

Summary Report on Workshop

Sustainable Development in Lake Areas: Empowering Local Initiatives and Civil Society



21 - 25 April 2010

Bled, Slovenia

Summary report

28 participants from twelve European countries met in Triglav National Park in beautiful North Western Slovenia for the third workshop of the „Lake Project“.

The participants represented...

- ☞ several large conservation projects in Romania, Hungary, Greece, Poland, Germany and England, organized in Global Nature Fund's Living Lakes network
- ☞ civil society projects in Macedonia, Austria and Germany, organized in the Forum Synergies network
- ☞ municipalities and public administration in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Germany and Poland (from both networks)
- ☞ Marburg University (Germany). Two students contributed an overview about „environmental communication“.

An additional large group of participants from Estonia, Latvia, Turkey and China could not show up due to air traffic restrictions after a volcano eruption in Iceland.

For a conference venue we were invited to the building of the Triglav National Park administration whose director Martin Šolar had the kindness to welcome us at the beginning, provided coffee for workshop breaks and sent a competent local guide for our field trips. The workshop was moderated by Titus Bahner (Forum Synergies) and Tillmann Stottele (Global Nature Fund).



More workshop photos can be accessed online¹.

¹ at picasaweb.google.de, for login type user = fs.bled2010, password = workshopbled.

First Day: Participants' Experiences

Mr. Dusan Kramberger from the Slovenian Ministry of Culture opened the first conference day with a presentation about participation strategies in a UNESCO Cultural Heritage denomination project about historical pile dwellings near Ljubljana, stating that open communication with the (beforehand very sceptical) population had been essential to the project's final success. 40 other heritage site applications had been dropped by the government due to local resistance.

The rest of the morning was dedicated to the mutual presentation of participants.

In the afternoon there was a first field trip to see the 25 km distant Lake Bohinj by foot and by boat, the largest natural lake in Slovenia and one of the sources of the Slovenian main river Sava. A Triglav National Park ranger explained the geological and ecological situation of the lake and actual threats to ecological treasures caused by construction plans on the lake shore. Tourism development so far had concentrated to Bled and Lake Bled which were situated outside the National Park; now there seemed to be an increasing pressure by some influential local leaders to develop facilities inside the park or nearby, attracting non-sustainable activities like ski lifts, cross country motorcycling or very large (50+) mountain hiking groups. The concept of sustainable tourism seemed to be an obvious solution but not really well known to the local decision makers. Instead of an active promotion the situation seemed to be marked by the National Park administration's struggle to restrict damage to the park on the one hand and some local beneficiaries' attempts to attract external investors for large scale tourism infrastructure investments regardless of their impact on local sustainability on the other side.



Second Day: Identifying Fields for Cooperation

The morning of the second conference day was dedicated to a more in-depth presentation of conservation projects with respect to the participation issue. There were presentations about Triglav National Park (Slovenia), Somogy and Boronka area (Hungary), Nestos Delta (Greece), Water Framework Implementation (Germany), Maramures National Park (Romania), Barycz Valley and Milicz Ponds (Poland). It became obvious that most successful projects are based on close cooperation between environmental experts, local citizens, local administration and



external founders, driven by active NGO actors that are competent to both include administrations and the local community into the project. Also most projects organize environmental education programmes for children and adults and sustainable tourism activities.

After lunch in a local restaurant the participants engaged in a 7x7 words exercise, simulating stakeholder negotiations by trying to agree on seven words that would complete the two following phrases:

- 1) I'm interested in a cooperation project about...
- 2) Participation is successful if there is...

Building on the resulting answers to the first question, three working groups were formed to brainstorm goals and coalitions for follow-up thematic exchange projects. The most favoured thematic areas were *environmental education, rural-/eco-tourism* and *habitat management*.

At the evening a Slovenian folk-music and dance presentation was scheduled at the hotel. Later a large group took a walk around Lake Bled at night.

Third Day: Follow-Up Commitments

The third conference day started with a presentation of Titus Bahner and Simone Matouch about Forum Synergies' communication strategies in view of the upcoming reform of the EU agricultural policies. They invited the participants to contribute to the 'ARC' process of gathering practical messages from the countryside as an input for decision makers in EU parliament and EU commission (see www.arc2020.eu).

Then the working groups from yesterday presented the following results (seperate summaries available):

Environmental education: Two case studies were presented by Polish and Hungarian participants. An active experience exchange could take place including e.g. carp days in Poland, school twinning UK, GNF programme "Schools for Living Lakes" etc. The group exchanged on the experiences which can be shared and developed following ideas as start vision of the projects: wine roads, bird watching, photographic tour, handicraft production, collecting mushrooms, cycling, hiking, testing traditional (local) food, horse riding, cheese roads, fishing, bio-energy village, and botanic tours.

Rural / Eco-Tourism: The group identified differences in scope and approach between eco-tourism and rural tourism. There are international guidelines to be used like e.g. the EUROPARC European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected

Areas² or the PAN Parks Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy³. The group agreed to set up a Google Groups forum for the discussion of next steps.



Habitat Management. An exchange project could focus on wetland management and conservation of cultural heritage, and would combine on-site expert coaching with practical conservation activities (e.g. work camps). An outcome could be a book in 2-3 languages and the organisation of a side event to the Ramsar Conference of Parties in Romania 2012. Meanwhile the group has prepared a draft project proposal “Exchange for Europe’s Nature Conservation”.

After a concluding evaluation round (see below) the afternoon was dedicated to an extended foot walk to beautiful Voje valley in Triglav national park along a wild mountain stream that had carved a deep canyon into the limestone, again guided by a national park ranger who explained many more details about the local successes, problems and attitudes in visitor education and park management.

Evaluation

In the concluding workshop evaluation many participants emphasized their regret about the low Slovenian participation. On the positive side the diversity of the rest of the participants and the liveliness of the exchange was welcomed. Also the structure of the workshop with much space for participants’ own contributions and the absence of time pressure in the programme were acknowledged. In a final round about “how do I feel and what do I take away from here” participants particularly mentioned many new contacts, much inspiration and also concrete plans for successive exchange activities.



² <http://www.europarc.org/what-we-do/european-charter-for>

³ http://www.panparks.org/learn/apply_for_verification/principles_and_criteria