants were eager to collaborate with the Youth Green Conference, including potentially incorporating a Carpathian Day activity.

Project Shifting Towards Ecotourism in Protected Areas through Heritage Interpretation

Valeriy Mykhaylenko, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, presented on the project, which aims to shift the focus of national parks towards ecotourism through heritage and culture, with an emphasis on involving young scientists. The project involves a "Carpathian School Project," where throughout 2025,

students will learn about national reserves in Slovakia, Poland and Hungary, and visit four Ukrainian national parks to then create tourism management plans for Ukrainian national parks for a competition to win funding for potential implementation. This collaborative project built upon S4C partnerships and involves partners from all Visegrad countries. More details about the project can be found in the presentation.

After the presentation, a representative from the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve expressed interest and recommended that the Reserve be included in the project as a crucial part of the Ukrainian Carpathians. Another expert commended the interlinking of cultural heritage and ESD in the project, and suggested that the Hutsul communities in Romania also be involved, not just those in Ukraine, to better pursue the project's goal of strengthening collaboration throughout the Carpathians. These recommendations were well received.

Project ProBioTIC: Promoting Biodiversity through Transdisciplinary Learning Interventions in the Carpathians

Senan Gardiner, Leuphana University Lüneburg, presented on the ProBioTIC project, which seeks to facilitate transdisciplinary learning exchange between students in Jagiellonian University and Leuphana University and biodiversity stakeholders in the Carpathians, with a focus on promoting biodiversity. It will train young scientists and engage various stakeholders, including government, science, businesses, and civil society, in biodiversity-related initiatives. The project will include two Summer Schools, university modules, and policy briefs, fostering collaboration and scenario-based research to develop context-specific, broadly applicable ESD learning interventions. He put out a call for groups to work with the university students for co-creating learning interventions for all stakeholders on complex sustainability issues. Potential interventions could include developing social marketing and awareness campaigns, scenario planning, community town halls, citizen science apps, and more, all contributing to the project's evaluation and research on transdisciplinary teaching effectiveness. He finished by showing the education framework for the transdisciplinary module in Leuphana University and how it broke down into phases of research, knowledge co-creation, reintegration of knowledge and finally communication.

Due to the limited availability of Gergely (Gary) Hanko, he was given the opportunity to present earlier in the agenda.

Updates from the Hungarian Association of Environmental Enterprises

Gary Hanko, Hungarian Association of Environmental Enterprises (HAEE) and Plastic Cup, described how the HAEE in Hungary includes 280 company members who focus on environmental awareness-raising and education. They lobby for the Hungarian action plan on awareness raising and have an upcoming conference in April in Budapest focusing on this issue. The Plastic Cup initiative manages hundreds of volunteers for river cleanups and collaborates on an Erasmus+ project, where they created a handbook series for schools and teachers on organizing cleanups and measuring microplastics and water quality. The Plastic Cup initiative also supports partners in their own river cleanups and waste management efforts, especially those that focus on the source of the Tisza River.

After the presentation, participants expressed appreciation for Hanko's information, especially in highlighting the Tisza River pollution issue, and how cross-sectoral approaches to river management are

an excellent way to engage young people. One participant raised the issue of the largest illegal landfill located nearby in Rahiv, emphasizing that this transboundary problem remains unresolved. They proposed to foster cross-border collaboration with HAEE, the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve, and other CESDEN members through a joint project to find a solution to this problem. In response, Gary Hanko noted that a potential solution to the landfill could involve building a new landfill for remediation, but financial support is needed and welcomes this recommendation for joint transboundary collaboration.

3. OUTLOOK FOR 2025 – CARPATHIAN ESD AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

Project Linking biodiversity, pastoralism, cultural heritage via ESD in the Carpathian region

Tamara Mitrofanenko and Elena Fischer, SCC, described the aims of this current project, which include aligning institutional frameworks within the Carpathian Convention, supporting the UNESCO inscription of Carpathian transhumance practices, and fostering transnational cooperation among experts in biodiversity and pastoralism. The project will also enhance awareness and education by developing a stocktake of pastoral training resources and an overview of how pastoralism is portrayed in local educational curricula. Additionally, it supports the celebration of Carpathian pastoralism through Carpathian Day and engages with various stakeholders to safeguard and promote traditional practices. More details about the project can be found in the presentation.

