GENERAL GOVERNANCE STRATEGY II

Integrating natural heritage in regional and communal sustainable development

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Content

1. Purpose and structure of this governance strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to support the management authorities of the "Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe" (WH Beech Forests) in their efforts to forge a productive relationship between the maintenance and improvement of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the component parts for which they are responsible on the one hand, and the sustainable development of the regions and communities surrounding them on the other hand. This shall also anchor the component parts in their regional setting and help to manage conflicts as well as to maximize synergies.

This strategy focuses primarily on the direct management of the individual component parts of the WH Beech Forests and the ways in which sustainable socio-economic development shall be integrated into their management. One additional aspect of this is how the management of the component parts is integrated with other, broader policies, strategies and processes that are more broadly aimed at sustainable regional development in the vicinity of the component parts.

To achieve its purpose, the strategy:

- briefly summarizes the requirements and good practice for integrating natural World Heritage (WH) into sustainable development;

- takes stock of existing efforts to achieve this integration, particularly in the three focal component parts of the BEECH POWER project – Grumsin (Germany), Paklenica National Park (Croatia), and Snežnik and Krokar (Slovenia);

- derives a general vision and specific objectives for the integration of the component areas into regional and communal sustainable development;

- lists indicative strategic actions as already identified in regional strategies for the focal areas; and

- proposes possible implementation approaches and mechanisms for these strategic actions.

The time horizon of the strategy is ten years.

2. Status quo: current integration of natural World Heritage into sustainable development

2.1. Requirements and good practice for integrating natural World Heritage into sustainable development

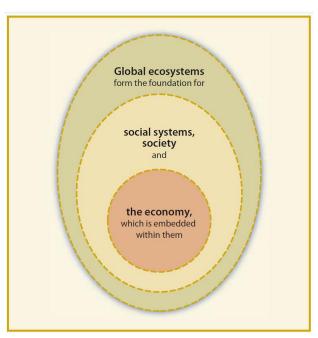Sustainable development is the overarching paradigm of the United Nations and, as such, a guiding principle for the management of UNESCO World heritage sites. Although there are many definitions of sustainable development abound, the most cited is that proposed in the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report "Our Common Future": "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without

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compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Albeit somewhat vague, this definition states that sustainable development is development that can be continued into the indefinite future. According to this concept, the major objective of sustainable development is to satisfy human needs through economic development recognizing the environmental-limits to economic growth. It refers to the many processes and pathways to achieve the reconciliation of environmental, social, and economic demands in the pursuit of an improved quality of life. The UN definition does not limit the understanding of the concept of sustainable development and is particularly open to interpretation, allowing for widespread support from diverse efforts, groups and organizations.

Since the Brundtland definition, several models have been developed to help make sustainable development more concrete. In these models, the three dimensions of sustainability – ecology, society and the economy – are often represented as integral parts of sustainable development, but differ in their relative importance. According to the three pillars model, sustainable development refers to the simultaneous and equal implementation of environmental, social and economic goals. The more integrative model of the sustainability triangle unifies the three pillars, providing a three-dimensional perspective to the concept of sustainable development. While both models – the three pillars model and the sustainability triangle – consider the three dimensions of sustainable development as being equally important, the systemic approach acknowledges the fact that social systems and, thus, the economy, are dependent components of the global ecosystem. According to this approach, "the global ecosystems provide the foundation on which social systems (society) develop. Embedded within society is the economy, which serves the needs of society (Molitor & Ibisch 2019)[1]".

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Schematic illustration of the relationship between the economy, society and the ecosystems in the systemic approach to sustainable development (Molitor & Ibisch 2019)

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[1] Molitor, H. & P.L. Ibisch (2019): Sustainability as a reaction: What has been happening so far. In: Ibisch, P.L., H. Molitor, A. Conrad, H. Walk, V. Mihotovic & J. Geyer (eds.) Humans in the global ecosystem. An introduction to sustainable development. Oekom Verlag, München, 409 pp. (ISBN 9783962381172). 35-58.

In the natural heritage context, the environmental dimension of sustainable development is paramount. As the conservation of nature integrity is recognized as a basic condition for human well-being and natural resource constraints and the environment as the primary limiting factor for human development, the systemic approach to sustainable development applies here. According to the systemic approach as proposed by Ibisch 2019[2], sustainable development is the development towards long-term viable and functional ecosystems which are characterized by self-organization and self-regulation. In that regard, sustainable development is not equivalent to growth as sustainably developing systems can only grow within the limits of resource availability. For the natural heritage context this means that sustainable development requires governance systems that ensure the protection of the environment and its natural resources above all.

