

# O.T2.1 STRATEGY FOR THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS IN WH BEECH FOREST BUFFER ZONE MANAGEMENT

Slovenia, Slovakia, Austria, Germany,  
Croatia

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## Abbreviations

BEECH POWER - Interreg Central Europe project: World Heritage BEECH forests: emPOWERing and catalysing an ecosystem-based sustainable development

BR - Biosphere Reserve

COVID-19 - Corona Virus Disease 2019

ECO KARST - Interreg Danube Transnational Programme project: Ecosystem services of karst PAs - driving force of local sustainable development

EU - European Union

FFH - Fauna Flora Habitats

GIS - Geographical Information System

IAP2 - International Association for Public Participation

IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature

JMC - Joint Management Committee

MARISCO - Adaptive Management of Vulnerability and Risk of Conservation Sites

NFC - National Forest Centre Slovakia

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

NP - National Park

OS - Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation

OUV - Outstanding Universal Value

PA - Protected area

PR - public relations

Ramsar - Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance

SFS - Slovenia Forest Service

SPA - Special Protection Area

UNESCO - United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WH - World Heritage

WHC - World Heritage Centre



## 1. Introduction

The thematic work package 2 - Creation of a sustainable model for buffer zone management around World Heritage Beech forests mainly targets pilot areas in Slovenia and Slovakia, where a variety of different stakeholders interact. The work package will produce a number of outputs targeting better active involvement of stakeholders, conflict management, visitor management, as well as sustainable forestry practices. Several activities on this work package are being implemented with participatory approaches.

The UNESCO WH property “Primeval and Ancient Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe” is the largest and most diverse site in the World Heritage portfolio, with a wide variety of stakeholders and levels of engagement currently in place. Given that, the protection regimes of these WH-forests are strict and often severely limit human interactions and usage in order to preserve the ecological integrity and the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV, see Annex for the provisional Statement of the OUV, pending confirmation of the World Heritage Committee) of these forests, active stakeholder involvement is key to assure long-term acceptance of the component parts by the local communities. The here presented strategy aims to address this challenge and provide the WH beech forest managers with additional joint frameworks of objectives and tools, regarding this topic. This strategy will be implemented on NUTS level 3.

Active involvement of the wide variety of stakeholders in protected area (PA) management planning is widely considered beneficial. However, even so the knowledge and experience on how to undertake these processes in a constructive way leading to satisfaction of all or most of the parties is often still lacking, despite quite impressive literature amassed to date. This Output presents a strategy for the active involvement of stakeholders in WH beech forest buffer zone management, developed on the basis of BEECH POWER activities undertaken in pilot areas Snežnik, Krokár, Grumšín, Paklenica, and Poloniny.

The aim of this document is to inform and present options for World Heritage site managers about ways to actively involve the publics in the buffer zone management of WH beech forests, with an emphasis on the preventive actions. Buffer zones of the WH beech forests are very varied in their management regimes, area they cover in relation to the component parts that they protect, ownership, and their function as well. While all component parts have established buffer zones which are already protected, the level of protection and how it is implemented on the ground differs greatly from country to country and even from one component part to the other. IUCN and the WH Committee expect a common approach to the designation and management of the buffer zones. With this Strategy we aim to provide additional guidance for improving one aspect of the common management approaches, namely the active engagement of stakeholders. The output will be subsequently also specified into a project deliverable D.T2.1.2, which will provide specific stakeholder involvement guidelines for pilot areas in Slovenia (Krokár, Snežnik) and Slovakia (Poloniny, Vihorlat).

A successful implementation of the strategy for active involvement of stakeholders is an ongoing task and responsibility of different institutions. Component part manager has the vital role in this case, since his actions and activities need to be directed towards a sustainable development of the component part. These actions include also active stakeholder involvement since their role and collaboration in the area was and



is vital for further implementation of activities and processes which lead towards the protection of Outstanding Universal Value. State Party and its responsible body for UNESCO World Heritage also has a task of keeping the overview of the activities inside the component part and tracking the manager's progress towards reaching their goal in sustainable development of the area and protection of OUV.

This Output O.T2.1 was based on the results of two MARISCO (Adaptive Management of vulnerability and RISK at Conservation sites) workshops, carried out in Ljubljana, Slovenia (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> November 2019) and Kaluža, Slovakia (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019), as well as two conflict resolution workshops organised in Slovenia (Kočevje - 21<sup>st</sup> November 2019 and Loška dolina - 11<sup>th</sup> December 2019) - deliverable D.T2.1.1. Additionally, relevant results of regional studies (Germany, Slovenia, Austria, Slovakia) and situational analyses prepared within the project were also taken into account (Grumsin, Germany - 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> November 2019, Krokár, Slovenia - 16<sup>th</sup> November 2019, Snežnik, Slovenia - 30<sup>th</sup> November 2019, Paklenica, Croatia - TBD). Results of other Interreg projects, such as ECO KARST, are also summarised in this report. This Output is thematically linked with other deliverables (D.T1.1.2, D.T1.2.1, D.T1.2.2, D.T2.1.1, D.T2.1.2, D.T2.1.3, D.T3.2.1) and outputs (O.T1.2, O.T2.2, see Table 1).

**Table 1:** The BEECH POWER project deliverables and outputs related to the present document

Type of project result	Code	Title
Deliverable	D.T1.1.2	Participatory situation analyses (Germany, Slovenia, Croatia)
Deliverable	D.T1.2.1	Participatory strategy development (Germany, Slovenia, Croatia)
Deliverable	D.T2.1.1	2 workshops (in Poloniny NP, Slovakia and either Snežnik or Krokár, Slovenia)
Deliverable	D.T2.1.2	Development of a guideline for stakeholder involvement and a related communication strategy
Deliverable	D.T2.1.3	Development of a strategy for conflict management
Deliverable	D.T3.2.1	4 regional studies on needs, potential, and requirements for good management by relevant stakeholders
Output	O.T1.2	Strategy for the creation of additional participatory processes in the surroundings of PAs
Output	O.T2.2	Strategy for conflict management in buffer zones of WH beech forests



## 2. Active stakeholder involvement

### 2.1. General introduction

Ensuring extensive public participation in decision-making is one of the central tenants in the development of decision-making procedures in recent years, following the Aarhus Convention<sup>1</sup> and the evolution of democratic traditions.

*“Public participation is the process by which an organization consults with interested or affected individuals, organisations, and government entities before making a decision. Public participation is two-way communication and collaborative problem solving with the goal of achieving better and more acceptable decision.” (International Association for Public Participation, [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org))*

*“The public is any individual or group of individuals, organisations or political entities with an interest in the outcome of a decision. They are often referred to as **stakeholders**. They may be or perceive that they may be, affected directly or indirectly by the outcome of a decision. Internal stakeholders (individuals who work for or with the decision-making organisation) are also part of the public”. (International Association for Public Participation, [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).*

### 2.2. General Public participation

While in principle simple, public participation requires a particular set of skills and knowledge to be successful. A set of core values of public participation should always be respected (Bryson, 2003). Public participation should:

- Be based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision, have a right to be involved in the decision-making process,
- Include the promise that the publics’ contributions will influence the decisions,
- Promote sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers,
- Seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision,
- Seek input from participants in designing how they participate,
- Provide participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way,
- Communicate to participants how their input affected the decision.

