

What's New @ Ramsar

University of Klagenfurt, Austria: MSc course in “Management of Protected Areas”



MSc course in “Management of Protected Areas”

"This course is an outstanding and innovative educational offer intended for managers and planners of protected areas. It does not only provide important training but also a professional momentum for nature conservation in Europe."

This is how Michael Succow, former professor at the German University of Greifswald and Alternative Nobel Prize winner in 1997, describes the MSc course. Together with other experts he contributed to the development of this educational offer “Management of Protected Areas” at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria. Launched in 2005, the course has already become an internationally well-established hub for the training of integrated management of protected areas.

MSc course opens up attractive occupational field with international opportunities

Planning, consulting and managing protected areas are challenging and dynamic occupational fields. Today, about 20% of Europe’s and 11% of the global land surface are designated as protected areas. “To enable a sustainable coexistence of protection and use in these areas is a complex task. It requires competence in ecological, economic and socio-cultural subjects and good communication skills. With this course we want to open up these attractive occupational fields”, says Michael Getzner, scientific director of the programme at the University of Klagenfurt. It is a regional university in Carinthia, the south of Austria, describing itself as the “lake-side campus”. The course is embedded in its economics department – a set up which facilitates the transfer of existing business and management knowledge to participants of the MSc course.

The programme was developed in an open process over a three years time period. Organisations like the IUCN, UNESCO, EUROPARC, ALPARC, WWF, PAN Parks and secretaries of relevant international conventions (like the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands) as well as numerous individual experts have contributed to the structure and content of its curriculum. These days they are members of the advisory board or the pool of about 40 lecturers who continue to support and shape this educational programme.

Curriculum and course structure guarantee an exciting time

The curriculum covers every aspect needed for the planning and the integrated management of protected areas – theoretical fundamentals, practical tools and personal skills. The course is structured in 4 terms and finishes with the award of a Master of Science degree. It is organised in 9 modules (altogether around 70 days of course attendance either as classes or excursions) supported by e-learning units. The classes take place at the University of Klagenfurt and selected protected areas of Central, South and Eastern Europe. In order to qualify for admission, potential students need to hold a university degree, have a good working knowledge of English and demonstrate interest in the topic.

Diversity of participants enables new learning experience

The course directors look for ambitious personalities with different professional backgrounds (natural sciences, humanities, economics) from Central, South and Eastern Europe – even if the first two classes attracted also interest from participants of other European, Asian and African countries (Armenia, Greece,

Kenya, Latvia, Malta, Nepal, Pakistan, Tanzania, Tibet, Uganda and Belarus). The diversity of the students' professions and experiences enables new learning experiences and methods of problem solving. Collaborative and application-oriented approaches are key to achieve the programme's learning goals.

Alumni demonstrate quality, innovation and entrepreneurship

The first participants successfully finished the programme in June 2007. They presented their master thesis to an international audience of protected area managers, scientists and representatives of relevant NGOs and institutions in the course of the „Klagenfurt Days of Protected Areas“. The public was “very impressed” by the quality and innovative approach of the thesis which ranged from natural sciences to business administration and economics (topics included - among others – the protection of species, visitor management, regional development, strategic planning, management efficiency, fundraising, human resources, brand management...).

The “Klagenfurt Days of Protected Areas” serve as a platform to exchange new ideas in protected area management – among others based on innovative findings presented by the participants of the MSc course. This event will take place again in June 2009. Impressions of the “Klagenfurt Days of Protected Areas 2007” and details on the thesis can be downloaded on the course homepage (www.mpa.uni-klu.ac.at).

Quality and practical applicability of the education were already confirmed on the job market. The majority of students successfully applied for positions in the consulting or managing of protected areas even during their course of studies, some of them have found partners and started their own ventures.

