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Nature Parks as Planning Objects within Integrated Regional Development

Results of the Interreg IIIB Project "Parks & Economy"

Final Report of the research project AW/159/06 EU,
a sub-project of the Interreg IIIB CADSES project
"Parks & Economy," 5D026

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Preface

The participation of the Austrian Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics in the Interreg IIIB CADSES project "Parks & Economy" (5D026) enabled an international and interdisciplinary cooperation with universities, regional management authorities and private consulting offices. Thereby, new methodological knowledge was gained and implemented, characterised by a primary focus on exploiting synergies between nature protection, agriculture and tourism in support of integrated and sustainable regional development. The sub-project of the Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics was thus a continuation of the effort to raise awareness for the multifunctionality of agriculture within regional economies, while the results published herein have been elaborated in close cooperation with the many project partners. Special thanks go to the project coordinators in the Province of Teramo, Italy, for having provided such prudent management of the overall project.

Vorwort

Die Teilnahme der Bundesanstalt für Agrarwirtschaft am EU-Interreg IIIB CADSES Projekt Parks & Economy (5D026) ermöglichte die internationale und interdisziplinäre Zusammenarbeit mit Universitäten, Regionalmanagementbehörden und privaten Consulting Büros. Dadurch konnten neue methodische Erkenntnisse mit besonderem Schwerpunkt in der Nutzung von Synergien zwischen Schutzgebieten, Landwirtschaft und Tourismus zur integrierten und nachhaltigen Regionalentwicklung gewonnen und auch umgesetzt werden. Der Projektteil der Bundesanstalt für Agrarwirtschaft war eine Fortsetzung der Bemühungen, die multifunktionale Rolle der Landwirtschaft in der regionalen Wirtschaft zu stärken. Die hier vorliegenden Ergebnisse wurden in enger Zusammenarbeit mit den Projektpartnern erarbeitet. Besonders zu danken ist den Projektkoordinatoren der Provinz Teramo, Italien, für die umsichtige und erfolgreiche Abwicklung des Gesamtprojektes.

Hubert Pfingstner
Director

Vienna, March 2009

Summary

Rural areas which have been declared as nature protection zones feature unique natural conditions and landscapes; however, they are often confronted with significant problems with respect to economic and demographic development. The Interreg IIIB CADSES project "Parks & Economy" set out to tackle these discrepancies in an attempt to identify, and ultimately make use of, synergies between nature protection and the regional economy, as a means of satisfying the broader goal of promoting a sustainable regional development that integrates natural, social and economic considerations. Towards this purpose, the project applied a common framework of methods consisting of SWOT, success factor and stakeholder analyses. Based on the results, development and marketing plans (DEMAPs) have been developed and implemented in each of the applicable project regions.

The synthesis of regional SWOT analyses points to a linkage between positive economic development and negative environmental consequences, an aspect to be avoided if sustainable regional development within the context of the project goals is to be achieved. As for the resulting DEMAPs, they show that the formulated objectives, strategies and actions were able to address multiple regional development aspects, thus reinforcing the many extant opportunities offered by the advantageous natural landscape (for nature protection, tourism, agriculture and services). Also significant is the fact that the planned measures achieved a balance between the needs of the local ecology, economy and social structure. With respect to implementation, a mixture of public, private and European funding, a better collaboration among nature parks and tourism managers, improved soft skills, the ongoing evaluation of implemented actions and greater public involvement have been recommended, as all will remain vital to the regional development process. Several key measures, such as the establishment and/or unification of regional trademarks, signposts and other marketing-related actions were directly implemented as part of the "Parks & Economy" project. Project web page: www.parks-economy.eu

Zusammenfassung

Ländliche Regionen, die als Naturparks oder Naturschutzgebiete ausgewiesen sind, verfügen zwar über besondere naturräumliche Ausstattungen, stehen jedoch oftmals Schwierigkeiten in der wirtschaftlichen und demografischen Entwicklung gegenüber. Das Interreg IIIB CADSES Projekt „Parks & Economy“ behandelte diese Diskrepanzen und versuchte, Synergien zwischen Naturschutz und regionaler Wirtschaft im Sinne einer nachhaltigen und integrierten Regionalentwicklung aufzuzeigen und zu nutzen. Zu diesem Zweck wurden in unterschiedlichen Projektregionen nach einheitlicher methodischer Vorgangsweise regionale Analysen durchgeführt (SWOT-, Erfolgsfaktoren- und Entscheidungsträgeranalysen). Auf deren Basis konnten Entwicklungs- und Marketingpläne mit konkreten Zielen, Strategien und Maßnahmen ausgearbeitet werden.

Die Synthese der SWOT Analysen zeigte auf, dass ein Zusammenhang zwischen wirtschaftlichem Aufschwung und negativen Umweltfolgen gegeben ist. Diesen gilt es zu vermei-

den, will man eine nachhaltige Entwicklung im Sinne der Projektziele erreichen. Die Ergebnisse der Entwicklungspläne veranschaulichen die mannigfaltigen Möglichkeiten zur Regionalentwicklung, wenn eine vorteilhafte Naturraumausstattung für verschiedenste Zwecke genutzt wird (Naturschutz, Tourismus, Landwirtschaft, Dienstleistungen). Besonders wichtig erwies sich dabei die Ausgewogenheit zwischen ökologischen, ökonomischen und sozialen Maßnahmen. Im Einzelnen sollte mehr Wert auf bisher vernachlässigte Bereiche wie bessere Zusammenarbeit von Naturschutz- und Tourismusmanagern, Verbesserung der sozialen Kompetenz sowie auf die begleitende Evaluierung der umgesetzten Maßnahmen und auf Einbindung der Öffentlichkeit gelegt werden. Eine konkrete Umsetzung vieler verschiedener Maßnahmen, wie die Entwicklung von Handelsmarken, Ausschilderungen und anderer Marketing Maßnahmen erfolgte bereits während der Projektphase. Projekt Homepage: www.parks-economy.eu

1 About the “Parks & Economy” Project

1.1 Project Outline

Rural regions within the CADSES area (Central Adriatic, Danubian and South East European Space) often lag behind in their economic development, while, at the same time, many of their landscapes and habitats are considered natural heritages. These inherent natural conditions hold promising potentials for developing the regional economies, especially if exploited for recreational purposes. The Interreg IIIB CADSES project “Parks & Economy” (long title: “Developing initiatives exploiting the potential of natural heritage for regional spatial development”, duration: 2006-2008) thus targeted the support of sensitive nature park areas to overcome weaknesses in regional economic development. The preservation and sustainable use of existing natural potentials within nature parks leads to marketing opportunities, particularly in terms of sustainable tourism and environmentally friendly products. Thus, nature parks are an appropriate tool for steering the results-oriented co-operation of stakeholders and shaping regional identities. Within the project, an innovative approach was developed and applied: the use of interdisciplinary, integrated “development and marketing plans” (DEMAPs) based on three different types of analysis conducted in each region. For each park, a corporate management strategy has been elaborated to enable the registration of an official trademark for marketing purposes. In addition, the project aimed to bring different stakeholders (local administrations, businesses, communities) into contact with each other, to facilitate developing a shared corporate strategy that will foster each region’s own identity. The common methodological framework, as well as the results from the various project regions, can serve as “guide posts” for other regions interested in exploring and activating their potentials for regional development (web page: www.parks-economy.eu). In concrete terms, the project’s goals were to:

- lead to a better understanding of the integration of nature and landscape protection within regional development policies inside the CADSES space
- support the enlargement of protected areas
- contribute to the growth of both cultural and ecotourism
- create better marketing opportunities for the traditional regional products of local enterprises
- create and secure jobs
- create a broad awareness of the available opportunities for promoting economic growth and social cohesion in a sustainable manner

“Parks & Economy” was coordinated by the Italian Province of Teramo and comprised eight project regions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia, with each area displaying different levels of existing nature protection. Scientific guidance was provided by three partners in Austria and Hungary. Because Bosnia-Herzegovina had to withdraw during the course of the project, complete results for only seven project regions are available.

The following project partners participated:

- ■ ■ Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Austria
- ■ ■ Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park, Bulgaria
- ■ ■ Denkmalschmiede Höfgen GmbH, Germany
- ■ ■ District of Muldentalkreis, Germany
- ■ ■ Förderverein für Handwerk und Denkmalpflege Schloss Trebsen e.V., Germany
- ■ ■ Naturpark Muldenland, Germany
- ■ ■ Municipality of Lidoriki, Greece
- ■ ■ Innovation Centre of Agriculture, Debrecen, Hungary
- ■ ■ Scientific Association for Regional Development (SARD), Hungary
- ■ ■ Spatial and Economic Development Association for Tisza Microregion (SEDA), Hungary
- ■ ■ Municipality of Mel, Italy
- ■ ■ Province of Rimini, Italy
- ■ ■ Province of Teramo, Italy, as lead partner
- ■ ■ Regional Environmental Centre, Slovakia (REC)

1.2 Tasking for the Sub-Project of the Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics

The Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics (Vienna, Austrian) and the Innovation Centre of Agriculture (Debrecen, Hungary) provided scientific support for the project's regional partners. The Institute of Agricultural Economics (AWI) was responsible for developing a common methodological framework based on spatial development and management plans. This framework comprised special of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analyses of the pilot regions, guidelines for the development and management plans (DEMAPPs), a synthesis of results from the project regions and the resulting policy recommendations.