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<sup>1</sup> Convention on Access, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters



While public participation processes, especially if done well, require considerable time and manpower investments, their results are often indispensable in planning decisions (Golob, 2019). Public participation in planning helps with better:

1. Understanding of the public
  - Both the public and the decision-maker need to fully understand both the problem or opportunity and the available options if an acceptable solution is to be found.
2. Quality of decisions and plans
  - All perspectives and critical issues are discussed and the final decision garners public support.
3. Acknowledgement of the human desire to participate in decisions which affect them
  - Providing means for incorporating the public's values into decisions that affect their lives and allows the public to provide meaningful input into the decision being made.

Furthermore, public participation provides numerous benefits to the sponsoring organisation, such as:

- Presenting an early warning system for public concerns and needs,
- Serving as a sounding board for proposed organisational programs,
- Providing the opportunity for communication between decision-makers and the public,
- Creating a credible channel through which accurate and timely information can be disseminated,
- Helping to increase understanding and support for the organisation's goals,
- Encouraging appropriate modification of policies and procedures before major problems develop,
- Reducing costly project delays.

Landscape management cannot be centralised effectively, as it is shaped by numerous activities and processes, as well as the responses of the ecosystem. While stakeholders are not usually involved in expert work and research, their knowledge is still very relevant and valuable, as it comes from their own daily experience. Integration of different knowledge systems provides an effective approach to natural resource management, especially in more unstable situations (e.g. climate change, Kuslits and Sólyom, 2019).

Efficient stakeholder involvement makes the processes more democratic, as it creates a more inclusive understanding of knowledge and takes into account the interpretations and interests of those who living in direct contact with nature. Moreover, the process is more expedient as well, as it avoids obstruction by stakeholders (International Association for Public Participation, 2020).

Effective stakeholder involvement will include three central components:

1. Inclusiveness
  - No stakeholder, person, group, or institution in connection to the land in question is left out, despite the political or economic role that they might be playing.
2. Neutrality



- All voices should be heard, without suppressing those with different views. The goal should be to find interpretations that reflect the interest of as many stakeholders as possible, including the future generations.

### 3. Equality

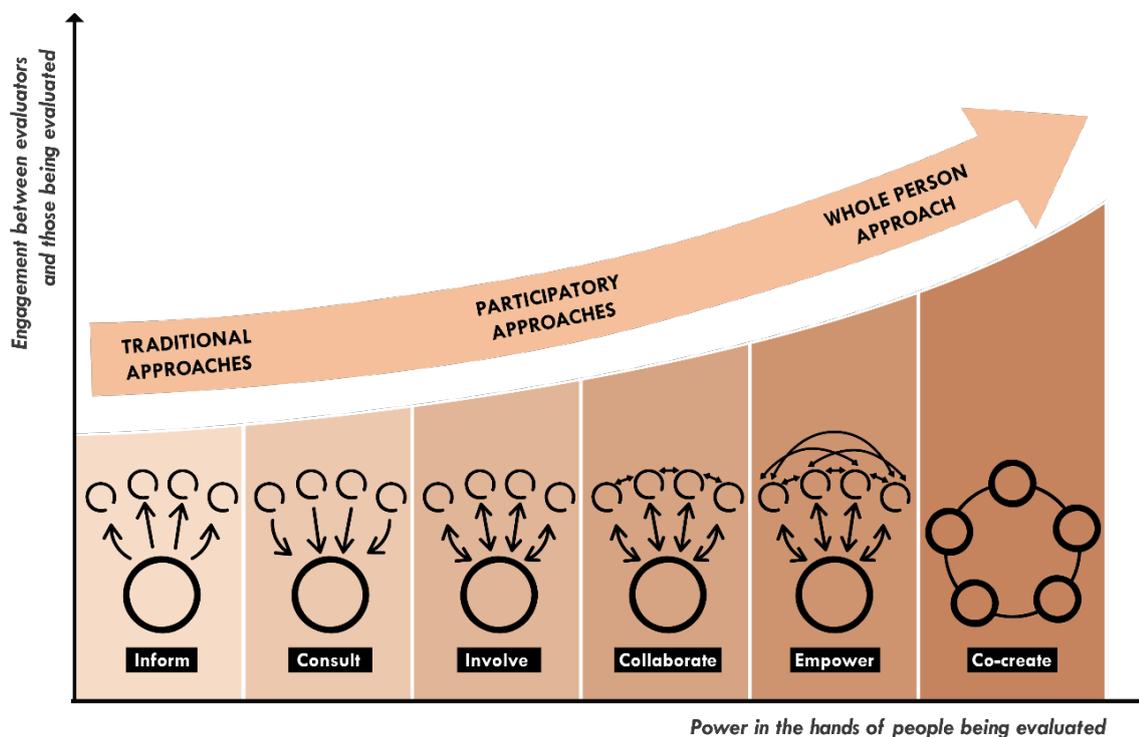
- Actors with established access to decision making should not be favoured, as oftentimes, stakeholders who are not directly involved in management have higher stakes in decisions (ECO KARST WP3).

## 2.2.1. Public participation approaches

The participatory approach has been around for a while and yet it is still often considered just one of the alternatives to a top-down approach in decision making. While the top-down approach can be quicker and simpler, the benefits of the participatory approach, described above, far outweigh long-term effectiveness. The participatory approach can be used in a variety of ways in roles, which are described below (see Figure 1, Bryson, 2003, International Association for Public Participation, 2020):

- Inform-promise: keeping the stakeholders informed.
- Consult-promise: keeping the stakeholders informed, listening to them, providing feedback on how their input influenced the decisions.
- Involve-promise: concerns and aspirations are considered and understood, reflected in the decisions made.
- Collaborate-promise: incorporation of the stakeholders' advice and recommendations to the maximum extent possible.
- Empower-promise: implementation of the stakeholders' decisions.

BEECH POWER project activities could be classified in the categories "Involve" and "Collaborate" and in some cases "Empower", as the inscription of the pilot areas on the UNESCO list already prescribes certain standards and management guidelines that are non-negotiable and therefore cannot be co-created with stakeholders.



Source: Illustration by Paula Vinhas adapted from IAP2 and Oasis School of Human Relations. Adapted with permission.

**Figure 1: Diagram of different participatory approaches and the degree engagement expected from them (source: IAP2, 2020)**

#### 2.2.1.1. Inform

Public participation goal: to provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.