MSc network expands

While the second generation of students are at present thinking about their master thesis, the preparation for the next round of the programme has already started. “With this MSc course we have developed a unique combination of knowledge and skills for the management of protected areas. This is the nucleus of our network which we strive to expand” says Michael Jungmeier, co-director of the programme and head of E.C.O. – a protected area consulting company headquartered in Klagenfurt, Austria. Therefore, the course directors are engaged in the linking of related educational offers. Together with the University of Madrid, they have significantly contributed to the set up of the EUROPARC Working Group on Academic Education.

In their efforts to strengthen the network internally, the course directors are supported by former students. They have set up an alumni club which serves as a platform for the long-term exchange of experience and knowledge of all people involved in the course. Ongoing discussion, problem solving and excursions allow for a lively knowledge transfer and strengthening of contacts even after graduation. “Due to this MSc programme I am now part of an outstanding international *personal* network of protected area experts” says Bernd Pflieger from Austria, one of the first graduates and head of the programme's alumni club. Sunita Chaudhary from Nepal is also enthusiastic about her participation in the course as she notes that “it was a great educational offer for me which provided a solid base to solve different issues in the management of protected areas and fostered my professional career at an international level“.

More information on the MSc programme is available in Table 1, on the course homepage or directly by contacting the course directors.

PS: There are limited scholarship funds available for students from low-income Central and Eastern European and developing countries. Qualified female students are particularly encouraged to apply.

