

**Project  
Apennine Park of Europe**


*International Mountain Corridors  
Conference in the Pyrenees*  
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Protecting the World's Mountain Corridors  
and Peace Parks  
Launching the Cantabric to Alps Initiative

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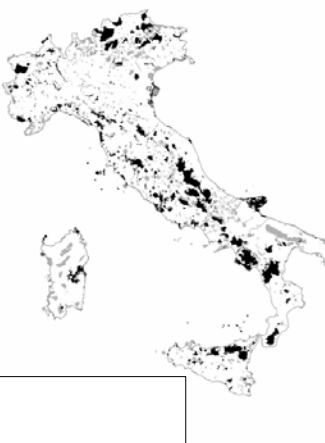
**What are the Apennines?**



The Apennines chain is the 5th in size among the European mountain systems, with a surface area of 4.818.459 hectares, and a length of over 1500 Km. The chain constitutes the backbone of the whole Italian peninsula, which extends from North to South into the Mediterranean Sea, and stretches between the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic coasts. In the North, it joins the Alpine system, with which the Apennines form a prominent structure – sort of a big T – between Central Europe and the Mediterranean basin, hosting most of the highest European mountains, including Mont Blanc, 4807 m.

Agriculture, forestry and grazing have, since prehistory, shaped local cultures and landscapes, and, still now, they cover the main part of the territory. While the plains along the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic coasts, in the last decades, have generally experienced important economic developments and a significant population growth, the local communities of the mountain territories generally have been subjected to a diffused and pervasive process of decline, in demographic, economic, social and cultural terms. A massive, unexpected and epochal process of abandonment took place in a large part of the mountain territories. With important environmental consequences, such as de-stabilisation of soil and ecosystems, loss of biodiversity in previously cultivated areas, alteration of many cultural landscapes, loss of a diffused cultural heritage. In many cases, these effects are intertwined with the effects of tourism, urban sprawl and infrastructural diffusion, producing an acceleration of environmental degradation, and a growing fragmentation of ecosystems.

Environmental protection and social and economic concerns are, therefore, strictly linked in the Apennines' system.





The Apennines' system hosts nearly half of the Italian PAs, with a total coverage of over 1.512.000 ha, i.e. 16% of the total territory's surface. If we also consider the sites of European interest according to the UE directives (SCIs), excluding overlapping areas, coverage raises up to over 2.210.000 ha, i.e. 24% of the total territory. This share is just about double that of the European mountain systems average. A large part of this coverage is constituted by National parks (n. 10) and Regional Parks (n. 36), which cover together 15% of the total, with a great variety of environments and landscapes.

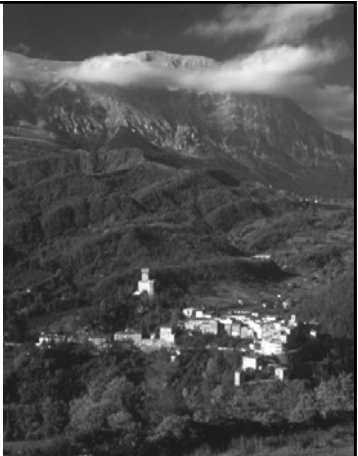
Furthermore, mountain PAs are generally included in large chains of natural areas (such as glaciers, rocky lands and other desert areas) or semi-natural spaces with high bio-permeability, such as forests, steppes, pasturelands and so on, without relevant anthropic pressures or barriers.

**NUMBER, SURFACE, PERCENTAGE OF PROTECTED AREAS (APC)  
BY CATEGORIES AND BY "MAIN SUB-NATIONAL SYSTEMS"**

	NP		RP		NR		RR		Other		Total			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	% on tot		
1. ALPS	4	5	30	11	17	0,1	68	0,2	57	0,1	176	824.290	16	25
2. PO PLAIN	-	-	34	7	15	0,1	77	0,3	5	0,0	131	373.208	7	11
3. APENNINES AND PENINSULA	43	6	63	5	109	0,3	106	0,7	46	0,2	337	1.906.088	12	58
3.1. MOUNTAIN APENNINE	10	9	36	6	59	0,2	47	0,5	16	0,1	168	1.512.368	16	46
3.2. PENINSULAR AREAS	3	2	27	2	50	0,5	59	1,1	30	0,5	169	393.720	7	12
4. ISLANDS	4	2	2	0	2	0,0	49	1,5	9	0,0	66	173.381	4	5
ITALY	21	4	129	5	143	0,2	300	0,7	117	0,1	710	5.276.967	11	100
5. COAST (overlaid)	8	10	28	7	52	0,7	64	1,4	25	0,2	177	815.973	19	25



To fully understand the environmental role of the Apennines, we must consider their relationship to the Mediterranean basin and to Central Europe. Together with the Alpine system, the Apennines constitute a long natural-cultural bridge between the Central Europe and the Mediterranean basin. The *Mediterranean Action Plan* has already enlightened a number of environmental linkages between the Italian peninsula and the basin, both in terms of environmental pressures and of the responses Italy must provide. Particularly important shall be the PAs policies: 91% of PAs in Mediterranean countries are located in Europe, mainly in Spain, France and Italy.







Such problems give a crucial role to connectivity strategies. Both in the Alpine Convention and the APE project, the search for linkages is a central issue. But what linkages?

The APE project seems to be an excellent ground for testing the complex meanings of linkages.