- Community engagement is a two-way process, which means that the first level of the Spectrum, Inform, is not really community engagement because it only involves a one-way flow of information. The Inform level of public participation does not actually provide the opportunity for public participation at all, but rather provides the public with the information they need to understand the agency decision-making process. When the inform level of public participation is conducted, it is important to recognise that there is no intention of trying to persuade or manipulate the public in any way. Instead it requires the agency to serve as an honest broker of information giving the public what they need to fully understand the project and decision and to reach their own conclusions as to the appropriateness and adequacy of the decision.

#### 2.2.1.2. Consult

Public participation goal: to obtain public feedback on analysis, alternative, and/or decision.



- Consult is quite a low level of community engagement being “the basic minimum opportunity for public input to a decision”. Essentially, it involves obtaining feedback about plans, ideas, options, or issues, but with little interaction. The promise is to “listen and acknowledge” issues raised, but not necessarily to act on them. At this level, it is particularly important to be quite clear about the focus of the consultation and what is not negotiable. Consult can involve little interaction or it can be more interactive. Consult largely involves one-way communication (feedback from the community) although there is still an element of two-way communication through the promise to “provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision”.

#### 2.2.1.3. Involve

Public participation goal: to work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

- At the involve level, the community is invited into the process to a greater extent than with Consult. As can be seen, the goal is to work with the public throughout the process: it is not a one-off approach. While the promise implies that issues raised should be taken into account, decision at this level are generally made by the organisation or department rather than the public. Again it is important to be clear about what is negotiable and that the decision-making will not be made by the community. The higher level of participation required by the public, means this level can be appropriate when people have some investment in an issues, but it is not very controversial nor has major implications for other people.

#### 2.2.1.4. Collaborate

Public participation goal: to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

- The collaborate level is about partnership and sharing power. The promise sets high expectations, as it promises to incorporate advice and recommendations “to the maximum extent possible”. It implies an interactive process with an emphasis on two-way processes. While decision-making still lies with the organisation or department, there is much greater input from the community. Creating the trust needed and ensuring there is genuine engagement can be costly and time-consuming.

#### 2.2.1.5. Empower

Public participation goal: to place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

- It does not necessarily mean it is the highest level of community engagement. Whereas collaborate requires a high level of community engagement, empower does not necessarily require the same degree of community engagement. At this level, a decision could be made by the community through a process that requires little interaction or engagement, such as a community election of



referendum, through which the community decides on an outcome, without much public engagement necessary.

### 2.2.2. Public engagement

Regardless of the participatory approach selected, public engagement process is still a complex process, which should be carefully thought out (Kuslits and Sólyom, 2019, Golob, 2019, International Association for Public Participation, 2020). There are seven core principles to be considered:

1. Careful planning and preparation
  - Through adequate and inclusive planning, ensure that the design, organisation, and convening of the process serve both a clearly defined purpose and the needs of the participants.
2. Inclusion and demographic diversity
  - Equitably incorporate diverse people, voices, ideas, and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy.
3. Collaboration and shared purpose
  - Support and encourage participants, governments, community institutions, and others to work together to advance the common good.
4. Openness and learning
  - Help all involved actors to listen to each other, explore new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes, learn and apply information in ways that generate new options, and rigorously evaluate public engagement activities for effectiveness.
5. Transparency and trust
  - Be clear and open about the process and provide a public record of the organisers, sponsors, outcomes, and range of views and ideas expressed.
6. Impact and action
  - Ensure each participatory effort has real potential to make a difference and that participants are aware of that potential.
7. Sustained engagement and participatory culture
  - Promote a culture of participation with programs and institutions that support ongoing quality public engagement.

### 2.3. Relevance for WH component parts' buffer zones

Intact, primeval, and ancient beech forests provide a variety of ecosystem services and possess an outstanding intrinsic value, but their protection is much more sustainable through systematic, continuous, wide-reaching, and encompassing cooperation with groups and individuals with an interest in their



conservation or a stake in their development. Since the component parts are strictly protected, most of the human activities are planned to be focussed in buffer zones and the wider surroundings of the protected areas. Particularly activities in the buffer zones will still be subject to numerous restrictions, as the primary role of buffer zones is to protect the WH property from any deleterious outside impacts. Effective and productive stakeholder involvement in the WH buffer zones is therefore a vital component of the effective management and conservation of WH designated beech forests.

Managers of PAs containing WH component parts or managers of WH component parts themselves are likely in the best position to organise and lead these participation and stakeholder engagement processes related to buffer zone management. Oftentimes, it is also beneficial to establish cooperation with other organisations outside PAs to lead similar, parallel processes with a wider range of regional stakeholders. These organisations could include regional tourist organisations or sustainable development agencies, as well as some sectorial agencies, if they are the key actors in the tourism sector and shape the visitor experience also within the buffer zones. There can be issues with improper stakeholder involvement, when public participation is on paper implemented, but the actual level of involvement of publics is questionable or their inputs are not translated into management action. Therefore, it is often recommended to use a trained, professional moderator to provide, at the very least, supervision of the public engagement, or even better lead the public engagement for the management authority. Moreover, often the issue is raised about the openness of the participation process, as in to what extent are the opinions and suggestions of stakeholders taken into account, and who decides which ones are valid or not (could be related also to legal background).

Stakeholders should get a chance to be involved in management decisions or at least be consulted about them in early stages. Such stakeholder participation can be the best way for the decisions to be synchronised with different interests and meet little to no resistance on the ground.



### 3. Methodological note

BEECH POWER project focusses on 15 component parts in seven PAs, in five countries. A number of different activities is focussing on these pilot areas, which allow for the identification of main challenges each component part manager is facing. The identification of challenges in this diverse set of Central European component parts is one of the foundations on which this strategy is build, while keeping in mind that the guidelines included here should be widely applicable across the entire designation. It is also important to note that the length and details included for each country are dependent on the data available. Therefore, for example, through BEECH POWER project more data was collected for Slovenia and Germany, because the pilot areas there are involved in more project activities, which already took place, in comparison to Slovakia, Austria, and Croatia. Moreover, the pilot sites that have been part of the original inscription (e.g. Slovakia) and the first extension (e.g. Germany) have been addressing various challenges longer than the component parts from the last extension (e.g. Slovenia, Austria, Croatia). Thus, more activities have been implemented and there is more data to be included in this report, as well.

The following subchapters present the methods that were used for general data collection for this and other project purposes. Information on relevant topics, such as the general overview of the pilot areas, their ownership and management situation, history of public engagement, and, where relevant, boundary modifications, were then extracted and summarised in this chapter.