Figure 1: Organisational structure of the MSc course

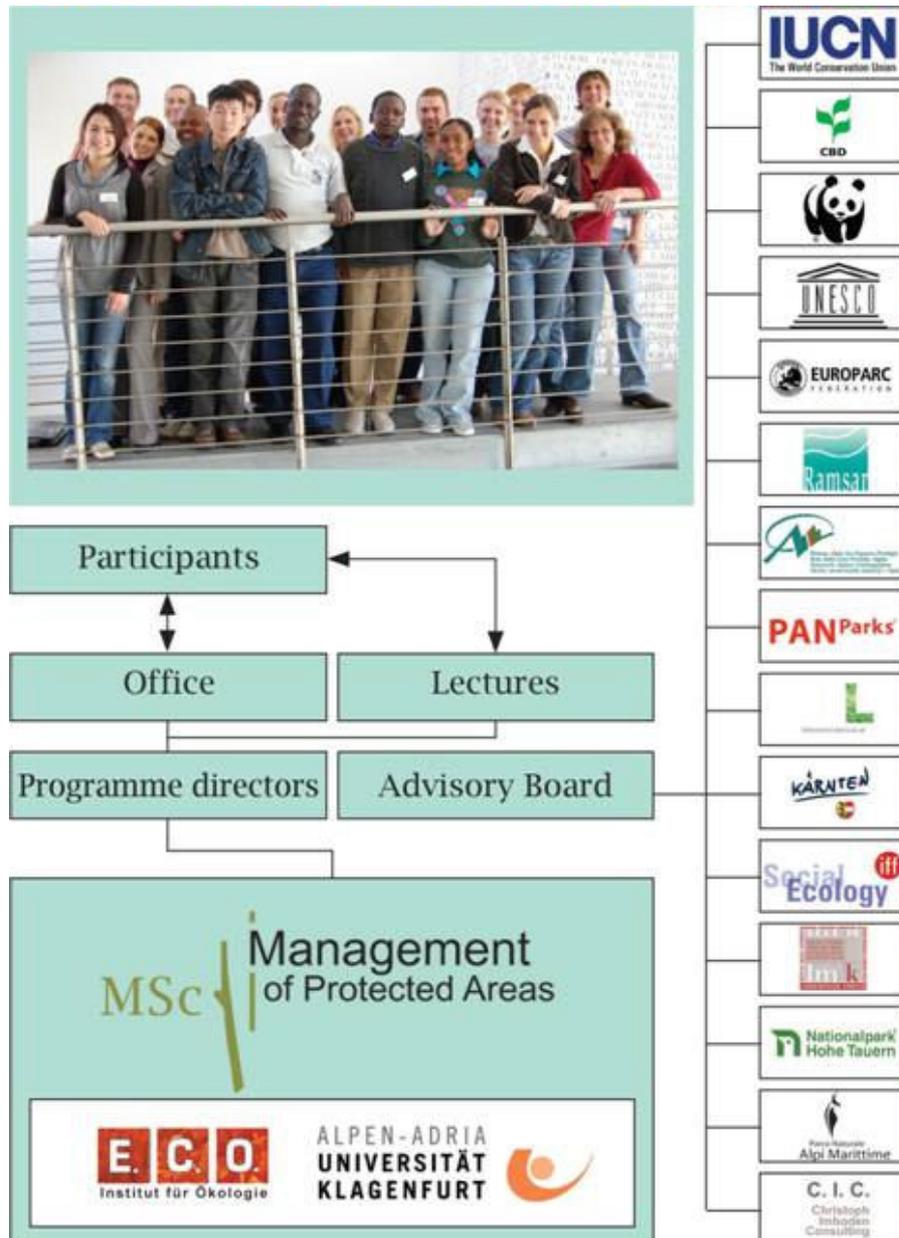


Table 1: MSc course at a glance

Learning goals:

- Theoretical fundamentals: comprehensive understanding of the aims and functions of protected areas in relation to the conservation of biodiversity and integrated regional development
- Practical insights: knowledge of existing management tools and how to apply them
- Personal skills: ability to analyse and solve problems encountered when planning, establishing and managing protected areas; ability to conduct interdisciplinary dialogues with stakeholders and to develop and implement appropriate integrated solutions

Thematic focus:

- European and international categories of protected areas
- Nature conservation strategies in Central and Eastern Europe
- Integration of socio-cultural, economic and ecological aspects of protected

area management

- Participative management approaches
- Application of innovative technologies and approaches

Course structure:

- 1st term: Theoretical and scientific fundamentals of the management of protected areas
- 2nd and 3rd term: Practical aspects of the management of protected areas (toolbox and best practice)
- 4th term: Supervised implementation of applied and/or scientific research project (master thesis)

Administrative details:

- Academic degree: Master of Science (MSc)
- Course language: English
- Minimum requirements for admission: university degree or equivalent qualification, good working knowledge of English and interest in the topic
- Tuition fee: € 12,400 (plus travel expenses and living costs during the modules)
- Structure: 9 modules in 4 terms (altogether around 70 days of course attendance either as classes or excursions) supported by e-learning units
- Timing: September 2009 to June 2011
- Location: University of Klagenfurt (Austria) and selected protected areas in Central, South and Eastern Europe
- Application deadline: 30.6.2009 (for scholarships: 1.12.2008)

Detailed information:

- Homepage: www.mpa.uni-klu.ac.at
- Prof. Dr. Michael Getzner: michael.getzner@uni-klu.ac.at
- Mag. Michael Jungmeier: jungmeier@e-c-o.at
- Mail: MSc Programme „Management of Protected Areas“, c/o Department of Economics, University of Klagenfurt, Universitaetsstraße 65-67, A-9020 Klagenfurt, Austria



Collaborative problem solving as important didactic approach (September 2007)



Excursion to the National Park Donauauen (July 2006)



Invaluable exchange of experiences in the MSc network (September 2007)



Differences in origin and experience enrich everyday course life (September 2007)



Prof. Michael Succow at the MSc final event ("Klagenfurt Days of Protected Areas", June 2007)



Course directors and first alumni after graduation ceremony ("Klagenfurt Days of Protected Areas", June 2007)



For further information about the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, please contact the **Ramsar Convention Secretariat**, Rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland (tel +41 22 999 0170, fax +41 22 999 0169, e-mail ramsar@ramsar.org). Posted 30 July 2008, Dwight Peck, Ramsar.

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