Building upon this systemic definition of sustainable development, general requirements for the integration of natural World Heritage into sustainable development can be derived from the following principal sources:

- The World Heritage Convention (WHC)[3]: § 27.

- The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (WHC OG)[4]: Refer particularly to §§ 12, 39, 40, 112, 117, 119, 211.

- Decision 31COM 13A of the WH Committee added "Communities" as a fifth "C" to the then existing strategic objectives of the WH Convention (Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building and Communication), "to enhance the role of communities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention"[5].

- The "Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention as adopted by the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention"[6] aims to ensure coherence between the implementation of the WHC and the UN sustainable development agenda as enshrined in the document "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". This shall be achieved by recognising and promoting "the properties' inherent potential to contribute to all dimensions of sustainable development and work to harness the collective benefits for society, also by ensuring that their conservation and management strategies are aligned with broader sustainable development objectives". The following cornerstones of the policy document are particularly relevant to sustainable development around the component parts of the Beech Forests:

  o Planning and management of WH sites needs to address all three dimensions of sustainable development, i.e., environmental sustainability, inclusive social development and inclusive economic development (§ 13).

  o Planning and management need to proceed on a larger scale than the WH sites or component parts themselves, in order to adequately take into account their sustainable development dimension. Buffer zones should be seen as layers of protection but at the same time as "planning tools to enhance mutual benefits for local and other concerned communities and for the heritage itself" (§ 10).

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[2] Ibisch, P.L. (2019): Ecosystem-based sustainable development. In: Ibisch, P.L., H. Molitor, A. Conrad, H. Walk, V. Mihotovic & J. Geyer (eds.) Humans in the global ecosystem. An introduction to sustainable development. Oekom Verlag, München, 409 pp. (ISBN 9783962381172). 263-283.

[3] UNESCO World Heritage Centre - Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

[4] UNESCO World Heritage Centre - The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention

[5] https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/5197/

[6] https://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabledevelopment/

- o WH sites need to be managed in such a way that they enhance the quality of life and wellbeing of all stakeholders, and in particular local communities (§ 19). Sustainable development initiatives should aim at gender equality (§ 23).

- o In order to involve stakeholders more closely in the implementation of the WHC, their participation should be defined in standards and policies, their initiatives to have a say with regard to the implementation of the Convention should be supported, and local values of WH sites should be acknowledged in management systems along with their OUV (§ 22).

- o The management of WH sites should support "inclusive local economic development and enhancing livelihoods, compatibly with the protection of their OUV" (§ 25). Sustainable tourism and investments should be supported (§ 26),

- o WH properties should be managed in such a way that conflicts between and within State Parties are minimized (§ 30).

- o The capacity of management authorities to address not only the WH properties themselves but also the wider socio-ecological system surrounding them needs to be strengthened (§11). The same is true for the capacity of local communities around WH sites to realize sustainable development opportunities (§ 27).

- Based on all the above, the World Heritage Committee has developed a more detailed policy framework for managing the relationship between natural World Heritage and sustainable development in the surroundings of properties or component parts of serial properties. The decisions which constitute this framework are summarized in Section 6 of the World Heritage Policy Compendium[7].

- Beyond this, UNESCO and the statutory advisory bodies to the World Heritage Convention (WHC) have compiled further practical guidance on the participation of local people in the governance and management of natural World Heritage sites[8].

All the above-mentioned documents acknowledge that good governance is a prerequisite for a positive relationship between the maintenance of OUV and sustainable development around WH sites and component parts. Requirements and ways of good governance of the Beech Forests are discussed in the *"General Governance Strategy I. Activating and involving regional stakeholders in participatory planning processes"* developed by the BEECH POWER project.

Within the general framework set out by the above policies and guidance, the Integrated Management System (IMS) of the Beech Forests defines additional, more specific requirements for the promotion of sustainable socio-economic development through management of its component parts[9]. This is based on the agreement among the State Parties where the Beech Forests are located to participate in sustainable development in the adjacent areas of the component parts:

- The IMS of the Beech Forests counts the enhancement of ecological and environmental education, awareness of primeval forests and their values, as well as promotion of the sustainable use of natural resources in the broader region through the support of traditional crafts, products and ecotourism without compromising the OUV, among its objectives. It envisages the establishment of Integrated Management Panels at the level of individual component parts. One of their tasks is initiating local

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[7] UNESCO World Heritage Centre - Compendium

[8] e. g. https://whc.unesco.org/en/managing-natural-world-heritage/, https://www.iucn.org/theme/world-heritage/our-work/global-world-heritage-projects/benefits-natural-world-heritage

[9] Kirchmeir & Kovarovics (Eds.), (2016), pp. 277 ff. See Nomination Dossier of 2017 extension at https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1133/documents/.

activities for sustainable development around the property. The latter shall include identification of sustainable development opportunities, the development of labels for marketing, promotion of ecotourism, and others.