#### 3.1. MARISCO workshops

Participatory vulnerability and risk assessment workshops were undertaken for Slovenian and Slovak pilot areas (Snežnik, Krokár, Vihorlat and Poloniny clusters), using MARISCO methodology (Adaptive Management of vulnerability and risk at conservation sites, Ibsch and Hobson, 2014). These workshops (D.T2.1.1) were organised as two full two-day events, in Ljubljana (Slovenia) on 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> November 2019 and in Kaluža (Slovakia) on 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019. Both were supplemented also with field trips, which allowed for more focussed and knowledgeable discussions. A field trip to the Virgin Forest Krokár WH component part was organised on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019 for interested parties, as well as a lecture about Snežnik forest reserve on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2019 (due to unfavourable weather conditions, field trip was impossible). Field trips to Vihorlat were organised on 1<sup>st</sup> December and 4<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

Both workshops were oriented towards local, regional, national, and international experts, decision-makers, and other authorities. Slovak workshop involved a wide variety of stakeholders, from private forest owners, NGOs, to Poloniny National Park management authority and State Nature Conservancy. While in Slovenian case, this workshop was supplemented with other workshops and methods, which allowed for the participants of the MARISCO workshop to be more on the expert and national decision-making levels.

The first workshop day focussed on identification of conservation objects, their key ecological attributes, stresses, as well as their associated threats and further contributing factors. The second day revolved around



assessments of criticality of stresses and threats, with particular emphasis on the ability to buffer these impacts and conserve the integrity and the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of both component parts.

While these workshops did not focus solely or directly on stakeholder engagement, they allowed for identification of a number of stresses and threats to the forests, as well as contributing factors, which partly reflected the shortcomings in stakeholder involvement. The resolution of some of these challenges will involve more active involvement of stakeholders. Furthermore, the workshops themselves were a best-case scenario of active stakeholder involvement in the management of UNESCO component parts and as such offering a great inspiration to the participants for the adoption of such practices in other areas, as well.

### 3.2. Situational analysis

As part of the project's thematic work package 1, situational analysis workshops (D.T1.1.2), using Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation, were organised in Germany and Slovenia. Another workshop is still planned for Croatia, however due to COVID-19 epidemic, it has been postponed. The workshops were carried out in Angermünde and Altkünkendorf on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019 for the component part of Grumsin. The Slovenian workshops were implemented on 16<sup>th</sup> November in Kočevje, for the component part Krokár and 30<sup>th</sup> November in Ilirska Bistrica, for the Snežnik component part.

The workshops aimed to gather the widest possible range and number of local and regional stakeholders, who are interested in the component parts and identify what benefits are they gaining from the areas and where more work should focus. They have also focussed on threats to the property sites and their contributing factors, as well as activities that are already taking place or should do so in the future. As such, some of the objectives were similar to those of the MARISCO workshops, described above, however undertaken with less complicated methodology, which does not require detailed ranking. The workshop resulted in regional situation analyses, which will be the basis for strategy development in later stages of the project.

The results of the workshops uncovered a number of issues, with a high proportion focused on stakeholder involvement or its lack in the past. Moreover, the resulting models will be used in further stages of the project as foundations for co-developing management strategies with local stakeholders and the formation of local action groups. Therefore, these workshops are a best-case scenario for actively involving stakeholders.

### 3.3. Conflict resolution workshops

In order to jointly identify risks and develop solutions for existing and expectable conflicts between stakeholders, two conflict resolution workshops (D.T2.1.1) were organised in Slovenia (Krokár and Snežnik). Both workshops were targeted to the local participants, land users, and landowners, or managers and followed the same format. The workshops were entitled "How to reach a solution, when we have different



views?” and took place in Kočevje on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2019 for component part Krokav and in Loška dolina on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2019 for component part Snežnik.

The aim of the workshops was mainly education of people of how to constructively approach heated situations and deescalate conflicts, so that they can be resolved productively, without needing to enter into court or mediation procedures. Different communication techniques for neutralising the emotional charges of conflict situations were presented and practiced.

These workshops were more relevant for other project deliverables and outputs, however, some stakeholder involvement activities or rather lack of them, which is creating issues have been identified and a need for more education engagement expressed, as it shows good will and intentions from the manager’s side.

### 3.4. Regional Studies

Project partners in collaboration with selected key stakeholders or experts on national level also prepared regional studies, which focussed on different aspects of needs, potentials, and requirements for good management of component parts on national levels. Regional studies were conducted for the project target areas in Germany, Austria, Slovenia, and Slovakia.

Regional studies focussed on the status quo in the component parts, as well as sustainable regional development, tourism, education, connectivity to other component parts, and any other relevant issues identified in each country. The data and results of the studies were collected through the expert knowledge of the project partners but also by integrating results of the workshops described above and smaller consultations and interviews undertaken with key experts on the national level.

This activity provided a lot of background information and more individual assessment of the main challenges to be overcome in the future. For the purposes of the identification of challenges, the regional studies were particularly useful in countries where other participatory activities have not taken place yet, such as Kalkalpen National Park in Austria. Moreover, for example for Grumsin, the study was very useful as it represents the first and only overview, presenting the actual stage and contains information that cannot be found online. Thus, the regional studies were useful for all areas that do not have a compiled overview of the current situation.

### 3.5. Expert knowledge

A considerable amount of information included in the overview of the challenges was provided by existing managers of these pilot areas or people who have been working with them for extended periods of time. Often this knowledge provided the foundation for any workshops or other activities that were used in order to gather data and afterwards also employed to fill the gaps.



## 4. Challenges of WH component parts and their Stakeholder Management in the WH buffer zones

### 4.1. General overview

The “Primeval and Ancient Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe” is the largest transnational serial property on the World Heritage list, spanning 12 countries, with 78 components in more than 40 PAs. The number of involved countries and component parts is likely to increase in the future, as an extension nomination has been submitted and is currently under review (Nomination Dossier, 2020). Therefore, from the start, this property represents the need for an unprecedented level of international cooperation and is the most challenging and complex site to manage in the UNESCO portfolio.

On a local level, since only small remnants of undisturbed forests remain, those are to be very strictly protected, on par with IUCN Category I/II. The State Parties have proposed these forests to be included on the UNESCO list to “*preserve the last remnants of ancient and primeval European Beech forests, as examples of complete and comprehensive ecological patterns and processes of pure and mixed stands across a variety of environmental conditions in the still ongoing postglacial continental wide expansion process*” (Kirchmeir and Kovarovics, eds., 2016). Accordingly, all component parts currently enjoy a legally defined strict protection regime, which was a pre-requisite for site selection, thus being subjected to strict protection on a permanent legal basis preventing negative human influences such as timber extraction, construction or infrastructure, grazing etc. Additionally, the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention provides the legal obligation for the establishment of buffer zones (Articles 103-107) to assure adequate protection. All buffer zones have to already have complementary legal and/or customary restrictions established at the time of the nomination and inscription of a property to the WH List. Buffer zones are not part of the nominated property, however they are integral for the conservation of the property and WH Centre has to be informed or involved in any subsequent planned changes to the buffer zones. In order to avoid negative human impacts, public access is normally restricted to certain parts and certain conditions (e.g. with guided tours). Some of the component parts or their buffer zones are partly privately owned, such as the Poloniny cluster in Slovakia or Grumsin in Germany, but the majority are publicly owned. However, such strict protection regimes also mean that human activities and uses of the areas are curtailed to a large extent, which is not always widely accepted in the local communities.