2 Nature conservation areas as tools for regional development: A theoretical background

2.1 History

The establishment of the first national park in 1872 – Yellowstone National Park in the USA – popularized the idea that species protection can be managed by protecting species' habitats. In Europe, the first national parks were established in Sweden, while the first nature reserves were designated in Great Britain at the beginning of the 20th century. Starting with this initial phase of nature protection, the conservation and maintenance of anthropogenic-unaffected areas prevailed for some time. By today, however, this "classical" approach has been replaced by a dynamic and integrated concept. The new paradigm of nature protection has shifted the emphasis from isolated natural areas with inherent conflicts between economy and ecology, to creating multifunctional and cultivated landscapes having historical, social and economic linkages. Deriving from the unsatisfactory experiences of the past, the importance of an endogenous and integrated regional development has gradually become clear; until, by today, protected areas are seen as driving forces behind, as well as instruments of, regional development, with the ability to positively impact the regional economy, regional identity, image creation, job security and, not least, biodiversity and landscapes (Dorninger, 1993, p. 42f; Weixelbaumer, 1998, p. 88; Mose and Weixelbaumer, 2007, p. 10ff; Hammer, 2007, p. 27).

2.2 Definition of nature conservation areas

A broad range of varied protected areas exists on the national level within Europe. In general, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Nature Resources (IUCN) defines a protected area as "an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and of natural and associated cultural resources, managed through legal or other effective means" (UNEP-WCMC, 2007). Under the classification of protected areas as used by UNEP (see Table 1), two general types can be differentiated:

- ■ ■ Areas in which the main focus is on conservation, development and/or re-establishment of biocoenoses, biotopes and species. In these territories no, or only slight, anthropogenic influence should exist and protecting them against changes is important (nature conservation areas).
- ■ ■ Areas for which the possibility of change is emphasised, concentrating on the preservation of scenery and conservation, as well as the development and re-establishment of natural balances with recreational usage (landscape protection areas)

Nature parks can include nature or landscape protection areas, with the main aim being to support sustainable regional development and, specifically, sustainable recreation and tourism. Because all project regions described herein seek to stimulate the regional economy in accordance with sustainable natural resource management, our understanding of the term "nature

park” is reduced to this common denominator. Ultimately, within the context of our project, “nature park” refers to a natural area exhibiting outstanding beauty and a characteristic landscape, while also serving regional marketing purposes to boost the regional economy under consideration of nature conservation needs. Thus, the term “nature park” as used herein can comprise national parks and other protection areas, as well as regions planning to establish a protection site in future.

Table 1:
Types of protected areas
according to
UNEP

	Category	Definition	Main Aim
I a	Strict Nature Reserve	Area of land and/or sea possessing some outstanding or representative ecosystems, geological or physiological features and/or species, available primarily for scientific research and/or environmental monitoring.	protected area managed mainly for science
I b	Wilderness Area	Large area of unmodified or slightly modified land, and/or sea, retaining its natural character and influence, without permanent or significant habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition.	protected area managed mainly for wilderness protection
II	National Park	Natural area of land and/or sea, designated to (a) protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations, (b) exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area and (c) provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible.	protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation
III	Natural Monument	Area containing one, or more, specific natural or cultural feature which is of outstanding or unique value because of its inherent rarity, representative or aesthetic qualities or cultural significance.	protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features
IV	Habitat/Species Management Area	Area of land and/or sea subject to active intervention for management purposes so as to ensure the maintenance of habitats and/or to meet the requirements of specific species.	protected area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention
V	Protected Landscape/Seascape	Area of land, with coast and sea as appropriate, where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity. Safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to the protection, maintenance and evolution of such an area.	protected area managed mainly for landscape/ seascape conservation and recreation
VI	Managed Resource Protected Area	Area containing predominantly unmodified natural systems, managed to ensure long term protection and maintenance of biological diversity, while providing at the same time a sustainable flow of natural products and services to meet community needs.	protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems

Source: www.unep-wcmc.org/protected_areas/categories/index.html

2.3 Current Research

A glance at current research in the field of regional development within nature parks and protection areas reveals studies that focus mainly on the development and application of monitoring and assessment schemes to serve the fields of planning and management. Topics dealt with are, for example: the application of multicriteria decision analysis techniques for the zoning of protected areas (Geneletti and Duren, 2008), the assessment of long-term effects on species richness stemming from the protection of areas, landscapes and the expansion of urban areas (Canova, 2006), the establishment of a landscape monitoring programme via identification of relevant landscape metrics for biodiversity assessments (Schindler et al., 2008), the development of a landscape monitoring system to evaluate the effects of park management on landscape quality (Agnoletti, 2007), and the application of a monitoring and assessment system for natural resources to examine the impact of human intervention and to observe the state of the environment in model regions (Reyers, 2004; Walz, 2008).

Other research has focused on the sustainable management of protected areas. For instance, Chapman (2003) points out that the management of protected areas must be accompanied by economic development to meet with general acceptance among the regional population, while Barker and Stockdale (2008) compared international sustainable development guidelines with the actual management practices of Scottish national parks.

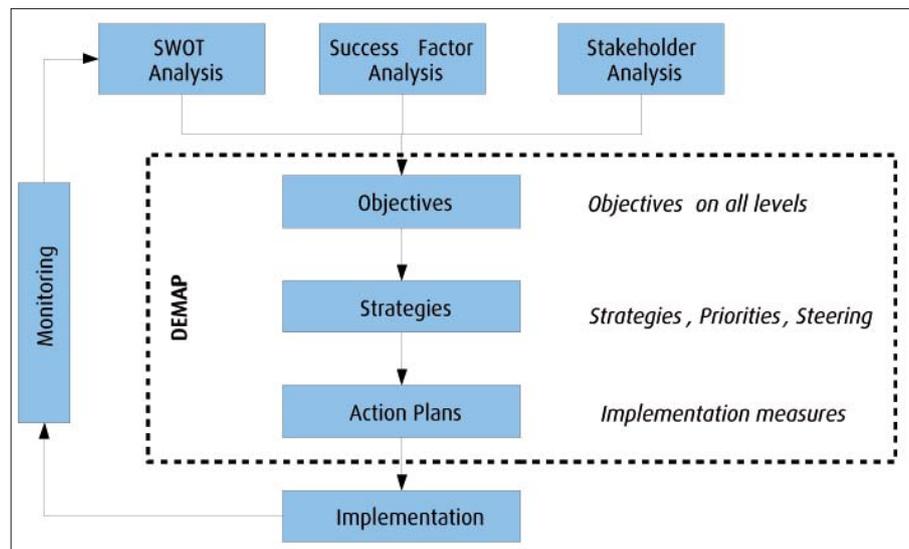
A third emphasis of research concentrates on the planning of greenways on the model of the USA. Greenways are merely in their initial phase in Europe, thus the development and application of methodologies for greenway planning will remain especially important. Toccolini et al. (2006) defined a methodology for analysing and assessing landscape resources, existing trails and route networks, while also deriving a greenway plan for application to a case study. Ribeiro and Barao (2006) have furthermore analysed the applicability of the greenway concept at the regional and municipal level in Portugal.

3 Applied Methodology

In order to achieve the project's main goal of exploiting the inherent potentials of nature parks for the benefit of regional spatial development, the development and marketing plans (DEMAPs) needed to be elaborated on the basis of the existing fundamental conditions in the seven project regions. A common methodological framework that includes three kinds of analyses was therefore developed by an interdisciplinary team of experts. The resulting analyses enabled the project partners to derive objective and comprehensible DEMAPs, complete with objectives, strategies, and tangible actions for regional development (see Fig. 1). High importance was placed on implementing actions, especially those supporting regional marketing and trademark development. Some of the actions were completed during the course of the project, while others will require long-term implementation. A monitoring of implemented actions has been ongoing since the project's close.

The necessary informational support, such as statistical data, qualitative estimations and expert knowledge, was provided by the various project partners acting in each region – a tasking approach that facilitated the implementation of scientifically supported methods, benchmarking and networking opportunities in cooperation with other international partners.

Fig.1:
Parks & Economy
project: Metho-
dological frame-
work (source:
Wagner et al.,
2006)



3.1 Analyses

3.1.1 SWOT Analysis

As an instrument for strategic management, a SWOT analysis serves to define the main goals of a development strategy, as well as the available alternatives. In addition, the technique is used to define and evaluate the key development factors. A SWOT analysis thus describes current conditions and attempts to comprehensively identify the regional situation in terms

of internal and external factors. Internal factors can be changed by the region and include its existing strengths, which shall be stabilized, and weaknesses, which shall be reduced. For the most part, external factors cannot be changed by the region, and these comprise opportunities, which shall be exploited, and threats, which shall be defended against.

The main purpose of this form of analysis is the isolation of key issues, while it furthermore facilitates deriving the required implementation strategies (see Jekel, 1998; Bergs, 2002; Veres, 2006).