The SCC also highlighted several upcoming events for participants information:

- Carpathian Convention Working Group on Forestry (28-30 April 2025), Bratislava, Slovakia
- Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity (13-15 May 2025), TBC Czech Republic
- UNECE Steering Committee ESD Meeting (May 2025), Geneva, Switzerland
- 3rd Carpathian ESD Seminar (TBC June 2025, in collaboration with Serbia).
 - The Seminar will likely be linked with a Serbian Protected Area Managers' Seminar. The SCC will explore how the topics of pastoralism and biodiversity can be integrated
- [Forum Carpaticum](#) (9-11 Sept. 2025), Bratislava, Slovakia
 - Pastoralism Session will be organized, as well as an ESD Session
 - Abstracts deadline: 20 March
- [International Mountain Conference](#) (14-18 Sept. 2025), Innsbruck, Austria
 - Pastoralism & Education session has been proposed, while there is also a Transhumance Session
 - Abstracts deadline: 20 February
- [Multifunctional Farming Conference](#) (16-18 Sept. 2025), Rzeszow, Poland
 - Several relevant topics will be explored at the conference
 - Abstracts deadline: 30 June

Updates from the Science for the Carpathians

Joanna Zawiejska, Science for the Carpathians (S4C) / University of the National Education Commission, announced that there is a call for participation in [Forum Carpaticum](#), the scientific conference of the Science for the Carpathians (S4C) network. In 2025, the Forum will focus on marginalized regions and communities, as well as on inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations. Sessions include topics on plastics and mountains, as well as water management (which Joanna is organizing) and a presentation on the Peace Park (an initiative between Romanian and Ukrainian partners) to raise awareness, among other topics, relevant for the [S4C Research Agenda 2030](#). The deadline for abstract submissions is 20 March but will likely get extended.

Joanna Zawiejska also highlighted that following the Forum, a IAG Regional Conference on Geomorphology will take place in Timișoara, Romania from 16-18 September 2025, concurrently with the [International Mountain Conference](#), taking place in Innsbruck from 14-18 September 2025. The IAG Conference will focus on natural hazards, geodiversity, and society. Joanna invited interested colleagues to participate in the IAG and motivate young scientists to also participate.

Following the presentation, Jakub Csabay, one of the organizers of Forum Carpaticum 2025, announced that the participation costs for the Forum will be affordable, and support will be available for active participants who contribute relevant content to the Forum, in cases where their institutions are unable to fund their participation.

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS, INCLUDING IN THE MEETING CHAT AND EMAIL

A representative from the Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic described that the Ministry is preparing a new youth development concept and has appointed a new youth officer. This may be an interesting opportunity for them to connect with youth organizations in the Carpathian region.

Representatives from the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation in Belgrade, Serbia were eager to re-engage and collaborate with CESDEN and upcoming events, especially the ESD Seminar in Serbia in June.

Representatives from the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve mentioned that in October 2024, a roundtable was held to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Carpathian Convention. They requested that recommendations and materials from the roundtable be shared within the Carpathian Convention and CESDEN.

Prior to the meeting, a representative from the Ministry of Environment of Slovakia shared information about several Carpathian Day events being organized in their national parks:

- The Administration of the Slovak Karst National Park will organize "Day of the Carpathians 2025", which will focus on the biodiversity of the Slovak Karst and cultural heritage. The event will include a lecture and a film for primary and secondary school participants.
- The Tatra National Park Administration will organize the event "The Tatras are also part of the Carpathians" - information about the fact that the Tatras are part of the Carpathians. The event will include an installed information poster, where a map of the entire Carpathian arc will be depicted with the distinctive Tatras mountain range. The event will take place in May and June. It will be intended for the general public.
- The Velká Fatra National Park Administration will organize the Carpathian Forest event in Velká Fatra. The event will include excursions to the natural history museum and field trips. It will take place in September 2025 and will be open to the public.
- The Administration of the National Slingshot of the Low Tatras will organize the Carpathian Day in September, and will focus on the natural and cultural heritage of the Carpathian region. The event will be intended for elementary school students.
- The Pieniny National Park Administration will organize the event "Pieniny as they don't like it." The event will be organized in September and will be intended for elementary school children.