IUCN, in their evaluation of the nomination, recognised that while the protection regimes in the component parts themselves are adequate, raised the concern about the ability of such a diverse collection of buffer zones to effectively protect the entirety of the designation. Because of these discrepancies the State Parties and site managers are now often in the processes of extending the buffer zones and implementing stricter protection regimes within them, which can further conflict with the wishes and actual activities (e.g. use of the forest for timber extraction, mushroom picking, etc.) of the local communities. While UNESCO designation provides additional incentive for better protection, it is a double-edged sword, as it also draws the attention of visitors and increase visitor pressures in areas. Given the remote locations of numerous component parts, the local communities are often counting on increased revenue from touristic exploitation



of the sites, which goes against the protection requirements already in place. For these reasons, wide-ranging participation on various management levels as well as the creation of ownership and fair compensation in the case of restrictions and disadvantages for some actors is key to ensure better management of buffer zones and WH component parts. Relatedly, communication strategies need to take into account the specificities of this particular UNESCO designation and the guidelines for this are presented in this document as well.

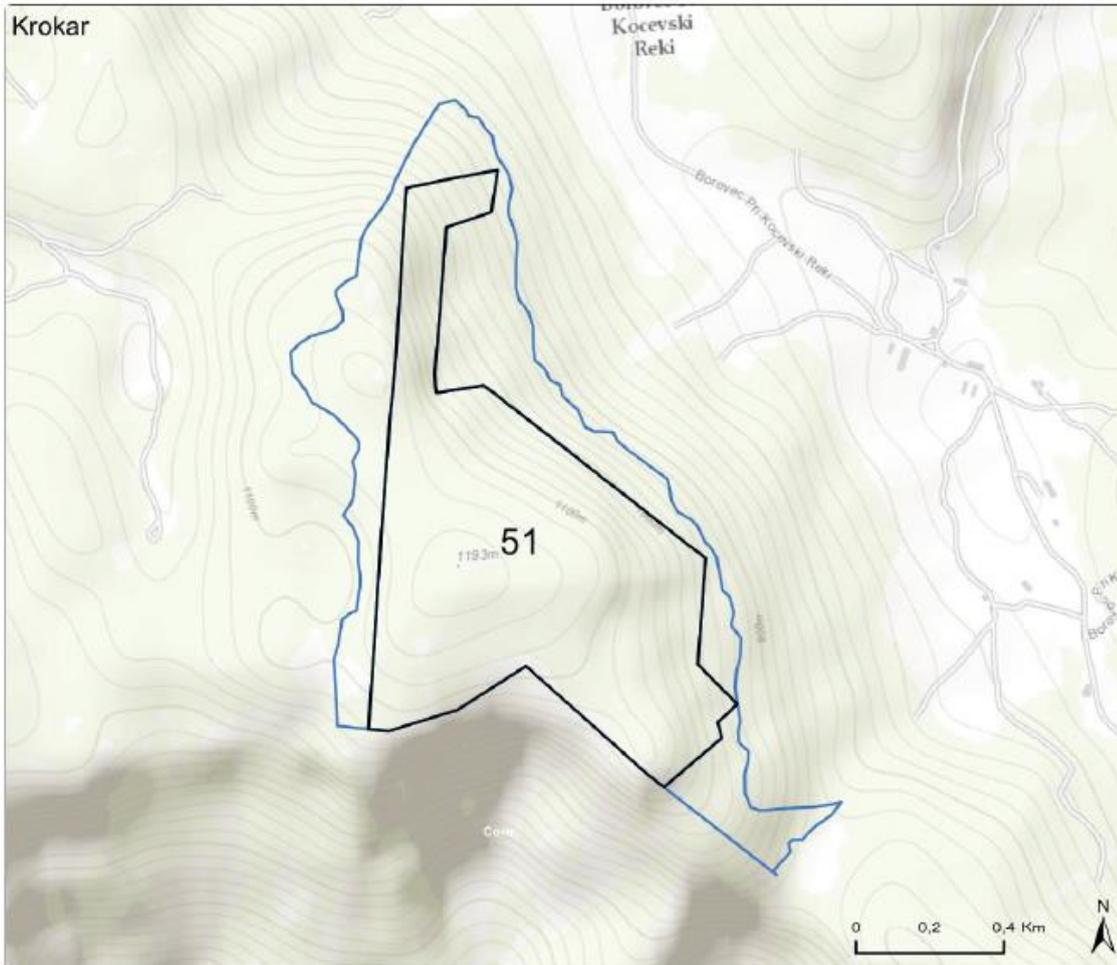
Long-term and sustainable protection of these exceptional forests is dependent on a positive relationship between the concerned management entity of a component part and the surrounding communities, which can justifiably expect to gain benefits of the World Heritage property in their vicinity. Reconciling the variety of perspectives will therefore play a crucial role in the future conservation of European WH beech forests.