An extension of the SWOT analyses was applied by ranking the key factors according to their strength of influence, while a second extension of the SWOT analyses included estimations regarding the future development of external factors (opportunities and threats) within each region.

The SWOT analyses of the project regions were conducted by project partners in collaboration with regional experts. As each indicator had two related values mirroring its internal and external importance with regard to regional conditions, a SWOT matrix was used. This matrix consists of four quadrants, each of which can be linked to various different strategies (see Fig.2; Antal et al., 2007a). The "SO" sector comprises strengths and opportunities, sector "ST" strengths and threats, sector "WO" weaknesses and opportunities, and sector "WT" weaknesses and threats. The estimations regarding future development of external factors are pictured as arrows within the SWOT matrix. Each comprehensive SWOT analysis includes 148 quantitative and qualitative indicators for the 7 main development topics: topology and settlement structure, population, nature and environment, economy, technical infrastructure, social infrastructure and governance. Required data came from regional, national and international statistics, experts, legal plans and existing literature.

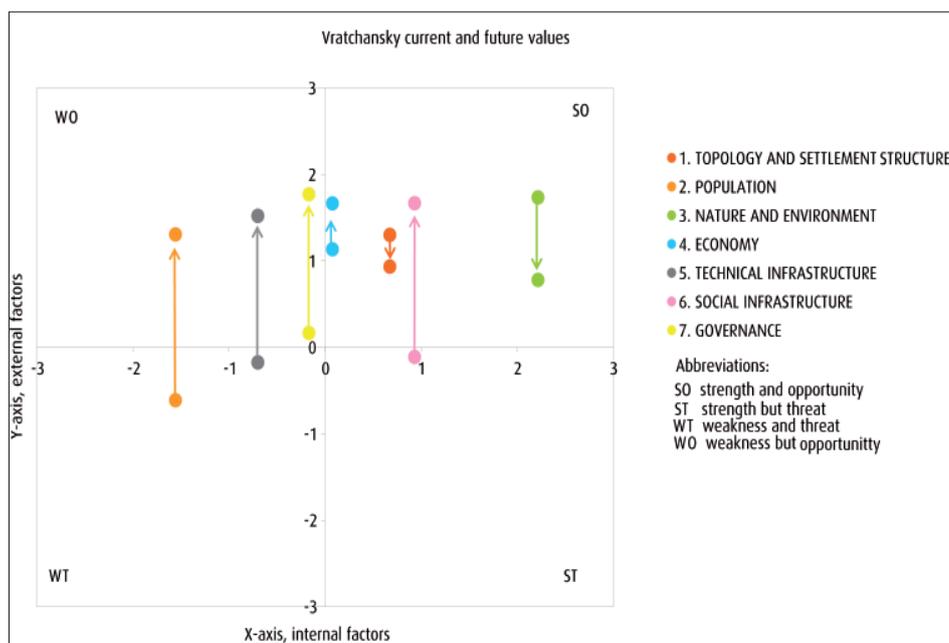


Fig.2: SWOT matrix using the example of Vrachansky Balkan Natural Park

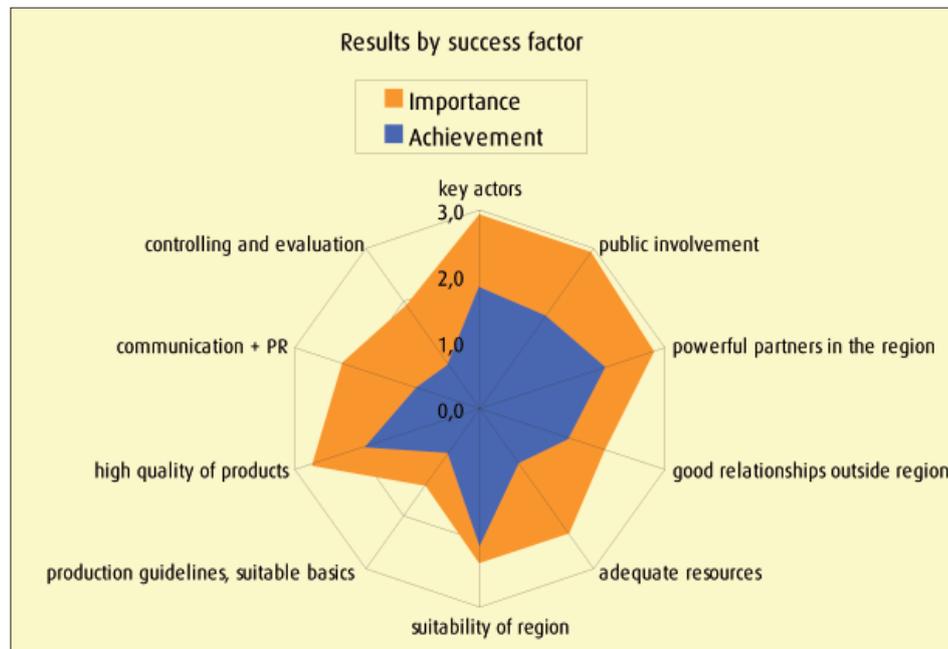
3.1.2 Success Factor Analysis

The method of success factor analysis used was developed within the Interreg IIC project MAREMA (Bogner and Mohl, 2005). This technique served to clarify the main factors affecting regional development; and, for this purpose, the below list showing the ten most important success factors was compiled, with each project region evaluated accordingly:

- highly engaged key actors
- reasonable involvement of the public
- powerful partners in the region
- good relationships to partners outside the region
- adequate resources
- suitability of region
- regional standards, guidelines plans and basic data
- high quality of regional products
- professional communication
- efficient controlling and evaluation

Regional experts compared both the importance and level of achievement of these success factors within each region. The gap between importance and achievement for each factor in turn enabled conclusions regarding the degree of endangerment or success of the respective project (see Fig.3).

Fig.3:
Common success
factor analysis
for all project
regions



3.1.3 Stakeholder Analysis

A stakeholder analysis evaluates, or quantifies, the people and institutions involved in the regional decision making processes. On the basis of the regional experts' knowledge, the degree of impact (range: 0 = no impact to 3 = strong impact) has been estimated, and the results are shown in Fig. 4 (by the type of line). Also evaluated was the quality of impact, ranging from “-” to indicate a threat to the project's success through to “++” to indicate strong project support (see Fig. 4, Wagner et al., 2006). This helped to:

- map the interests of stakeholders in relation to the issues the project was seeking to address
- identify conflicts of interest between stakeholders, which could influence the project's risk factors
- identify relations between stakeholders, which could be built upon, and which might also enable project sponsoring, ownership and cooperation
- assess the appropriate type of participation by different stakeholders at successive stages in the project cycle

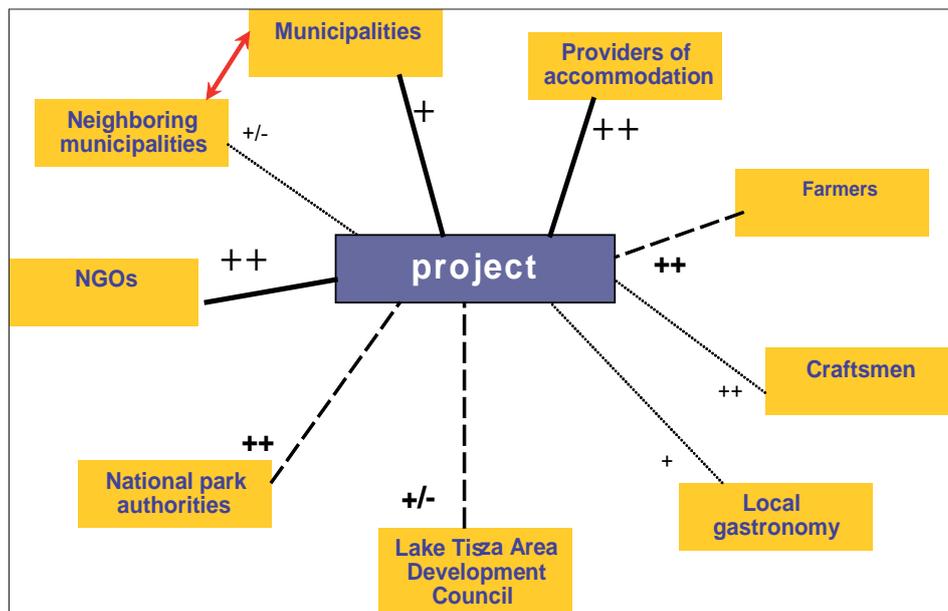


Fig.4: Stakeholder analysis using the example of the Tisza Microregion

3.2 Development and Marketing Plans (DEMAPS)

Having implemented the three analysis tools, it was then possible to create the development and marketing plans. These comprised a list of objectives that were determined to be suitable for strengthening each region. Next, the partners developed a strategic plan for their region so as to fulfil their objectives. The key goals for elaborating regional strategies were to develop a

framework and to identify the priorities, resources and actions required in support of sustainable development. Thus, the partners were asked to:

- give an assessment of how promising they viewed their objectives to be
- estimate the timeframe for achieving the objectives
- check the coherence of objectives amongst each other and identify “controversial” objectives
- review resources and responsibilities
- estimate required budgets
- set priorities for the listed objectives

Finally, the partners were asked to develop an action plan that clearly showed the priorities and estimated results. The measures in this plan were structured according to the related objectives and strategies, responsibilities, timeframes, milestones, risks, precise budgets, funding sources and stakeholder interests, all as detailed as possible to facilitate efficient implementation.

