

KICK-OFF meeting report

The European project IMPACT Interreg Europe has started with the celebration of a three day kick off meeting organized by the Andalusian Regional Council, which took place between Seville and the Sierra de Grazalema Nature Park, Spain.

Together with the Spanish representatives and leaders of the project, members from Germany, France, Italy, Lithuania and Romania have addressed the action lines of IMPACT (Innovative Models for Protected Areas: ExChange and Transfer). Its ultimate goal is to introduce a new approach to protected area planning in order to meet current challenges in conservation together with sustainable development

The Steering committee was chaired by Javier Soto, from the Andalusia Regional Council and lead partner of the project.

The Conference was inaugurated by José Luís Hernández Garijo, vice-councilor of Andalusia Regional Council, and counted with the participation of professionals from the local protected area management institution and relevant politicians.



Javier Soto

José Luís Hernández Garijo in the center

More than ever, planners and managers of natural are challenged with combining the sustainable use of natural resources to promote socio-economic development and the preservation of biodiversity. Natural protected areas are undoubtedly a potential source of green jobs and economic development, as illustrated by the companies established in this territory, which the meeting participants had the opportunity to discover. The meeting was followed by a set of visits to some of the companies located inside the Cadiz province region of *Sierra de Grazalema* Natural Park.



Zahara de la Sierra, a village located in the Sierra de Grazalema Nature Park

The visits started with the Ethnological Museum Molino de Abajo, an ancestral mill propelled by the water of the river *Majaceite*. This museum is located at El Bosque village and in it is possible to see an ancient mill recovered from the family tradition by Francisco Javier González, and through which he produces wheat flour and a local rounded bread, or *Mollete*, for the whole region.



Ethnological Museum Molino de Abajo

Afterwards, a visit to *El Bosqueño* took place. This company produces cheese from autochthonous sheep and goat breeds, and has been granted with an international award for the quality of their cheese. Last, it is worth to mention the visit to the *Enrique Calvillo Rural*

Hotel, an accommodation recognized with the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in protected areas (ECST). All of them are good examples of economic activities developed inside a protected area such as the *Sierra de Grazalema* Natural Park.

On the other hand, at the other side of the Natural Park belonging to Malaga province, the participants were able to taste the ecological comfitures of *Al Jaque* jam factory. This factory uses local and natural products to produce its marmalades and is fully committed with the conquest of the vegan market. The visit ended at the olive oil production factory *Oleum Viride*, which is located at the foot of *Zahara de la Sierra* municipality, and where the attendees were able to learn about the process through which olive oil is produced.



Al Jaque jam factory



Oleum viride

All these companies have been able to produce handcrafted goods, disseminate their production techniques through didactic workshops, and promote eco-tourism through exhibitions and guided tours inside a protected area without compromising nature conservation. For this reason, Andalusia has been an excellent example for the promotion of socio-economic activities in protected areas through the implementation of Sustainable Development Plans that undoubtedly will inspire other European partners.