Annex 1. List of Participants

Name	Country	Institution
Andrea Kurta	Romania	Piatra Craiului National Park
Branislav Randjelović	Serbia	Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation (IEQE), Belgrade
Eliška Rolfová	Czech Republic	Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic
Danijela Đukić	Serbia	Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation (IEQE), Center for International and National Research Belgrade
Danut Ungureanu	Romania	National Agency of the Mountain Area
Elena Fischer	Austria	UNEP Vienna, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention
Fadir Hamor	Ukraine	Carpathian Biosphere Reserve
Hankó Gergely	Hungary	Hungarian Association of Environmental Enterprises
Hildegard Meyer	Austria	WWF Central and Eastern Europe
Ingrid Károlyová	Slovakia	State Nature Conservancy
Ioana Baskerville	Romania	Romanian Academy
Iryna Shchoka	Ukraine, Austria	European Wilderness Society
Iryna Yonash	Ukraine	Carpathian Biosphere Reserve
Isidoro De Bortoli	Italy	EURAC Research
Jakub Csabay	Slovakia	Comenius University
Jiří Kulich	Czech Republic	Environmental Education Centre SEVER
Joanna Zawiejska	Poland	Science for the Carpathians/University of the National Education Commission, Krakow (UKEN)
Liudmyla Sirychenko	Austria	UNEP Vienna, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention
Lucia Cuşnir (Ursu)	Romania	Retezat National Park
Lucia Thumová	Slovakia	Ministry of the environment of the Slovak Republic
Michal Medek	Czech Republic	Scout Centre of Excellence for Nature and Environment
Mioara Clius	Romania	University of Bucharest
Natália Kubicová	Slovakia	Carpathian Wetland Initiative
Irina Cozma	Romania	PA3-EUSDR, Ministry of Public Works, Development and Administration

Name	Country	Institution
Senan Gardiner	Germany	Leuphana University Lüneburg, Sustainability Education and Transdisciplinary Research Institute (SETRI)
Slíva Vítězslav	Czech Republic	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
Slovácková Natália	Slovakia	Tokajíc United School
Tamara Malkova	Ukraine	Green Dossier
Tamara Mitrofanenko	Austria	UNEP Vienna, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention
Valeriy Mykhaylenko	Ukraine	National Ecological Center of Ukraine
Varga Attila	Hungary	Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology
Wioletta Kilar	Poland	University of the National Education Commission, Krakow (UKEN)

Annex 2. Preliminary Programme

Carpathian ESD Expert Network Meeting

30 Jan 2025, 15:00 -17:00 CET

[Meeting link](#)

Preliminary Programme

- Welcome
- Overview of the Agenda

15:10-15:25 Key activities from 2024

- **Steps Forward Education Festival – New Approaches to ESD in the Carpathians and Beyond**, Kosice, Slovakia, November 2024 (*Boglárka Kurka Ivanegová, Špirála*)
⇒ *Impressions of participants who attended the festival*
- **UNECE Forum for ESD and Youth**, Limassol, Cyprus, June 2024 (*Tamara Mitrofanenko, Carpathian Convention Secretariat, and Boglárka Kurka Ivanegová*)

15:25 -16:15 Engaging youth and young researchers in the Carpathian region

- **Brief update: Carpathian Convention hopes for engaging youth** (*Tamara Mitrofanenko*)
- **Youth engagement activities of European Wilderness Society** (*Iryna Shchoka, European Wilderness Society*)
- **Project Shifting Towards Ecotourism in Protected Areas through Heritage Interpretation** (*Valeriy Mykhalenko, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv*)
- **Project ProBioTIC** (*Senan Gardiner, Leuphana University Lüneburg*)
⇒ *Impressions of participants who attended the festival*

16:15 -17:00 Outlook for 2025 – Carpathian ESD and related Activities

- **Linking biodiversity, pastoralism, cultural heritage via education for sustainable development (ESD) in the Carpathian Region** (*Tamara Mitrofanenko and Elena Fischer, Carpathian Convention Secretariat*)
- **Updates from the Hungarian Association of Environmental Enterprises** (*Gary Hanko, Plastic Cup / Hungarian Association of Environmental Enterprises*)
- **Update from the Science for the Carpathians (S4C)** (*Joanna Zawiejska, S4C*)
⇒ *Impressions of participants who attended the festival*