3.2.1 Regional Marketing and Trademarks

A key goal from the very beginning of the project was to address the topics of regional marketing and development of regional trademarks. Selected scientific papers therefore provided the theoretical background and potential implementation methods. It has been stated (Haas, 2006) that the customer-oriented marketing approach, which aims to build long-term relationships, emerged in the USA in the mid-1950s. As such, essential to effective marketing is a focus on customer needs and clearly defined targets, although regional marketing differs from conventional consumer goods marketing in a variety of ways (see Table 2). Accordingly, four substantial areas of marketing need to be addressed:

- Product-related decisions should provide clarity about the physical nature of products, the assortment, trademarks, brands and quality labels, and country of origin, in addition to core value and added value. The bundle of benefits should ultimately be clear.
- Price considerations in regional marketing must take into account not only the market price, but also taxes, subsidies or tariffs, payment methods and contracting.
- “Place” (or distribution) encompasses availability and organisation, e.g. public transport systems, business hours for services, etc.
- Promotion must include five key instruments: sales promotion, direct marketing, advertising, public relations and personal selling.

Also important is to streamline the different opinions of the multiple stakeholders within a region. The best way would appear to view the region neither solely as a product nor solely as a region, but rather as a strategic network which follows explicit objectives, shows mutual dependency, has a central coordination centre and must share resources.

Criteria	Company	Region
Location	mobile	immobile
Object of exchange	products / services	regional services / products
Price instrument	flexible prices	taxes, subsidies, prices
Pluralistic decision making	not necessary	necessary
State of employment	employee, self-employed	civil servant, farmer, employee, entrepreneur
Objectives	profit	employment, non-monetary, profit
Public interest	no	yes
Experience with marketing	long tradition	little experience

Table 2:
Basic criteria
for marketing

Source: Antal et al., 2007b

The implementation of regional trademarks (Antal et al., 2007b) needs to follow certain developments and legal standards before registration can occur. This is the most important instrument in terms of legally-protected identification, as trademarks differentiate products and services from others on the market and also support consumer decisions. Trademarks must have determinable and measurable attributes, and must meet specially controlled and monitored standards. With respect to the “Parks & Economy” project, trademark development was based on the SWOT analyses, while furthermore supporting the high-importance factors (from the success factor analyses) and concentrating on the best-fitting actors as derived from the stakeholder analyses. Thus, all regional trademarks developed within the “Parks & Economy” project:

- ■ ■ are target-area specific
- ■ ■ carry value and quality
- ■ ■ can be distinguished from products or services of other areas (through either unique identification or high quality)
- ■ ■ are appropriate for both individual and common marketing purposes
- ■ ■ are suitable for the marketing of products, services and the region alike
- ■ ■ support local competitiveness

3.3 Monitoring

In terms of project management, “monitoring” refers to the systematic collection of data for drawing conclusions on the extent of the project’s progress, the achievement of objectives and the appropriate allocation of funds. In contrast, “evaluation” encompasses determining the worth of the project, the relevance of objectives, its efficacy of design and implementation, as well as the efficiency of resource use and sustainability of results. While monitoring concentrates on documenting and assisting the implementation and development processes, evaluation focuses on in-depth insights with respect to the project’s long-term and comprehensive effects (see Giddings, 2006).

In general, project development can be divided into three phases: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Within the “Parks & Economy” project, the main effort concentrated on the planning phase and was based on comprehensive analyses embedded within a methodo-

logical framework. After implementation of the development and marketing plans (DEMAPs), a revision with respect to common evaluation needed to take place, with evaluation subsequently comprising all actions to be implemented by each project region. Because a qualitative assessment of the implementation effects ought not to take place until after completion of the majority of actions, the common evaluation activity initially focused on a monitoring comprised of impartial fact finding as to the level of conformance between the current state of implementation and the DEMAPs. The results of monitoring can be a useful basis for further evaluation by the project partners at a later stage, e.g. to explain deviations from their time schedules and to detect more lessons learned. Evaluation results may also be used to adjust, refine or extend the DEMAPs, in which case the whole process of planning, implementation and evaluation will start again.

For the monitoring phase, a brief questionnaire was developed containing questions about changes in the regional strategies objectives. It included also a table for checking the actual status of implemented actions as compared to the action plans. The questionnaire was sent to project partners in February 2008, by which date actions implemented as part of the "Parks & Economy" project needed to be complete. To monitor the precise planning of actions, we compared the planned level of implementation as called for by the DEMAPs with the actual status of implementation at the time of the questionnaire. The monitoring results are described in the sections covering the implementation of action plans in each project region, while they were also used as one source for deriving lessons learned and recommendations (Section 5).

4 Implementation and Results for the Project Regions

Section 4 provides insights into the development process within the regions participating in the “Parks & Economy” project. Included are brief descriptions of the nature parks, an overview of the analyses results, as well as the thereon based DEMAPs and their implementation for each project region. The project regions represent nature parks at various implementation stages and comprising a broad range of natural conditions and basic circumstances.

4.1 Project Region: Kysuce, Slovak Republic

4.1.1 About the Kysuce Region

The Kysuce territory borders on Poland and the Czech Republic and is part of the Carpathian range. With an area of 935 km², Kysuce is situated in the northwestern part of the Žilina region and is divided into the two districts of Čadca and Kysucké Nové Mesto. The inhabitants living in the project region’s four towns and 33 villages number approximately 127,000. The Kysuce region features high natural values and is characterised by a picturesque landscape with groups of forests, grass fields, yards and settlements, as well as preserved folk architecture. The area has a wide network of water flows, numerous springs, temporary peat bogs and boggy grass fields with the presence of protected plant species. The area represents the western border of extension for Slovakia’s big carnivores (wolf, bear and lynx). Geological rarities of the region are surface outflows of petrol in Korňa and sandstone balls in the natural reservation “Klokočovske skalie.”



Fig.5:
Sandstone ball

4.1.2. Results of Analyses in Kysuce

SWOT Analysis

The existing status of the Kysuce region showed best results based on the analyses of all relevant topics. Only demographic development was assessed to be a weakness and also a threat. Looking at the future expectations for regional development in the Kysuce area, the only significant change predicted is population decline, which is expected to accelerate. Slight improvements are foreseen in settlement structure, as well as slight degradations in the economy and governance. Natural, technical and social infrastructure will remain constant.

Success Factor Analysis

The success factor analysis resulted in highest importance for the following factors: key actors, public involvement, powerful partners in the region and high quality of products. According to the appraisals, production guidelines, good relations outside the region as well as controlling and evaluation are less important factors. Levels of achievement are high for key actors and for the quality of products. The main gaps between importance and level of achievement were found in the factors public involvement, powerful partners in the region and adequate resources.

Stakeholder Analysis

According to the stakeholder analysis, the most powerful impact on the project derives from operators of tourism facilities, NGOs dealing with nature protection, local self-government and the media. Producers of traditional products will have quite a large effect on project success, as well. All of these stakeholders are connected very positively to the project. Problems may occur with the group of large forestry companies, as forestry-related restrictions affect other forms of forest use. Therefore, conflicts between forestry and tourism can be reasonably expected.

4.1.3 DEMAP and Implementation in Kysuce

Objectives

The defined objectives for the Kysuce region are in good accordance with the overall "Parks & Economy" objectives. They focus on workshops and meetings for local stakeholders, communication, creation and registration of a label for traditional products, certification of products, growth of cultural and sustainable tourism and establishment of an educational route.

Strategies

The most important strategies in light of financial conditions are a communication strategy and the construction of an educational route. These were ranked higher than workshops and meetings for stakeholders, and are thus the first strategies to pursue within a chronological order. Responsibility lies mostly with local NGOs.

Action Plan

For Kysuce, five short-term actions were determined: workshops and meetings, communication, the establishment of an educational route in the area and the creation and registration of a product label.

Implementation

Thanks to the manageable number of actions (five), all with short-term implementation perspectives and in compliance with the precisely derived timetables and budgets of the DEMAP, a straightforward and successful implementation in close cooperation with local stakeholders was possible. In addition, accompanying promotional activities contributed to the successful implementation, and these will furthermore serve as a good basis for further implementations,

as they managed to convince locals of the social and economic advantages of a protected area status – beyond the limitations of strict nature conservancy regulations.

The pilot project “Educational-informational path for tourists, Javorníky” with a length of 40 km was realised. It comprises an educational and recreational walk-way with signposts, information panels, benches and places to relax. The path also functions as an open-air gallery, as objects of art created by local artists have been positioned along the recreational path. Supported by a series of informational leaflets, the path is expected to positively impact tourism and the local economy in general.



