

Experience of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve in participative tourism management involving stakeholders

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Sustainable tourism and a more concrete direction – ecotourism – is exactly that instrument which, which can support integration of biodiversity protection into regional development. In order to have a positive impact on the regional development protected areas should first develop their own visitor management. Exactly that is why the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve has implemented an international project “Modern management concept for the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve” (Transcarpathia, Ukraine; including UA part of the UNESCO World Natural Heritage Property “Beech Primeval Forests of the Carpathians”). In order to improve cooperation with the stakeholders there were organized a series of workshops, which aim was to organize an active dialogue with the stakeholders.

The Carpathian Biosphere Reserve (CBR) is among the largest and most interesting protected areas of Ukraine, because its territory is guarded by a large number of natural objects, and great representation of this cultural and historical heritage. The value of its ecosystems is recognized at the international level - since 1993 CBR is a part of the World Network of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. The Carpathian biosphere reserve has total area of 58 036 ha. It is composed of eight detached massifs. They are located on the territory of Rakhiv, Tiachiv, Khust and Vynohradov districts of Transcarpathian region at an altitude between 180 and 2061 m. a.s.l., which represented almost all landscape and biological diversity of the Ukrainian Carpathians.

Totally at CBR there has been launched a network of 18 ecotourism routes with a total length of over 200 km. All trails are equipped with the proper infrastructure: information about points of interest, sources of drinking water arranged along with places for bonfire, transitional bridges placed and so on.

The Carpathian Biosphere Reserve's team has created a number of tourist information centers. In 1997 we opened the first such center in the city of Rakhiv - "Museum of mountain ecology and history of nature management in the Ukrainian Carpathians." The following environmental-education centers were opened later: in Khust - "Museum narcissus", and in the village of Dilova - "The Centre of Europe", "The Carpathian Highlands" at the piedmont of the

Hoverla Mt. (the most high altitude visitor center and tourist shelter in Ukraine), and two more tourist information centers "Carpathian trout" (Dilove village) and the "Keverliv Information Center" (Yasinia village).

Today we very widely use practice of joint management - participative management - which means the involvement of stakeholders to manage the institution / territory and their participation in decision-making. Particularly, this approach is relevant in the management of protected areas, as in these areas many business interests cross on different levels: local, regional and national.

To identify the most important stakeholders or individual institutions we analyzed them by using a special technique: the database consists of actors potentially interested in the institution (ie, anyone who has a particular interest), and determined their role and relationship to the institution. It is necessary to determine the influence of each stakeholder (strong, weak, neutral) and attitude (positive, negative, neutral). According to these data, a plan of work with stakeholders should be elaborated.

As for PAs Ukraine, this practice is becoming increasingly important for the tourism management with each passing day, as usual constraints of nature protection leads to a conflict of interest.

Sustainable tourism and more specific direction - ecotourism - are these tools that can facilitate the integration of biodiversity conservation interests in regional development. Thus, ecotourism can be used as a way of achieving environmental objectives and sustainable development, thus strengthening the position of the protected area as a major player in the region of its location. In addition to roles in regional development, one of the benefits of protected areas is that they can be a stimulator of sustainable development, which in turn will contribute to achieving environmental goals.

To have a positive impact on regional development, protected areas must first develop a visitor management system. Only effective management of visitation, such as to satisfying the expectations of the visitor, well-equipped infrastructure and an effective monitoring system of positive and negative impacts of visitors to the area will provide an opportunity to create a protected area around itself a partnership for sustainable development of the region through sustainable tourism.

In Ukraine, where the economy is at an early stage of development and the country is highly diverse in nature, it is clear that economic development will play a greater and greater role in decision-making in the field of environment. Protected areas need to adapt their approach to regional development, offering opportunities to develop the surrounding area. Uncontrolled development of infrastructure and tourism, as well as abandoned mountain pastures and other traditional land uses, is a clear sign of the approach of globalization with its associated social and economic changes. The decline of state control in part led to inconsistent privatization of land and over-exploitation of land resources. In addition, the growing demand for resources, the forest, especially in the international market, enhances this tendency.

The new approach should not ignore the environmental targets (objects, which the institution aims to preserve), but just the opposite - to promote the

conservation of biodiversity. This method consists in the fact that environmental protection must be adapted to political and economic change and move from a purely regulatory approach that is effective in a centralized economy to a partnership that requires a market economy, seeking better opportunities for sustainable regional development. The partnership should involve public administration, local business and administration of the protected area. Protected areas should remain the guarantor of the preservation of nature in the area of its operations, and should contribute to sustainable development.

Therefore Carpathian Biosphere Reserve was implemented international project with financial support from the German government in cooperation with the University of Sustainable Development Eberswalde on "Fundamentals of modern concepts of management for CBR (Transcarpathia, Ukraine, part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site "Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians"). The main goal of the project was to support the CBR in the effective implementation of existing strategies and action plans of the Network of Biosphere Reserves and UNESCO World Heritage, and promote the development of its management according to stakeholders' initiatives such as the Carpathian Convention. This includes the development and implementation of strategies for the integration of stakeholders in decision-making processes and improving the perception of the CBR at the local level, improving protected area management, the strengthening of the role of CBR as an engine of sustainable development in the region, and to study the mutual exchange of knowledge and experience between administration of environmental institutions in Ukraine and Germany.

Open standards for the practice of environmental protection, methodological principles of adaptive environmental management, which includes involvement of stakeholders served as a reference point in a systematic and integrated process of the project. There have been a number of consultations and expert meetings and two workshops with stakeholders who contributed to the project team interaction with regional stakeholders and international experts to enhance stakeholders in decision-making regarding the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve.

Special attention requires management of recreational and tourist activities that are priority direction. Therefore, in the ecotourism project has been given special attention and collected a database that is the basis of preparation for the Advisory meetings and workshops with stakeholders.

Great importance was attached to the definition of stakeholders in ecotourism sector. Of course, stakeholders of tourism scope have a negative and a positive attitude towards environment protection in general and CBR in particular. Tourism as a sector is under development. The degree of influence of these activities depend on the number of tourists as well as the place and type of activity, and on how the management of tourism and the service sector with the principles of sustainable development. Some stakeholders and key activists of the tourism sector include the following groups:

- Private tourist business
- District and regional administrations, departments of tourism
- FORZA, Uzhgorod
- Transcarpathian Regional Center of Rural Tourism
- Rakhiv Agency agro-ecotourism
- The Activist Team in the village of Kostylyvka
- Tourists

As mentioned earlier, to establish cooperation with stakeholders and the project organized a series of seminars, the main purpose was to initiate and organize an active dialogue with stakeholders. Representatives of interested members of the tourism industry have been presented in full.

In addition to the definition and discussion within the open standards of modern direct threats and driving forces that affect one or more of the conservation objectives of CBR are also discussed other (cultural) values in the region, and scenarios made for possible developments regarding these values and environmental objectives.

Success and further positive results of the implementation of the said project was broad involvement of stakeholders. During a series of workshops with stakeholders were identified most valuable natural objects in terms of tourist attraction and economic importance to local communities.

According to local stakeholders, most important tourist attractions of CBR and its areas of activity are the following natural sites: meadows, the highest peaks of the Ukrainian Carpathians – the Hoverla Mt. - and the Carpathian highlands in general, forests and the Narcissus Valley. To the defined of objects an action plan for the conservation and sustainable use was elaborated, and also there were modeled possible developments in different circumstances and made recommendations for the management of the territory.

The result is collaboration in development of management strategies CBR, which also includes the sustainable development of ecotourism activities.

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