## 4.2. Challenges in BEECH POWER pilot areas and their buffer zones

### 4.2.1. Challenges - Snežnik and Krokar (Slovenia)

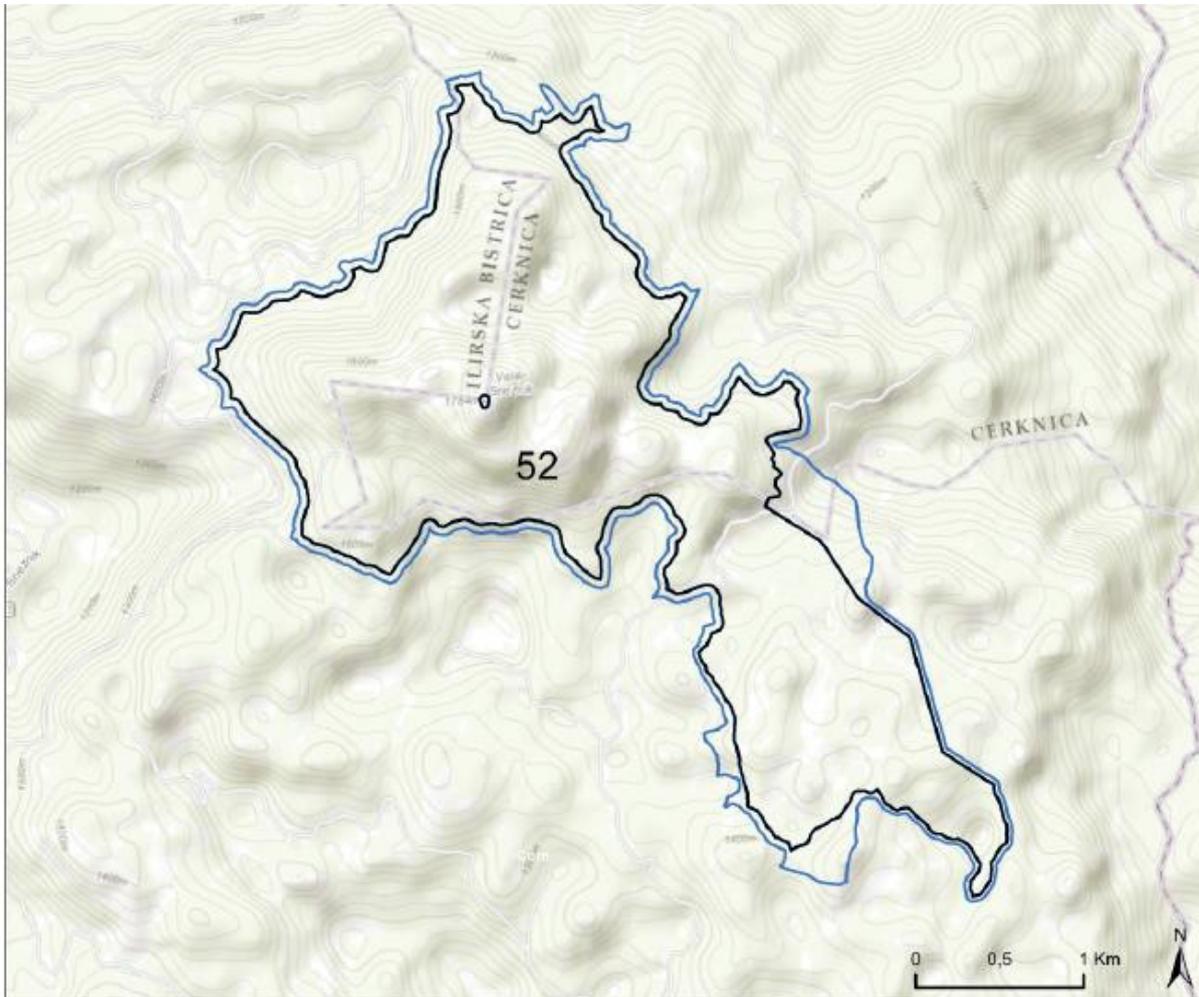
#### 4.2.1.1. General overview

Forest reserve Virgin Forest Krokar is a small remnant of virgin forest, which was never exploited by humans and also represent an important relic of the Illiric glacial refugium, from which most of the today's European beech is descended. The component part is part of an extensive forest complex, covering more than 90.000 ha (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: The WH component part Virgin Forest Krokar forest reserve (black line) with its buffer zone of forest reserve Borovec (blue line, source: Nomination dossier, 2016)**

Snežnik forest reserve represents the tree limit of beech in the Dinaric-Illiric region, where the expansion of beech upslope can still be observed. The reserve incorporates pronounced karstic phenomena and various vegetation belts (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: The WH component part Snežnik forest reserve (black line) with its buffer zone (blue line, source: Nomination dossier, 2016)**

Both Slovenian component parts (Krokar and Snežnik) are protected with the governmental Decree on Protective Forests and Forests with a Special Purpose. The protection regime is more stringent in Krokar, where no visitors are allowed. However, even the milder regime on Snežnik prohibits all anthropogenic activities but visits on marked trails and research with special ministerial permission. Both areas also have designated Ecologically Important Areas, are part of Natura 2000 network, and have areas designated as natural values of national significance. There is currently an on-going process of protecting both forest reserves as nature reserves under nature conservation legislation. This process is accompanied with an intent to extend the buffer zones of both component parts. However, the outcome is not clear yet.

#### 4.2.1.2. Ownership

The vast majority of forests in those extensions are state-owned (only about 3.5 ha are privately owned, with suggestions for state to buy-out those parcels), while the component parts are entirely state owned.



#### 4.2.1.3. Management situation

Both sites currently lack a properly designated manager with allocated funds and personnel. According to the Decree on Protective Forests, Slovenia Forest Service, alongside Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food, manages the area. The Law on Management of State Forests, on the other hand, states that the Slovenia State Forests Ltd. enterprise is managing all state-owned forests in Slovenia, which could be interpreted to include these two reserves, as well, as they are entirely state-owned. Until now, the forest management plans that Slovenia Forest Service produces and which deal with forest reserves so far as to prohibit logging within them, are the only management document at hand, with funding for any activities within the reserves being abysmally low (Kirchmeir and Kovarovics, eds., 2016).

Both component parts and their buffer zones are quite stringently protected. Most of the Snežnik component part and its buffer zone are positioned within the same forest reserve. All anthropogenic uses of the forest reserve are prohibited, apart from carrying out necessary public service works and visitors can use the existing trails. Only small parts of the buffer zone extend into surrounding protective forests (where that was an option), which have a bit milder regime, but in reality the situation in them is the same, as it is hard to reach them. In Krokar there is a difference, as no human intervention and presence is allowed in the component part, while in the buffer zone existing trails can be used by visitors. Apart from that the rest of the restrictions are identical in the component part and the buffer zone.

Both areas are of interest to visitors. Krokar, currently, receives a modest number of visitors, which can be estimated in a few hundreds per year. There is currently almost no visitor infrastructure present, including a complete lack of signage informing the visitors about the UNESCO status. Snežnik, on the other hand, welcomes up to 10.000 visitors a year, as it is a popular hiking destination and the highest peak in Slovenia, outside of the Alpine region. The visitor infrastructure, discounting the marked hiking trails, is quite sparse. While the increase in visitors has not been drastic yet, it is often directed to the areas, where visits are not allowed. The UNESCO brand is attracting new visitors to both areas, which will require more active and comprehensive direction and redirection of visits, as well as potentially some new constructions in the vicinity of both areas. New ways for experiencing nature (hiking, biking) to lessen the environmental impact will have to be established.

There is currently also a pronounced lack of control and proper signage around both component parts, which allows visitors to use illegal trails and move outside of marked paths. Moreover, some tourist providers are offering experience and adventures in forest reserves, where such activities are not permissible. These situations are expected to be resolved after the component parts get the status of nature reserves, solid management plans, and an official manager, which will be able to exercise control over the areas. Collaborations with tourism operators will be crucial for safeguarding the OUV and the integrity of the sites.

Thus, on a national level it has been recognised that an establishment of an effective management structure is the precondition for good quality of management. It is clear that the managers will have to focus on conservation, surveillance over the area, and visitor management, as well as active stakeholder involvement.



#### 4.2.1.4. Public engagement

There is some history of public engagement in both component parts, with more activities taking place in Krokár. For the area of Krokár, a group of expert institutions that have important stakes in the management of the area has been established for consultations. This group involves representatives of Slovenia Forest Service (Regional Unit), Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation, State Forests Ltd, Municipality of Kočevje, and Public Institute Zavod Kočevsko (regional tourist organisation). This cooperation is positive and allows for relatively smooth communication among the major stakeholders. However, sometimes some of the local stakeholders feel they are not involved in the decision-making. Wide-ranging public participation events are usually held through different projects that Slovenia Forest Service participates in (Interreg, LIFE, Cohesion projects). The lack of clearly designated managers of the component parts is currently one of the main impediments to more regular and structured engagement, as the responsibilities of different institutions are not clear yet. Snežnik component part has seen less public engagement activities. This is partly due to its larger size and division into more management units.