Fig. 6:
Art objects along
the recreational
path of Javorníky

Trademark

A regional trademark was developed for food and handicraft products of local producers, as well as detailed certification criteria for the labelling of local products. Labelling criteria for producers beyond the legal scope include regional provenance and an environmentally friendly process of production. Labelling criteria for products, also beyond the legal scope, are the environmental friendliness of products and packaging, as well as product uniqueness. For indicating the uniqueness of the product, a point system was developed to assess the share of local raw materials and the share of handcrafting used in producing the product, while the level of quality and tradition of a product was also factored in. Potential users of the trademark are craftsmen, folk artists, folk producers, service enterprises and farmers.

The following future benefits are expected as a result of using the regional trademark:

- ■ ■ traditional and environmentally friendly production
- ■ ■ a healthier environment
- ■ ■ higher-quality and more careful area management
- ■ ■ a higher value of the region for tourists and inhabitants
- ■ ■ enlargement of the business activities of local producers
- ■ ■ improved marketability of regional products
- ■ ■ better co-operation among regional enterprises



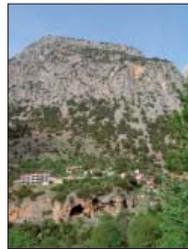
Fig.7:
Logo of the regional
trademark
of the Kysuce
area

4.2 Project Region: Lidoriki, Greece

4.2.1 About the Lidoriki Region

The municipality of Lidoriki, including 12 villages with 1,500 inhabitants, is located in the region of Dorida. The surrounding landscape of Lidoriki is characterised by the wooded mountains Giona and Vardousia, and Lake Mornos, an artificial lake located just 7 km west of Lidoriki and approximately 220 km northwest of the City of Athens. The dam was constructed in 1980, and the lake now serves as a main storage reservoir for Athen's water supply. The natural environment in the Mornos area is considered exceptionally beautiful. The eastern area of Lake of Mornos, belonging to the Municipality of Lidoriki, has been identified as appropriate for the implementation of a nature park.

Fig.8:
Lake Mornos
and the Lidoriki
region



4.2.2. Results of Analyses of Lidoriki

SWOT analysis

Topology, settlement structure, nature, technical and social infrastructure, and governance were all identified as strengths and opportunities, while demographic development and economy were evaluated to be weaknesses and threats. Future development of the region is expected to have positive effects on the development of the population, economy and technical infrastructure, but negative impacts on nature. Other examined topics were judged to remain unaffected.

Success Factor Analysis

In this Greek project region, the existence of key actors and powerful partners, the involvement of the public, good relationships outside the region, a high quality of products and communication and public relation measures were identified as success factors with highest importance. The region was furthermore found to be very suitable for the establishment of a nature park, while the existence of powerful regional partners and the quality of the regional products were judged as fairly good. Least promising are the factors communication and PR, as well as the lack of adequate production guidelines and "suitable basics." Therefore, the main gaps between factor importance and level of achievement were observed for good relationships to partners outside the region and professional communication. In addition, improvement appears necessa-

ry with respect to the engagement shown by key actors and in the involvement of the public.

Stakeholder Analysis

The strongest impacts on the development of a nature park in Lidoriki are exercised by the Municipality of Lidoriki, the Prefecture of Fokida and the Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Company (EYDAP). The first two mentioned institutions have taken a positive position on the development of a nature park, whereas EYDAP may strongly endanger the implementation of a nature park within the region. The company's firm contrarian position arises from the fact that Lake Mornos is one of the most important water supplies for the Greek capital, and EYDAP has thus placed many restrictions on potential uses for the area around the lake, as well as on specific activities that the project seeks to develop. These restrictions negatively influence regional economic development in general and tourism activities in particular (except sightseeing).

Other quite powerful and positive impacts on the project can be exercised by the local hotel and catering branches, companies offering alternative tourism, local residents and travel agents. At present, cultural and athletic associations, as well as regional educational and training centres, seem to have adopted a rather chary, yet positive, position.

4.2.3. DEMAP and Implementation in Lidoriki

Objectives

The main objective was to consolidate the idea of a nature park as a creative solution for regional development. In consideration of the individual circumstances of the Lidoriki region, three alternative scenarios were identified to address the issue of usage restrictions as related to the supply of drinking water from Lake Mornos to Athens:

- In the first scenario, the park offers no activities around the lake other than sightseeing, walking and some resting places.
- The second scenario would enable participation in several activities (e.g. exploring the lake and its history, camping near the lake) and would include realising small-scale infrastructure.
- The third scenario includes walking, sightseeing and participation in athletic and cultural activities by visitors. The implementation of this scenario would necessitate the development of heavier infrastructure.

As the three scenarios differ in the degree of basic infrastructure (upon which the offerings for tourists depend), the stakeholders' main priority is to negotiate with the Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Company regarding the existing restrictions. In accordance with the aims of the "Parks & Economy" project, one portion of the objectives focused on communication, promotion and public relations, marketing of regional products and tourism offers. The other specific objectives derive from the results of the analyses and address raising awareness among stakeholders, negotiations with the Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Company and the enrichment of local tourism offers and services.

Strategies

The strategies for Lidoriki give highest priority to the implementation of workshops for regional stakeholders, including raising their awareness, and to negotiations with the Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Company, but also to the enrichment of local tourism products. All of these were judged to offer a medium level of promise. Of high priority, yet showing little promise for success, would appear to be a communication strategy and implementation of a pilot project. Further emphases of the strategies are on improving marketing opportunities for the traditional regional products of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as creating and safeguarding jobs. Additional financing means for implementing the strategies must also be identified.

Action Plan

A total of 13 actions – eight of which are seen as having long-term perspectives, and five planned for implementation as part of the “Parks & Economy” project – were identified and further divided into five categories:

- preparatory phase (2 actions)
- supporting development of the necessary infrastructure (2 actions)
- human resources development (1 action)
- communication tools (5 actions)
- development of supporting services and products (3 actions)

Implementation

Successful steps have been taken towards improving the basis for negotiations with the Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Company in regard to the restrictions in place around Lake Mornos. A large scale-project has been assigned for wastewater treatment planning and will be implemented within the framework of the operational programme “Environment and Sustainable Development 2007 – 2013.” A hosted workshop, whose objectives were to build a strong sense of ownership for future activities, to actively engage all stakeholders, to overcome distrust and to demonstrate benefits of a nature park for the local community, was also held. In addition, leaflets on the “Parks & Economy” project were designed and printed, and both actions have contributed to increased awareness within the region. The Municipality of Lidoriki has also made initial efforts towards developing a local trademark, and it has designed a visitors package for the area. A key general observation was that a small municipality in the initial phase of implementing a nature park, and that with few available resources may face particular difficulties in involving all relevant stakeholders and in exploiting the various potential funding opportunities.

Trademark

Initial steps for developing a geographically-related trademark were taken, with the main aim to support tourism facilities. The planned collective mark should assure differentiation and gu-

arrantee the quality of regional services and products. The future holder of the trademark will be a non-profit organisation operated by the municipality of Lidoriki, and it will be responsible for registration, marketing and information campaigns, as well as controlling and monitoring. Use of the trademark is intended for local manufacturers of agricultural, food or handcraft products, local service providers, gastronomy and hotel businesses, cultural associations and travel agents. Further steps will be taken for planning the regulation of trademark usage, including a description of the mark and its territorial positioning, as well as the development of quality criteria. The criteria will comprise traditional production, usage of local raw materials, environmentally friendly production methods, packaging, cultural, folk or natural values, use of renewable energy and waste reduction. A trademark audit is also planned.

4.3 Project Region: Muldenland, Germany

4.3.1. About the Muldenland Region

The total area of the planned Nature Park Muldenland covers approximately 760 km². The location is in the northwest of the Federal State of Saxony and extends along the rivers Zwickauer Mulde and Freiburger Mulde, and along the “united” Mulde River. The prominent features include river valleys, semi-natural wooded slopes and striking rock formations. The area is situated close to the metropolitan areas of Leipzig, Dresden and Chemnitz, and is dominated by built-up areas. Some 231,000 inhabitants live in 32 settlements within the area, with only six settlements having more than 10,000 inhabitants. Today, 80 % of the planned park territory already consists of protected areas (e.g. Natura 2000). In addition, many cultural and historical attractions can be found along the Mulde Valley, such as fortresses, castles, cloisters and medieval churches.

Fig. 9:
The Mulde River
and Trebsen
Castle



4.3.2. Results of Analyses in Muldenland

SWOT Analysis

The topic of governance was identified as an external opportunity, but also as an internal weakness, while all other topics were estimated to be strengths and opportunities. Slight future improvements were expected in technical infrastructure, but the structure of settlements, nature and environment, economy and governance were judged to be worsening. Population and social infrastructure are projected to remain unchanged in future.

Success Factor Analysis

The average results of the success factor analysis showed highest importance for the factors region suitability, powerful regional partners, key actors and communication and public relations. However, all applicable success factors seem to be important in Muldenland, as none of them displayed low values. Estimates of achievement were highest for the topic of region suitability, and lowest for controlling and evaluation. The biggest gaps between importance and level of achievement occurred for the factors key actors, public involvement, adequate resources and communication and promotion. Measures to improve these factors thus appear necessary.