Besides the requirements as referenced above, the active involvement and participation of stakeholders is an absolute prerequisite for successful integration of natural WH into regional and communal sustainable development. Therefore, this governance strategy is directly related to "*Governance Strategy I: Activating and involving regional stakeholders in participatory planning processes.*

2.2. Current relationship between component areas and sustainable development

Existing ways to integrate maintenance and enhancement of the OUV with sustainable development depend on the national and regional context of individual component parts and hence differ between them. This is also true for the focal component parts of the BEECH POWER project:

- Various initiatives of local stakeholders and municipalities already exist around the **Grumsin** component part (Germany). Local volunteer groups support the property through the operation of information points and businesses of the tourism sector as well as their associations cooperate to promote the wider landscape around the component part in a coherent way. However, there is still a vast potential of the Grumsin component part to foster the sustainable development of the region. For this, a regional strategy was developed by the BEECH POWER project, which includes promotion of sustainable regional development through the World Heritage area (in sectors such as sustainable tourism and visitation, marketing of local products or the development of environmental awareness), contribution of regional stakeholders to an enhanced visitor experience/management, and broad integration of the World Heritage topic in the activities and offers of institutions in the wider surroundings of the component part (e.g. by the culture and education sector) among its thematic work packages[10].

- In the component parts **Snežnik and Krokar** (Slovenia), the potential for sustainable tourism development as a green destination with a special World Heritage label has been recognized. The BEECH POWER project supports broad stakeholder participation in this and other sustainable development fields, as spelled out by the local strategy for this component part[11]. This document includes an objective on promoting sustainable regional development for the benefits of local stakeholders (e.g. through development of a visitor centre and non-invasive visitor infrastructure around the property, cooperation with local tourism operators, incentives for local companies for cooperation with the component part through development of a local brand, etc.), capacity development for locals to support visitor management and experience (e.g. through guide training) and communication/knowledge transfer, which is also a contribution to local community development.

- A dense network of local and regional stakeholders exists in and around **Paklenica National Park** (Croatia). Important sectors in the vicinity of the component parts that could develop further, in a sustainable way, include nature-based tourism and low impact traditional activities such as

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[10] https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/D.T1.2.1--Regional-Strategy-Grumsin-1.pdf
[11] https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/D.T1.2.1-Regional-Strategy-Slovenia-final.pdf

beekeeping. The regional strategy for Paklenica National Park[12] includes objectives on sustainable tourism and visitor management (e.g. local brand development), effective cooperation with local communities (e.g. through joint development of local development projects, and institutionalized cooperation mechanisms) as well as education and capacity building for local stakeholders, also related to their capacity to promote sustainable socio-economic development.

3. Vision and objectives

3.1. Vision

A general vision for integrating WH management in regional/communal sustainable development around each of the component parts of the Beech Forests can be formulated as follows:

The natural World Heritage of the component parts of the "Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe" is part and parcel of the sustainable development of the region and the communities belonging to it. Its potential to support this development is recognized and explored by all relevant actors, making the component parts and their surroundings model regions for sustainable development within and across sectors in social, economic and environmental terms. This includes the creation of human-wellbeing, regional added value and places of learning/education in support of sustainable development as well as the identification and harnessing of synergies between nature conservation, climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation.

3.2. Objectives

Based on the overall vision, the general policy framework and guidance from UNESCO as well as its advisory bodies, and the specific context of the component parts of the Beech Forests as reflected in the regional strategies of the focal component parts, this strategy identifies the following objectives:

1. The WH status of the component part is recognized and systematically used as opportunity and means to reach the objectives of sustainable development of various agendas and policies on different levels, including beyond the boundaries of the property. These include the SDGs, national sustainable development strategies, and other sectoral strategies, e.g. the Biodiversity Strategy 2030, etc.).

