

Basic Interpretive Skills – a European Pilot Course

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As part of the LEONARDO II project TOPAS, in May the five day course *Basic Interpretive Skills* took place in Germany.



Course members are developing an interpretive walk

The aim of the project

TOPAS (Training of Protected Area Staff) started in 2001. The aim of the twenty partners from nine countries is to set European standards for the training of staff in protected areas. The idea: One developing partner from one country develops a training course which is then tested by a testing partner from another country.

Seven five day courses were designed - *Basic Interpretive Skills* being one of them.

The course was realized by Bildungswerk interpretation (Germany). The developing partner was Istituto Pangea (Italy), and the testing partner Harz National Park (Germany). The training centre was the International House Sonnenberg, which also manages TOPAS, and which is specialised in the organization of international projects.

The contents of the course

One week is only a short period of time. On the one hand, the imparting of at least some theory about creativity and communication should be part of the curriculum. On the other hand, the interpretive skills taught during the course need to end in whole projects, developed by working groups. All this takes time and to be able to manage all the various topics, the focus of the course was decided as personal interpretation.

Nevertheless the testing group, consisting of rangers, seasonal and volunteers from different German national parks, a representative of the International Ranger Federation from the UK, and team members from Harz National Park and Istituto Pangea, had to work through a full programme, using all forms of media and modern methods of training. Each day, participants

were asked to consider the days training and complete an evaluation form in favour of a modification of the curriculum structure.

The outcome

According to the statements of the participants, the course was very successful, although an extension of one or even two weeks would have been welcome. Following the evaluation, the partners are now working on the final version of the curriculum, which will be presented in the autumn. Certification of the course will be carried out by the Centre for European Protected Area Research CEPAR (University of London).

TOPAS is a great opportunity to develop credibility of our profession within the protected areas. We can take advantage of this, if we are able to convince the administrations of the importance of common training standards – and with the high quality of our work.



The pilot group has successfully finished the course

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For further information on TOPAS:
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