Stakeholder Analysis

The results of the stakeholder analysis for Muldenland showed a division of stakeholders from outside and inside the region. The most important organisations are the European Union, with its financial and methodological support, and Aufbauwerk Leipzig, with its regional logistics and organisational support. Other more or less important stakeholders outside the region are primarily ministries and public administrations. The only negative impact derives from the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture of Saxony, as it disapproves of the establishment of new nature parks. The most important, and most engaged, stakeholders inside the region are the Rural District Office Muldentalkreis and the Regional Management of West Saxony. Additional quite important groups of stakeholders are other rural district offices and municipalities, as well as various associations engaged in regional management, nature conservation and upholding of the cultural and natural heritage. A good level of cooperation and collaboration is given, on the one hand due to the comprehensive number of stakeholders and their mostly positive attitude towards establishing a nature park and implementing connected measures, but also due to a lack of conflicts.

4.3.3. DEMAP and Implementation in Muldenland

Objectives

For the German project region, the most important aims and visions were identified as the establishment of a common management structure, the development of a regional communication plan, the development and maintenance of a network of cooperation, increasing public awareness, accentuation of the Muldenland region's specific characteristics, identities and amenities, the development of new environmental education projects and the implementation of nature conservation projects.

Strategies

Internal and external communication strategies qualify as core activities, since communication measures are vital to any strategy for reducing potential risks. Within the "Parks & Economy" project especially, key aims for Muldenland were to improve marketing opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises, and to safeguard and create jobs.

Action Plan

The action plan for Muldenland is divided into four sections comprising the following main topics: development of structures, valorisation of the natural and cultural heritage and usage for tourism, development of human resources and communication tools. In total, 15 actions were formulated, and these were then divided into four "groups of intervention:"

- development of structures (3 actions)
- valorisation of the natural and cultural heritage (7 actions)
- development of human resources (3 actions)
- communication tools (2 actions)

Initial steps were taken during the project, including strengthening regional collaboration, support for existing trademarks, installing signposts for tourists, improvements to salmon habitats, improvements to an internal web portal and the development of a brochure about Muldenland.

Implementation

Due to the high number of planned actions, and because of organisational and technical changes during the course of the project, not all of the actions were realised. The Nature Park Association needed to elaborate integrated rural development strategies in collaboration and coherence with other involved regions to obtain LEADER funding in Saxony, and this resulted in a stop of the “Parks & Economy” implementation process. However, there are examples of successfully completed actions, such as an online tourism portal that enables hundreds of associations and tourism-related businesses to present their activities and commercial offers (www.naturpark-muldenland.de), implementation of a dedicated tourism destination, development of a corporate image and a new brochure. Perhaps the most visible outcome of the “Parks & Economy” project in Muldenland is the information and sign-posting system, which was developed and implemented within the project. In a first step, fifteen locations along the Mulde River received new information panels to help interested visitors learn more about the aims of the nature park initiative and the sites where panels are located. In addition, many interesting project ideas for the nature park territory were implemented, e.g. the re-domestication of salmon in the Mulde River and the training of park rangers to care for the area’s natural heritage.

Trademark

The Muldenland region plans further development of an existing collective mark that has a geographical context, and it will be based on quality characteristics for attaining a stronger regional identification and higher product quality. The trademark “Naturpark Muldenland” is owned and, so far, used only by the Nature Park Muldenland Association. In addition, an existing product trademark for regional products, called “Marke Muldenland,” remains in use and is held by a local association of several area towns. The latter includes 65 businesses which are permitted to use the brand name (www.marke-muldenland.de). A future challenge will be linking both brands and arriving at a common definition for the terms of use.

Fig. 10:
Logos of the
Nature Park
Muldenland and
of the trademark
“Marke Mulden-
land”



4.4 Project Region: Rimini, Italy

4.4.1 About the Rimini Region

The Onferno Natural Reserve is located in the southern part of the Province of Rimini, close to the border with the Marche Region and between the Conca River and Ventena River valleys. This well preserved landscape in the southern Emilia Romagna region became one of the “points of excellence” within the regional system of protected areas in 1992, in particular because of a large population of seven different bat species living in the Onferno caves. Other valuable habitats include grasslands, slopes covered by linden-tree forests and calcareous rocky walls featuring unusual vegetation. In total, the reserve measures 2.7 km². The nearest high-ranking town is Gemmano (~ 5 km), while the distance to the City of Rimini is approximately 30 km. Only 150 inhabitants live directly inside the reserve, and the entire territory of the Gemmano Municipality has a population of roughly 1,400.



Fig. 11:
Onferno
Natural-Oriented
Reserve and
Onferno cave

4.4.2 Results of Analyses in Rimini

SWOT Analysis

All of the given topics were evaluated to be strengths and opportunities. Future development is seen as positive for the population and economy, but negative for settlement-structure, nature and environment and technical infrastructure. Social infrastructure and governance are projected to remain at approximately the same levels.

Success Factor Analysis

In the project region Onferno Natural Reserve, highest importance has been assigned to key actors and public involvement, for which achievement was evaluated as relatively good but with room for improvement. Partnerships inside and outside the region are rated as good, and both are seen as regional strengths. Lacks in the achievement of success factors were identified for adequate resources, production guidelines, high quality products, communication and promotion, as well as controlling and evaluation.

Stakeholder Analysis

The most important stakeholders with a strong impact are regional politicians, the regional administration and associations, as well as local stakeholders like the Municipality of Gemmano, the association overseeing the Onferno caves, agricultural stakeholders and NGOs. All were estimated to have a positive impact on the project and an interest in raising income opportunities and protection standards. Without initial financing from the EU, the development of this region would not be possible. A lower impact was determined for high-level administrations (Italian Ministries) and for some local tourism and marketing stakeholders. Stakeholders who could negatively impact the development of the natural site were not found. Agriculture, tourism and nature protection interests appear to be collaborating well.

4.4.3. DEMAPs and their Implementation in Rimini

Objectives

The objectives for Rimini consisted of elaborating a communication strategy, developing standards for labelling and trademarks, enlargement of the protected area, marketing and promotion of the regional heritage and products, as well as job creation and job security.

Strategies

The regional strategies relied on funding from the Province of Rimini and the Municipality of Gemmano. Highest priority was given to developing a communication strategy, regional product labelling standards and several pilot projects. Other strategies, like those addressing marketing opportunities and recognition of the regional heritage, are more indirect and thus not easy to quantify. Nevertheless, their promise and priority were both evaluated as medium. Due to the fairly positive economic situation in the Province of Rimini, job creation and job security were assigned a low priority.

Action Plan

The focus within the Rimini project region is on promoting the existing local trademark, "La valle della Riserva," which remains in the early development phase and cannot yet be described as successful. Thus, one specific action was to advance the trademark as a key and fundamental element of the "Parks & Economy" project. Other actions included a series of workshops to strengthen cultural and ecotourism, marketing knowledge and the regional heritage, each of which involved key actors and harboured follow-on opportunities. In total, four actions were planned.

Implementation

The small number of actions helped assure their successful implementation. All of the four planned actions were thus implemented and completed within the "Parks & Economy" project. The first step for integrating the various aspects essential to the territory was to further develop and market the unique territorial trademark – "La valle della Riserva". Henceforth, certified pro-

ducts and services will be promoted together with regional tourism offerings, at local, national and international fairs, markets and retail outlets. Also, wildlife protection fences and cycling routes were improved, while signposts and a learning area for tourists and scholars alike were developed. During the implementation phase, it was observed that raising awareness among all regional partners – and indeed activating them – as well as creating opportunities for communication, collaboration and discussion between the citizens and all stakeholders, rank as “indispensable fundamentals” for future development.

Trademark

The territorial trademark “La valle della Riserva” is intended to support and strengthen environmental conservation efforts, local identity, sustainable tourism, local heritage and quality of the landscape. Potential users of the collective mark were identified to be local producers and service providers, local handicraft enterprises, farmers, the agritourism branch and accommodation providers, other local tourism facilities and sporting clubs. The (in part) fixed trademark usage regulations contain the description of the trademark (i.e., logo, design and position), territorial positioning, description of product groups, quality criteria and other requirements to be met by products and services. And, the key criteria for use include quality, local production, use of local raw materials, traditional production techniques, environmentally friendly production processes, links to the conservation of local traditions and cultural, folk and natural values.

4.5 Project Region: Teramo, Italy

4.5.1 About the Teramo Region

The project area is located in the Apennine Mountains, in central Italy, a mere 11 km from the City of Teramo. The Gran Sasso and Laga Mountains National Park covers 902 km² and shelters a very high number of pioneer plants. Approximately 37,000 inhabitants live in the project area.

Fig.12
Logos of the
Onferno Natural-
Oriented Reserve
and of the trade-
mark “La valle
della Riserva”



4.5.2 Results of Analyses in Teramo

SWOT Analysis

The results of the SWOT analysis for Teramo showed that all key topics can be viewed as strengths and opportunities. Future development was deemed to be positive for the population and economy, but negative for settlement structure, nature and the environment and technical infrastructure. Development was estimated to keep social infrastructure and governance stable.

Success Factor Analysis

The success factor analysis for Teramo focused on human resources, such as the presence of key actors, public involvement, powerful partners and partnerships. The level of achievement for these factors was shown to be relatively good, while the availability of high-quality products and the region's inherent suitability rank highest for their impact on success. On the other hand, key lacks exist with respect to adequate resources, production guidelines, communication and promotion, as well as controlling and evaluation.