2. Mechanisms to promote the integration of natural WH into the planning and management of regional and municipal sustainable development are in place and effective, and involve all relevant sectors and actors.

3. Synergies between nature conservation, climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation are identified and managed in and around the component parts of the series.

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[12] Oikon et al. (2021)

4. Natural WH is adequately integrated in the school and adult education sectors of bordering municipalities, in activities of the tourism sector, and by the arts and culture.

5. The opportunities for regional and municipal development arising from the pan-European character of the series - e.g. in the field of education and tourism – are used to their full potential.

6. Sustainable regional and community development are anchored as management objectives in the management plans of the component parts of the Beech Forests, and pursued in practical part management.

7. WH promotes the generation, marketing and equitable sharing of regional added value in line with the principles of sustainable development.

4. Strategic actions to integrate natural heritage in regional and communal sustainable development

Strategic actions are derived directly from the objectives, taking into account documented regional strategies, the WHC "Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention as adopted by the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention" and the relevant guidance of the WHC OG, UNESCO and IUCN. For the implementation of the strategic actions, specific activities need to be defined by the component parts individually in accordance with the site-specific conditions and needs, and thus is not covered by this strategy.

4.1. Strategic actions relevant to Objective 1

Objective 1: The WH is recognized and systematically used as opportunity and means to reach the objectives of sustainable development of various agendas on different levels, including beyond the boundaries of the property. These include the SDGs, national sustainable development strategies, and other sectoral strategies.

Strategic Actions:

- Facilitate local ownership, goodwill and cooperation with regard to the WH Beech Forests and their component parts, as a basis for harnessing sustainable development opportunities arising from them.

- Screen regional guidelines, strategies, and other relevant guidance on sustainable development for their relevance to integration of each component part into sustainable development processes on the regional level. Use the results to inform the management of the component parts. Additionally, consult the general requirements for the integration of natural World Heritage into sustainable development from the sources specified in section *2.1. Requirements and good practice for integrating natural World Heritage into sustainable development*.

- Support the coordination of local stakeholders in identifying and using the sustainable development opportunities arising from the component parts.

- Create economic incentives for initiating projects and businesses that pursue the sustainable development opportunities offered by the component parts.

- Create regional thematic working groups on aspects of the contribution of the component parts to sustainable socio-economic development, where appropriate.

4.2. Strategic actions relevant to Objective 2

Objective 2: Mechanisms to promote integration of natural WH into the planning and management of regional and municipal sustainable development are in place and effective and involve all relevant sectors and actors.

Strategic Actions:

- Consider the specific needs and opportunities arising from the WH status of the component parts in the planning and development of public services, including public transport.

- Maintain and expand existing mechanisms for the coordination of WH management and the wider sustainable development agenda with municipal authorities and other local/regional stakeholders, such as the Integrated Management Panels of the component parts.

- Integrate the WH status of the component parts and its consequences for regional development into all relevant public planning documents.

4.3. Strategic actions relevant to Objective 3

Objective 3: Synergies between nature conservation, climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation are identified and managed in and around the component parts of the series.

Strategic Actions:

- Seek collaborations with scientific institutions to better understand the relationships between the OUV of each component part and their management and climate change mitigation/adaptation.

- Integrate interventions aimed at climate change adaptation – also in the interest of the wider surroundings of the component parts – into the management systems of component parts.

- Integrate information about the role of the component parts in climate change mitigation/adaptation into the information and education offers of the component parts. Communicate the ecosystem services provided by the component parts with relevance to climate change mitigation and adaptation (e. g. carbon storage, cooling) and use the benefits for human-wellbeing generated by this for internal and external marketing purposes.

- Build capacity of stakeholders to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation into their areas of activity (e. g. nature and landscape guides, education providers).

- Explore new funding sources for projects at the interface of nature conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation.

- Pursue cooperation with actors in the area of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

4.4. Strategic actions relevant to Objective 4

Objective 4: Natural WH is adequately integrated in the school and adult education sectors of bordering municipalities, in activities of the tourism sector, and by the arts and culture.

Strategic Actions:

- Establish close links with schools and adult education institutions in the vicinity of the component parts to support them to adequately integrate WH into their curricula and activities.

- Elaborate and promote teaching materials and teacher trainings about the Beech Forests and the respective component parts for inclusion in formal school curricula and curricula of adult education institutions.

- Develop and offer educational packages for school excursions and project days.

- Develop special targeted information and interpretation materials and events for various target groups (e. g. children/youth of various age groups, people with special needs, visitors speaking different languages).

