

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER THROUGH NATURA 2000

Tell me and I will forget... Show me and I may remember... Involve me and I will understand!

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Abstract: The participative approach is a successful way to effectively use Natura 2000 in maintaining Europe's biodiversity. Using it in several European countries, Alterra and DLG managed to build sustainable networks of stakeholders and make widely supported management plans for nature protection. Management planning for Natura 2000 proved to be more about sociology than ecology; involving people is just one step beyond simply telling and showing what sustainable nature protection is about.

Keywords: Increasing public support and participation, Socio-economics of nature restoration, Identifying appropriate conservation and restoration objectives.

Introduction

In Poland, 2200 stakeholders managed to make 55 management plans for Natura 2000 sites within a 2 year period. European nature and biodiversity are protected by the Natura 2000 policy. Every EU country has its responsibility for taking appropriate conservation measures, but they all have their own way of dealing with the implementation. Working in a participative way results in sustainable networks between stakeholders and enhances the quality of management plans.

Materials and methods

A participative approach, focussing on opportunities, means to involve and hear all interested in or affected by nature protection. In the Netherlands and the UK this approach has been used extensively, resulting in widely supported management plans for protected areas. By implementing this participative approach in a wider European context, we were able to further improve the methodology. Two lines of work (process and operational) run parallel, continuously involving one another.

Process line

The Dutch and UK societies have a less centralized structure than the Polish society, allowing the organisation of stakeholder groups closer to the decision making process. Key stakeholders participate in the advisory group, addressing the management planning issues. A broader group of stakeholders is invited by publishing the announcements for the participative meetings in national newspapers and door-to-door newspapers.

In Poland, all stakeholders of a site were invited to a series of 3 workshops by the responsible authority. In the first workshop participants were asked to complete the list of stakeholders. During the workshops stakeholders discussed and worked on management planning issues. Parallel to this and using the same participative approach, stakeholders developed a national communication strategy.



Figure 1 Workshop participants on field visit and discussing back in the 'office' again (Poland)

Operational line

The main purpose of a Natura 2000 management plan is to maintain the favourable status of conservation of habitats and species. During lively discussions in workshops, stakeholders capitalize on threats and opportunities. They take into account economic chances while benefiting biodiversity. Threats and opportunities are translated into detailed objectives that form the heart of the management plan. These objectives are used to define specific (restoration) measures taking into account social, economic and legal aspects (figure 2; Idle & Bines, 2004).

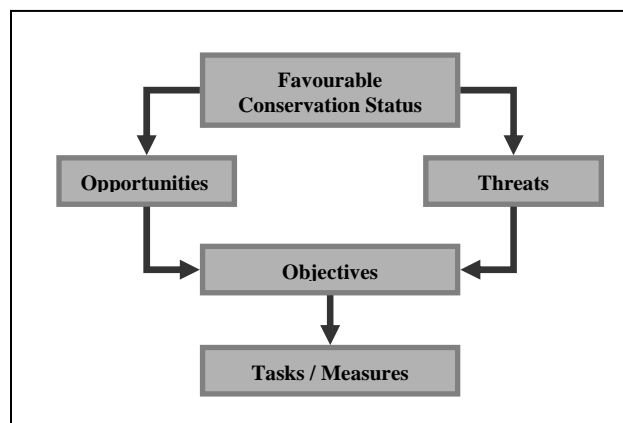


Figure 2 The operational line of management planning

Results and discussion

Involving all opinions and working in a participative way generated enthusiastic co-operation between stakeholders. This resulted in an increased quality of all final management plans. Sustainable networks of stakeholders were built and the image of Natura 2000 has been significantly improved. The extra amount of time needed for the preparation of the management plan was gained back in the implementation phase. On top of that, trust among all participants is enhanced.

In the Netherlands, in comparison to Poland, less individual stakeholders but mostly institutions, NGO's and public organisations attend the workshops. This is possible because the representation of stakeholders in the Netherlands is well organised, due to a long standing tradition of stakeholder participation. In Poland, an inventory of all

available data, knowledge and identification of stakeholders had to be made at the start of the process. Organised stakeholder representation is scarcely out of the egg, so to speak.

Bringing together stakeholders and responsible authorities means that threats and opportunities for both of them are being looked at from different viewpoints. This enables new exciting solutions and enhances both support for and quality of the management plan.

Example

The Rospuda valley case in Poland (figure 3) illustrates the turnover from a centralized approach to a decentralized, participative approach. After bringing together all parties involved and using this approach, alternatives were developed and could be compared. However, starting off from the centralized approach made the process last much longer and caused damage in the relation between the different stakeholders and responsible authorities.

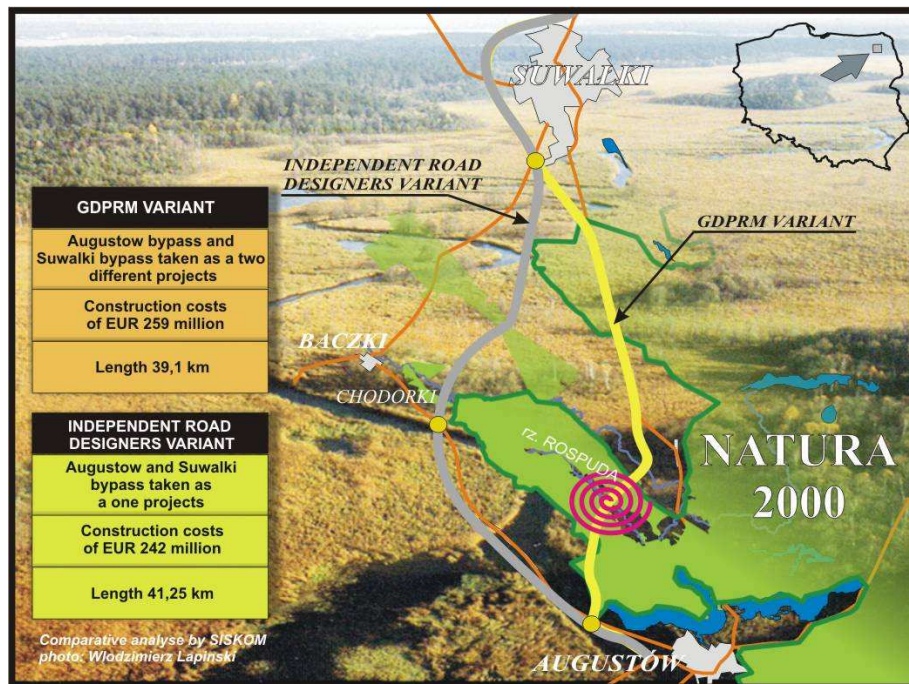


Figure 3. Alternatives for Natura 2000 in the Rospuda valley (Poland)

Conclusions

The participative approach generates trust amongst stakeholders, gives insight in each other's interests and strengthens their networks. These factors increase the sustainability of Natura 2000 site management. The resulting management plans are widely supported and therefore implemented more easily.

Management planning for Natura 2000 sites proved to be more like sociology than ecology, focusing on relations between parties involved. The described approach brings about a structured way of dealing with all possible alternatives and all opinions involved. It demonstrates a process which is repeatable and clear to every one involved. The participatory approach is not an infallible approach, but starts with involving people and their understanding of protecting Europe's nature and it's biodiversity.



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