Stakeholder Analysis

The most important stakeholders with an impact in Teramo are regional politicians, the regional administration and such associations as GAL Appennino Teramano and Ente Parco Gran Sasso, as well as local agricultural and tourism stakeholders. All seem to have a strong interest in the project for reasons of regional development and positive income perspectives. At a lower level of impact, and in most cases with a lower interest, are national administrations and NGOs (Italian Ministry and EU institutions, WWF), but also some local institutions and agencies. No negative impacts were found to derive from the stakeholders.

4.5.3 DEMAPs and their Implementation in Teramo

Objectives

The objectives for Teramo comprised the elaboration of a communication strategy, pilot projects, standards for labelling and trademarks, but also an enlargement of the protected area, marketing and promotion of the regional heritage and products, as well as job creation and job safety to a lesser degree.

Strategies

The ten strategies for the pilot region Teramo concentrate on funding from the Province of Teramo. The highest priority, and highest budget, was accorded to elaborating a communication strategy and the pilot project of creating parking spaces for campers. Additional strategies for local and regional trademarks, promotion and marketing were given medium priority. However, enlargement of the protected zone, job creation and job security all carry a low priority.

Action Plan

The focus in the Teramo pilot region is on the development and promotion of a local trademark, and on developing a camping area to strengthen cultural and ecotourism. Marketing knowledge and the regional heritage, each of them with involvement by key actors, should open follow-on opportunities.



Fig. 13
Gran Sasso and
Laga Mountains
National Park

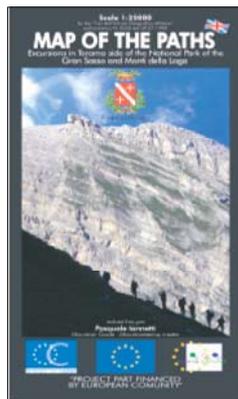
Implementation

A map of the paths in the Gran Sasso and Laga Mountains park area (in both English and German) and a map containing accommodations and hospitality facilities (in several languages) have been published. As a pilot project, the Province of Teramo has realised five equipped parking places for campers and caravans. These offer electricity and water facilities, as well as sewerage disposal outlets. Good equipped facilities for the promotion of typical products have also been established. The necessity for understanding the territory's individualised needs and for cooperating on projects with local actors were key observations.

Trademark

The planned trademark for Teramo will function as a tool for the territorial differentiation of services and will have a primarily informative character. The holder will be the Province of Teramo. Main users will be service providers, such as restaurants, accommodation providers and hotels, in addition to handicraft manufacturers. The planned criteria for use will include geographic position within the nature park, tradition and conformance as a regional speciality.

Fig. 14
Map of hiking paths in the Gran Sasso and Laga Mountains National Park, and a new camping location



4.6 Project Region: Tisza Microregion, Hungary

4.6.1 About the Tisza Microregion

The pilot region is located in Dél-Heves County, within Hungary's Northern Great Plain region, along the western bank of Lake Tisza. Six municipalities with approximately 12,000 total inhabitants are located inside the area. The nearest high-ranking town is Eger, in a distance of 50 km. Lake Tisza and the Heves Grasslands represent significant natural values in the region. Lake Tisza is a mosaic patchwork of backwaters, sandbanks, islands, dead channels, reed fields and gallery forests, with rich flora and fauna. The protected patches of saline and salinating areas in the Heves Grasslands consist of xerophilous saline grass communities and loess steppe. Lake Tisza is on the UNESCO World Heritage list; and, partly, it is also a RAMSAR area (the Lake Tisza Bird Nature Reserve). The Heves Grasslands are a national landscape protection area, and a nature park is planned to be established there.



Fig. 15:
The study path
on Lake Tisza
and grasslands in
Dél-Heves

4.6.2 Results of Analyses in the Tisza Microregion

SWOT Analysis

The Hungarian SWOT analysis identified weaknesses and threats to be the topics economy and population, and strengths and threats for the topics social infrastructure and nature and environment. A weakness, but also an opportunity, was seen in settlement structure, while technical infrastructure is both a strength and opportunity. Governance was evaluated as a strength only. Estimations regarding future development predict very positive trends for each of the investigated topics, with the exception of settlement structure, which is projected to stay constant.

Success Factor Analysis

Regional development experts in the Tisza Microregion identified six factors as having top importance (key actors, involvement of the public, powerful partners in the region, adequate resources, region suitability and high product quality) and another four factors as moderately important (good relations outside the region, regional production standards, communication and PR activities, controlling and evaluation). Levels of factor achievement are highest for powerful partners in the region, adequate resources and region suitability. The lowest values occurred for

controlling, evaluation and regional production guidelines. The largest gaps between a factor's importance and its level of achievement were identified for key actors, public involvement and high quality of products. However, these gaps are only of a medium size, thus they will not directly endanger the project's success.

Stakeholder Analysis

The examination of actors who might have an impact on the project identified local municipalities, NGOs and accommodation providers as the actors with the highest degree of impact. Neighbouring municipalities, craftsmen and local gastronomy businesses have the least ability to impact the project. With respect to those having a significant impact, the local accommodation providers and NGOs were observed to have the most positive effect, while neighbouring municipalities and the regional development council could maintain a neutral, or perhaps negative, impact on the project. The local experts were also able to identify potential sources of conflicts among local municipalities, and these stemmed from the competition for market position and visitors.

4.6.3 DEMAPs and their Implementation in the Tisza Microregion

Objectives

Regional experts worked out seven objectives targeting the establishment of a nature park, the marketing of regional foods using a trademark and the improvement of regional collaboration.

Strategies

The high-priority strategies for the Tisza Microregion focus on the development and registration of a regional trademark and the controlling and evaluation of the same. The establishment of a nature park is also of high priority, but is promising only to a medium degree. Improvement in the relationships between producers and customers is also highly important to the region, even if the potential for this strategy was also determined to be of medium effectiveness only.

Action Plan

The action plan for the Tisza Microregion was split into two parts. One part comprised actions to be implemented within the time frame of the "Parks & Economy" project, while those of the second part will be implemented after project completion. Short-term actions comprise the three main tasks of introducing a local eco-trademark, preparing for the establishment of the nature park and developing communication tools. These tasks have in turn been subdivided into various individual actions. Thus, a total of twelve short-term actions were formulated. The long-term action plan concentrates on the establishment of the nature park and its technical background.

Implementation

Implementation of the short-term action plan was very successful in the Tisza Microregion, as eight of the twelve actions were right on schedule. A key change ensued with respect to the site of the planned nature park. In the initial planning phase, the park was designated for establishment in the Tisza Microregion. Later, however, the Heves Grasslands were chosen as the centre of the planned park territory and the name was changed accordingly to Dél-Heves Nature Park.

During the implementation phase, substantial initial worries regarding added environmental restrictions were detected among the local stakeholders and these had to be assuaged with information campaigns. In addition, locals displayed a degree of reluctance towards the regional trademark. However, by stressing the strong connection between the trademark and the future nature park, and by ensuring a raised awareness for the services and products to be traded under the mark, as well as its robust territorial aspects, stakeholder anxieties were eased. In the course of the project, more and more municipalities and NGOs became enthusiastic about the concept of the planned nature park and a local trademark. At the same time, these stakeholders became more active towards implementation. Along with their stronger involvement came a certain degree of competition between the stakeholders, mostly among the municipalities in regard to assuming the leading role in establishing a nature park organisation. As yet, much effort remains needed towards strengthening co-operation in the area and combating rivalries.

Trademark

An eco-trademark as a geographical identification mark for the Dél-Heves region has been developed and will be eligible for environmentally friendly services and products originating from the area as of 2008. The collective mark has an informational function and also serves as a guarantee of quality. The holder will be an association to be founded by the municipalities in the Dél-Heves area, together with local non-profit organisations and private individuals. In addition to application for and registration of the trademark, the association will be responsible for managing the nature park.

The trademark will be available for traditional, environmentally friendly and organic farming products, for products made by local craftsmen, providers of rural accommodations, camping sites, gastronomy businesses and summer schools. The criteria for local services are environmental friendliness, typicality for the region, "checkability," preservation of local traditions, contribution to the popularisation of the nature park and compliance with nature conservation regulations. The trademark's graphic logo will conform to the logo of the nature park, thus both will schematically depict the landscape of the Dél-Heves area.



Fig. 16:
Logos of the
Dél-Heves Na-
ture Park and
Dél-Heves eco-
trademark

4.7 Project Region: Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park, Bulgaria

4.7.1 About Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park

Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park was founded in 1996. It is situated in northwestern Bulgaria amidst the Vrachanska Mountain territory, in the vicinity of the city of Vratsa, and also close to Sofia and the Danube River. The park's area covers 289 km² and holds 17 settlements with approximately 8,700 inhabitants. The territory is rich in beech forests (more than 160 years old), unique rock formations, waterfalls and ancient caves. One natural reserve, ten specific environmental objects and 500 caves and gorges can be found in the project region. The entire Vrachansky Balkan NP area will become part of the National Ecology Network, thus officially designating it as a place of ornithological importance.