The idea of establishing local action groups was popular when mentioned on the local and regional levels. On the national level, informal cooperation has been established since the time of the preparation of the nomination dossier, which is ongoing now. This cooperation includes all relevant, competent institutions in Slovenia, which are Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, UNESCO Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia Forest Service, Institute of Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation, and Scientific-Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

A lack of understanding of the value of beech forests has been detected, with numerous stakeholders, including experts, being confused about why these particular forests or beech forests in general are considered WH and what do they get out of that. Improved communication should address this knowledge gap. Among some of the national-level institutions there was also some scepticism present about the level to which regional and local stakeholders should be involved in the preparation of management plans and the management of the areas themselves, if they should be involved at all. This points to a need to better anchor the participative approaches also among the expert and national level institutions in Slovenia in general, so they can recognise the benefits of active stakeholder involvement.

#### 4.2.1.5. Boundary modifications

In Slovenia, currently the discussions on extensions of the protective buffer zones of both component parts (Krokár and Snežnik) are taking place. However, the extension will still result in the loss of economic income for the state-owned manager of the state forests (Slovenian Forests Ltd.). The loss of revenue and ways to find alternatives are at the core of their concerns about the extension (unofficial at this point). However, there is also a concern that some parts of the extended buffer zones, where spruce plantations are still present, could be places where bark beetle outbreaks could spread to the surrounding forests and thus cause additional economic damage on forests outside the reserves.



#### 4.2.2. Challenges - Grumsin (Germany)

The following information is summarising opinions and feedback from stakeholders of the WH component part `Grumsin` gathered in a participatory workshop in November 2019 as well as via personal interviews with stakeholders from different sectors (e.g. village majors, NGO representatives, county administration, forest administration) between November 2019 and March 2020. Further information and statements have been provided by the Biosphere Reserve (BR) Schorfheide-Chorin as official management institution of the component part.

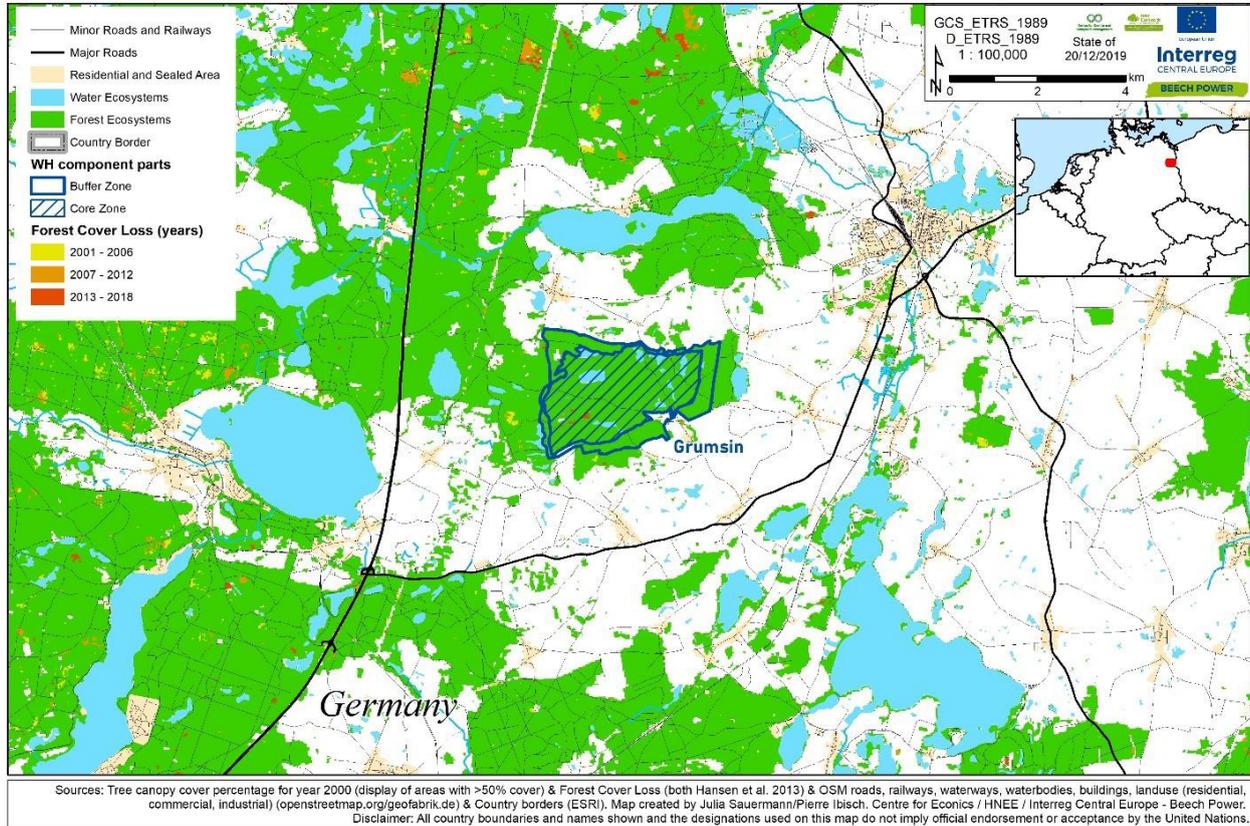
##### 4.2.2.1. General overview

The WH component part `Grumsin` located within the BR Schorfheide-Choring was recognised as WH in 2011 with 4 more German component parts. The WH core zone is an area that already since 1990 is within the nature development zone/ core zone (protection zone I) of the BR and managed under a strict non-intervention regime since then.

The core zone of the component part is located within the county of Uckermark on the territory of the city of Angermünde, whereas the buffer zone stretches also into the county of Barnim. This situation means an involvement of numerous administrative actors as two counties and several communities have a stake.

The `Grumsin` component part is surrounded by a more or less broad forest buffer (see Figure 4), nevertheless after this buffer the area is surrounded on 3 sides by agricultural areas, connecting to large forest areas only in the West. Regarding this, the situation of connectivity to other old-growth beech forests in the surrounding can be subject to investigation.