A) Linkages through history. "Using the past to shape the future" is one of the major challenges of the project. None of the strategies designed could be viable or even intelligible without making reference to the past. The natural and cultural heritage is not only the basis of the complex system of values that the project aims to enhance and valorise, but it is also the root of the opportunities we can gain for pursuing its strategies.

B) Linkages across geography. An enormous variety of habitats, natural and cultural resources, and local cultures are to be connected. However, it is just such variety that makes it difficult for each network policy to widen the range of the involved actors and to sharpen the complexity of the governance processes. In fact, networking places and resources is not a mere matter of physical connection, it means scaling-up of regulation systems, coordination of local efforts and start-up of new forms of cooperative management.

C) Linkages among people. Therefore, one of the project's unavoidable missions would be to move throughout society. Its aims cannot be achieved with a top-down process, neither they can be based on a mere local approach. In order to promote the local responsibility and creativity, while obtaining the advantages of system policies that concern the entire mountain range, or relevant parts of it, both approaches must be mixed. It requires new styles and tools of planning, where social communication should play a central role. Speaking a common language is one of the pre-requisites. This is very difficult to achieve in the present legislative, administrative, social and political context.



Every connectivity strategy for the Apennines must consider a double interest:

a) Cultural landscapes. Cultural heritage is diffused in forms that are different from, but at the same time interconnected to, the environmental structure. This fact is more comprehensible when thinking of an extensive group of national and regional Parks in the central Apennines (Sibillini, Laga Gran Sasso, Sirente-Velino, Majella), a protected territory with an area of 500.000 hectares, where there are about 100.000 inhabitants, among many historical centres, with different economies and quality. On one hand cultural heritage offers added value to the territory, on the other hand, cultural heritage constitutes an intrusion for environmental structure, for example when it leads to intensive tourism that disturbs the ecological context.

b) Wilderness. Despite the fact that the whole territory has been shaped and deeply made by man, the Apennines present an extraordinary richness of natural features. This can be enlightened by means of the concept of bio-permeability, linking natural and cultural factors. Research has revealed that the Apennines present a high level of bio-permeability, requiring strategies for the environmental continuity largely exceeding the PAs system, even if such systems can play a basic role.



### Strategies of APE Project

The research for the Environment Ministry, (2003), identified the following strategies for the implementation of the Project:

a) the integration of the Apennine system in the Euro-Mediterranean context:

- building a new unitary image of the Apennine range,
- integrating the protected areas and other natural resources in the European Ecological Network and in the Euro-Mediterranean system for nature conservation;
- improving the linkages of the Apennine system with the international transport networks, including the "sea highways", while reducing the adverse environmental impact of traffic.



- b) the networking of natural and cultural resources:
- creating an "environmental infrastructure" formed by parks and protected areas, sites of European Community interest, wilderness areas and other natural resources linked by proper corridors or stepping stones;
  - supporting new management programmes for the abandoned areas, ensuring the effective prevention of hydrogeological risks, reducing the land and soil wasting and pollution processes;
  - putting in place special programmes for the rehabilitation of the rural areas and the support to traditional forestry, agriculture and pasture;
  - implementing plans and programmes for the conservation, management and enhancement of landscapes, according to the *European Landscape Convention* (Council of Europe, 2000);
  - creating and protecting enjoyment networks based on the recovery of historical roads, paths, trails, sheep tracks and so on, associated with communication programmes.



c) the strengthening of local systems:

- promoting and supporting the enhancement of the local milieu, their natural and cultural heritage, their social resources and their own management capacity;
- strengthening and up-grading services and equipments ensuring the acceptable habitability of the mountain territories (forming networked villages or "city of villages");
- reorganising the transport local systems in order to improve, for visitors and populations, the accessibility to services and civil opportunities, parks and natural and cultural resources, while reducing the impact of private motorised flows;
- promoting the sustainable tourism and the social enjoyment of natural and cultural resources in forms suited for the local specificities, by means of interpretation and communication programmes.



The elements for connectivity strategic planning: in the preliminary recognition of biopermeability conditions in Italy, research analysis focuses on three macro categories based on land use features: hydromorphology, agriculture and forestry, and barriers.

A crucial factor of fragmentation and lack of environmental continuity is represented by barriers: particularly urban barriers and infrastructures

A possible focus of the fragmentation strategies: the large units of environmental cohesion. Within these, it is still possible to obtain efficient eco-connections if ecological conditions are supported by sound economic and technical efforts.

1, the double system Alps/Apeninnes has to play a basic role in the European Ecological Network as a long natural and cultural bridge between Central Europe and the Mediterranean; to this end a strong connectivity strategy is required:

2, to ensure the connectivity of the whole range we must consider a set of linkages:

- linkages through history, using the past to shape the future,
- linkages across geography, building bridges among different ecologies, economies and cultures;
- linkages among peoples and institutions, mixing top-down with bottom-up approaches;

3, to conserve, restore or create such linkages, we need a more effective control and regulation of the trasformation processes (particularly urban sprawl and infrastructure development), in order to avoid fragmentation and loss of environmental continuity, by means of new styles of planning, social communication and cooperative management;

### CONCLUSIONS

4, to this end, a special attention must be given to the integration of PAs in the whole system, including PAs planning in eco-regional and territorial planning, widening the protection measures to their natural and seminatural surroundings, sharing costs and benefits beyond their boundaries;

5, to promote and realise such integration, a powerful alliance can be found in landscape/seascape policies, affecting the whole territory, conceiving landscape - as recommended by the European Landscape Convention - as an essential component of the living context, an expression of the bio-cultural diversity and a foundation of the local identities.