Fig. 17:
Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park



4.7.2 Results of analyses in Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park

SWOT Analysis

Regional weaknesses and threats were identified to be the topics population and technical infrastructure. Governance was evaluated as a weakness, but also as an opportunity, and social infrastructure as a strength and threat at once. The economy, settlement structure and nature and environment were assessed as strengths and opportunities. The estimation of future trends resulted in foreseen positive developments for population, technical and social infrastructure, governance and the economy, while settlement structure and nature and environment were the topics predicted to worsen.

Success Factor Analysis

Four of the success factors were of top importance: key actors, public involvement, powerful partners in the region and high quality of products. The topics production guidelines and controlling and evaluation were found to have little relevance in this region. Levels of achievement are high for key actors, powerful regional partners and high quality of products. The biggest gaps between a topic's

Stakeholder Analysis

Twenty stakeholders were identified in Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park region and their main topics of interest are tourism, agriculture and forestry. The most powerful stakeholders are the municipality of Mezdra and large-scale foresters. Mezdra has a positive attitude towards the project, as the pilot region is located on its territory and the municipality is very interested in the preservation of the cultural-historical heritage and progress in tourism. Large forest enterprises display a neutral stance towards the project at present. Threats to the success of the project derive from a dairy farm and a hydroelectric power station, as these imply negative environmental effects for the area.

4.7.3 DEMAPs and their Implementation in Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park

Objectives

The objectives for Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park concentrate on communication, partnership, strengthening of regional capacities, regional trademarks and the implementation of a pilot project.

Strategies

The following strategies were prioritised for Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park and, at the same time, were evaluated as highly promising: a communication strategy, standards for the creation of a regional trademark for product labelling, trademark registration, growth of cultural and ecotourism, improvement of regional collaboration, improvement of existing infrastructure, development of new tourism products and a quality management system for tourism activities.

Action Plan

The actions developed for Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park focused mainly on the regional trademark and public relations. Further actions dealt with marketing and the realisation of a pilot project.

Implementation

Basic preparatory work for the registration of a newly created trademark in accordance with Bulgarian legislation was completed. The analyses undertaken contributed to the sufficient preparation of the nature park for future participation in the National Rural Development Programme.

Trademark

The future trademark of Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park will be conducive to geographical identification. The service mark will guarantee quality and will be held by the nature park itself. Users of the trademark have not yet been specified. The future usage regulations will need to be in accordance with the nature park's principles and criteria.

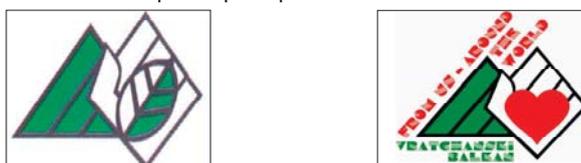


Fig. 18:
Logos of
Vrachansky Bal-
kan Nature Park
and the area's
trademark

5 Lessons Learned and Recommendations for the Implementation of Regional Development Measures in Nature Parks

One source of information for compiling the lessons learned were the results of the questionnaire that was sent out for monitoring purposes to the project partners, during the final stage of the “Parks & Economy” project. The questionnaire dealt with local adaptations to objectives and strategies, as well as the implementation of pilot actions. Additional information came from experiences presented at the final project meeting in Gemmano, Italy, and from the “Parks & Economy” final report (N.N., 2008). Because the lessons learned from the implementation of DEMAPs necessarily depend on the existence of an already established nature park, our review of the results has been divided into two categories: first, the specific experiences of project regions without an established nature park and, second, general lessons learned.

The three project **regions without an established Nature Park** thus far (the areas in Germany, Greece and Hungary) faced specific problems due to uncertainty among locals, unclear management structures and limited resources. In general, these regions encountered negative bias among local stakeholders. Existing reluctance against the plans for establishing a nature park and regional trademark derived mostly from inherent distrust and uncertainty, as well as general ignorance regarding the legal framework, restrictions in nature parks, the requirements and benefits arising from the establishment of a nature park and the benefits of a regional trademark. In these cases, **information campaigns** were needed to overcome inhibitions, to raise awareness and to convince the local population that protected areas are not only territories where activities are limited by strict nature conservation regulations, but also a source of social and economic advantages.

In the Greek project region, the legal framework endangers the realisation of a nature park, or at least its embodiment, as strict land-use regulations exist due to the proximity of a lake that serves as a vital drinking water reservoir. In this case, a much higher degree of sensitivity will be needed with respect to developing regional offerings, but also increased efforts to adapt the existing legal restrictions.

The **motivation** of local stakeholders was another crucial factor. Successful implementation of plans and actions depends mainly on the involvement and motivation of all critical stakeholders, and in such manner that each stakeholder perceives “ownership” of the plan and assumes responsibility for future development. However, activities that seek to increase motivation can also steer feelings in the wrong direction, as evidenced by one region where stronger rivalries among stakeholders ensued – instead of the intended effect of improved cooperation.

Improved communication, including the involvement of local stakeholders, has shown to be a protracted process, and thus sufficient **financial and human resources** are needed. At the same time, unclear management structures, deficiencies in establishing distinct responsibilities and few available human resources in a planned nature park area all contribute to hindering accessibility to financial subsidies, and thus also the implementation of activities for

raising awareness. Before establishing a nature park, it is indispensable for the stakeholders to deal in detail with challenges arising from the existing **legal situation**. This includes gaining a comprehensive understanding of the regional operative laws and restrictions very early in the planning stage, as the applicable legal framework will strongly influence the shape of the future nature park.

In general, it can be said that the lessons learned within all project regions are concentrated mainly on the topics of **communication** and **cooperation**. The regions developed a high demand for creating an atmosphere of interchange, communication and discussion. Activating and motivating stakeholders can be said to be fundamental keys for a participatory development process, and the latter is vital if actions are to be implemented with engagement and enthusiasm. For instance, one project region identified exceptional cooperation among the regional project members, their strong personal engagement and a substantial amount of voluntary work as the main success factors for implementation. Ultimately, the necessity for a permanent effort towards improving communication and cooperation among stakeholders from all sectors, as well as integration of the public, ranked high in importance within all regions and at every project stage.

Another project region identified too few **implementation capacities** on the part of the responsible body as an obstacle to regional development. Due to the lack of human resources for development activities, involving, informing and coordinating all stakeholders and also exploiting the various funding opportunities was carried out only to an insufficient degree.

On the other hand, implementation of actions within the "Parks & Economy" project strengthened acceptance of the nature park among regional decision makers and created a sound basis for further bottom-up activities. Now, in many cases, participation in LEADER activities or in other measures of national rural development programmes is possible due to the elaboration of mature and **well structured plans** during the "Parks & Economy" project.

Undoubtedly, successful implementation of actions in support of developing nature parks can only result through a deliberate strategic approach, to include realistic estimations and detailed plans. Although the **planning phase** may seem time consuming, and at first glance even minimally productive to some, it is obviously the most important step for maintaining prospects of realising the underlying ideas.

Additionally, concentration on a manageable **number of strategies, objectives and actions** should be considered vital, as either too many or too few defined actions will not be conducive to project implementation. The better that preparation within the planning phase is elaborated, including details, milestones, possible obstacles and circumstances, the easier it becomes to estimate realistic time schedules and, ultimately, to implement the project.

Both the existence of structured plans and **tangible results**, as well as their communication to the public, are needed to initiate the development of nature parks. Visible results – in the form of successfully implemented actions – provide "model examples", which in turn will generate pride of achievement, motivation to continue and a higher acceptance among local populations.

Well planned and managed **pilot actions**, including those to guarantee funding and to build a solid organisation, can serve as a regional driving force; and support for their development was one aim of the “Parks & Economy” project. Though nature parks cannot be the “big engines” of regional development, at least not in the manner of large industries, they very well can initiate significant development in several directions.

Improved **human relations** are central to the effective regional implementation of projects. All activities associated with raising awareness, information transfer, and the building up of cooperatives were observed to be related to interpersonal relationships. For quality relationships are always needed to arrive at new opportunities for cooperation – both horizontally, among the different sectors involved in regional development, and vertically, between different levels of economic and administrative actors. Thus, a significant amount of effort should be afforded for addressing this priority from the project’s very beginning, as well as concomitant to the entire development process.

Trademarks are used as effective marketing instruments. Apart from this, however, they are also a good means of building identification with the region among its residents, which can in turn help initiate and strengthen further development.

In order to anchor the elaborated objectives and strategies firmly within the region, and also to ensure their ongoing implementation in future, their **assimilation** into already existing regional planning documents and concepts is highly recommended. A close **collaboration** with existing regional associations, agencies and policy makers should be strived for. In addition, measures of the national **rural development programmes** should be exploited to support future development activities for European nature parks.

By its close, the “Parks & Economy” project had generated many new plans, ideas and activities, as well as an atmosphere of optimism within the project regions. However, new questions arose concerning customer needs, as well as those of the regions, including the desire for understanding and identifying with these needs. Indeed, the regions are quite well equipped to meet the future challenges, such as the harmonising supply and demand, continued improvement in public relations, establishing a creative milieu and motivating the key personalities and regional stakeholders.

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