- Use digital media to promote natural WH among regional stakeholders.

- Invite and support artists to reflect the values of the component parts in their work (e.g. through workshops, fellowships etc.).

- Organize events to experience the relationship of nature and culture around the component parts (e.g. forest concerts, book readings, exhibitions etc.).

- Use visitor monitoring and management to ensure that visitation remains sustainable, in terms of intensity, visitor behaviour and overall impact, and that the natural basis for sustainable development in the vicinity of the component parts is not eroded.

4.5. Strategic actions relevant to Objective 5

Objective 5: The opportunities for regional and municipal development arising from the pan-European character of the series – e.g. in the field of education and tourism – are used to their full potential.

Strategic Actions:

- Create exchange programmes with other component parts of the Beech Forests to enable participants (youth, tourism association members, municipal staff, etc.) to understand the entire series.

- Establish partnerships between municipalities around the various component parts.

- Cooperate with other component parts to promote "WH routes" connecting them.

- Cooperate with other component parts to realize joint projects such as a rotating exhibition on the Beech Forests as a whole and its diverse component parts.

- Inform visitors about the pan-European dimension of the component parts as part of the Beech Forests, as part of their core information and interpretation programmes.

- Establish information and knowledge exchange between the management authorities of the component parts on integrating WH into regional sustainable development.

4.6. Strategic actions relevant to Objective 6

Objective 6: Sustainable regional and community development are anchored as management objectives in the management plans of the component parts of the Beech Forests, and pursued in practical management.

Strategic Actions:

- Develop or update management plans for the component areas according to all relevant legislation, and addressing not only the guarding and technical management of the component parts themselves but also the wider socio-ecological system with its sustainable socio-economic development needs and opportunities.

- Adopt a partnership approach to the day-to-day management of component parts, in cooperation with municipal partners and other stakeholders, to fully exploit opportunities for sustainable socio-economic development around them.

- Apply the principle of subsidiarity to involve local/regional institutions and stakeholders in visitor information, management and monitoring, and to give them opportunities for meaningful engagement with the component parts.

- Actively participate in sustainable development projects launched by regional stakeholders, where appropriate.

4.7. Strategic actions relevant to Objective 7

Objective 7: WH promotes the generation, marketing and equitable sharing of regional added value (in line with the principles of sustainable development).

Strategic Actions:

- Enable and/or support local businesses to market ecologically sustainable accommodation, gastronomic, transport and interpretation offers around the component parts (e.g. B&Bs, garden restaurants, bicycle hires, horse carts and horseback riding etc.).

- Initiate or support the establishment of local WH based brands for the marketing of sustainably sourced local products (e.g. agricultural, handicrafts, interpretation related, artistic etc.).

- Establish benefit-sharing mechanisms (e.g. from parking revenues, through improvement of public services, or via a public foundation) as an economic incentive for regional stakeholders and as a way of ensuring equitable benefit sharing.

- Inform visitors about available local products, and how to obtain these.

- Support capacity development among local businesses on how to use the WH status of the component parts to better market their sustainably sourced products.

- Create or maintain visitor centres as platforms for regional businesses and other stakeholders to present/offer their products and services to visitors.

- Develop and implement collaborative marketing strategies for individual component parts of the WH Beech Forests.

- Monitor the satisfaction of regional stakeholders with the sustainable development around the component parts.

5. Options for implementation of the governance strategy

This strategy is addressed to the regional public authorities responsible for the management of the component parts of the Beech Forests, who are encouraged to adapt this strategy according to their specific circumstances and to implement it in concert with all stakeholders, by jointly defining respective specific activities.

Possible mechanisms for the implementation of individual strategic actions at the level of component parts include the following:

- Integration of strategic actions into the core site management plans of component parts;

- Implementation of strategic actions in cooperation with municipalities and their agencies within existing mandates, regional development planning frameworks, and with existing resources;

- Implementation in a devolved manner, by other partnering organizations including businesses, business associations, or successful pioneers of sustainable regional development;

- Cooperative development and submission of project proposals to fund individual strategic actions;

- Engagement of volunteering initiatives to support implementation of some strategic actions;

It is expected that the main objectives and strategic actions under this strategy will require considerable adaptation at the individual component part level, as not all objectives are equally relevant and reflect needs for equally urgent action in relation to all component parts of the Beech Forests. However, this strategy serves as a common base for the component parts to improve their governance through the integration of natural WH in regional and communal sustainable development.