## Germany: Grumsin

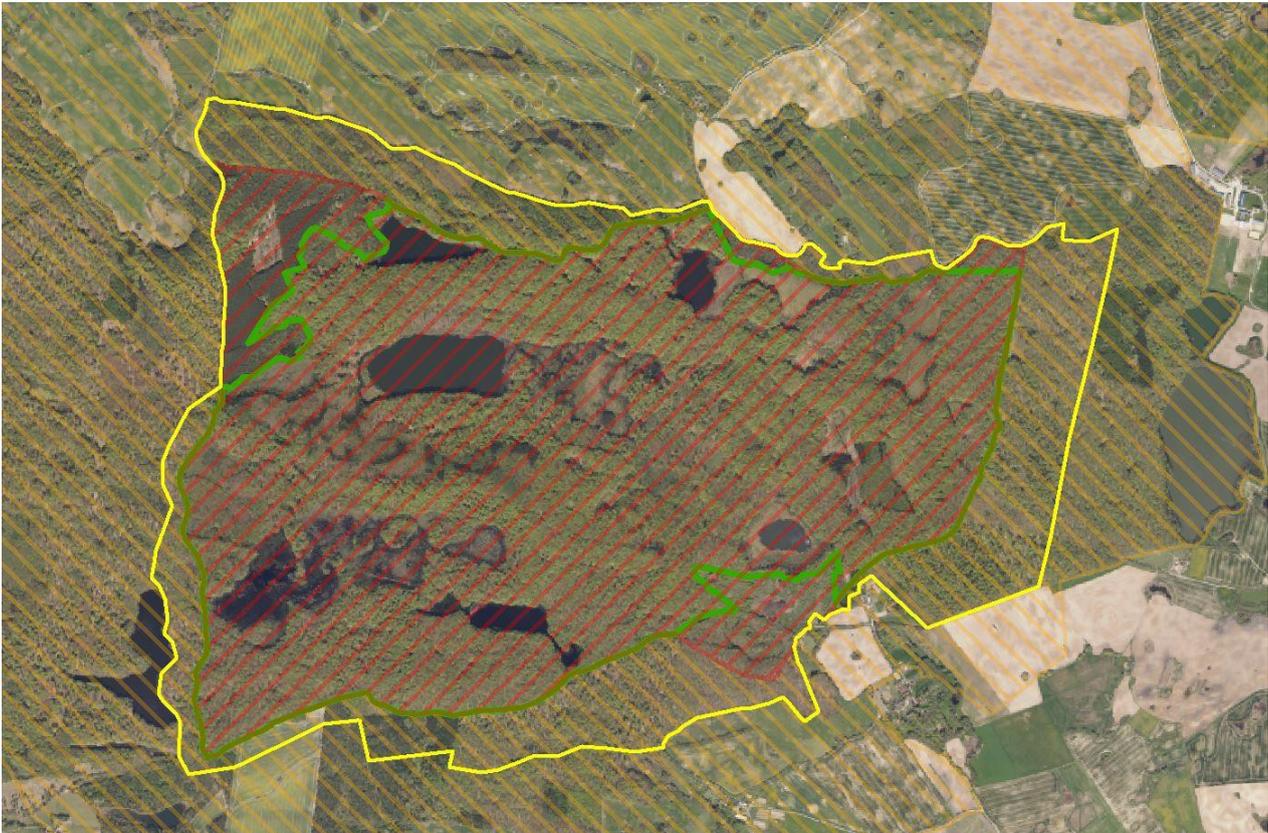


**Figure 4: The WH component part Grumsin (stripped) with its buffer zone (blue line, source: BEECH POWER, 2019)**

The buffer zone around the WH component part 'Grumsin' (see Figure 5) was defined by the state of Brandenburg for the UNESCO nomination process. The buffer zone is comparatively narrow, in relation to other WH component parts, as it is, at some points, narrower than 100 meters. At two small points the the core zone touches directly agricultural area.

The buffer zone of the WH component part lays completely within protection zone II (nature conservation area) of the BR (according to the regulations of the BR decree) as well as within a Natura 2000 area (SPA and FFH site) under the Habitats and Birds Directives. The specific regulations for the protection zone II of the BR are given in the BR decree and define e.g. no clearcuts >0.3 ha, no afforestation with non-native tree species, no use of pesticides, no access besides roads and trails, no collection of mushrooms.

There are no additional specific regulations for the buffer zone of the WH site to the ones mentioned above, as 'buffer zone' and 'world heritage site' are not a legal protection category in German or federal legislation.



**Figure 5: Zonation of the WH component part Grumsin and of the BR Schorfheide-Chorin (green= core zone WH, yellow= buffer zone WH, red shaded= core zone BR, yellow shaded: nature conservation area)(Source: unpublished data/map provided by the BR Schorfheide-Chorin)**

As criteria for the buffer zone definition, the BR named (1) the core zone of the BR that is on some edges broader than the WH core area as it is already under a non-intervention regime, but not yet containing the potential natural vegetation (red shaded area in Figure 5), (2) in the northern part the ownership situation and the forest edge, (3) on the Western side it could only be continued without strong planning reference points. According to information of the BR, the information about the criteria and the delineation of the buffer zone of the WH component part is not explicitly published, because it is part of the surrounding nature reserve (yellow shaded area in Figure 5), the buffer zone (protection zone II) of the BR, with specific regulations and it is seen as too confusing for the public, if the BR buffer zone would be different from the world heritage site buffer zone.

#### 4.2.2.2. Ownership

The core zone area due to recent information of the BR is mainly owned by a registered society supporting the BR and by the federal state of Brandenburg. Around 28 ha (representing < 5%) are still owned by private forest owners, but is reduced continuously due to the land purchase process making offers to the forest owners to sell their property to the state of Brandenburg. This land purchase process has started in the mid 1990ies and was intensified since 2007 going along with the preparatory activities to become World Heritage. Some stakeholders, since the installation of the core zone in the BR in 1990, are not satisfied with the fact that they cannot use their forest anymore, but are offered to sell it or exchange it to an equivalent other



forest. Their main concerns refer to communication within this process as well as that the offers according to their opinion are not high enough or that the equivalent forests offered for exchange do not meet their requirements (e.g. that they should be closeby and with a similar tree composition and stand structure).

Therefore, the World Heritage inscription as additional protection and recognition was not received positively by some actors. Other inhabitants celebrated the World Heritage status of the Grumsin forest.

The buffer zone contains forest and agricultural land from at least 25 private owners, as well as areas owned by the registered society supporting the BR. According to information of the BR the state of Brandenburg bought pieces of land within the buffer zone, if it was possible. Nevertheless currently there is no data publically available about the ownership structure of the WH buffer zone (e.g. in %). However the BR has full access to the official ownership data and thus has the possibility to integrate this knowledge into planning.

The specific situation of private ownership in the WH area influences the overall situation, the management, the acceptance of the WH by local actors as well as the processes related to public participation. The administration of the BR assesses the situation related to this topic to become calmer in the meanwhile.

#### 4.2.2.3. Management situation

The official management institution of the WH component part is the administration of the Biosphere Reserve (BR) Schorfheide-Chorin.

The BR is further responsible for the monitoring towards the national steering group and UNESCO as well as representatives participate at meetings and activities on the national and transnational level. On this national level have been developed joint activities and products (e.g. the development of a World Heritage-App, definition of joint monitoring criteria, development of image films for the German WH sites and every German component part, information material (e.g. flyer) as well as the regularly updates website <http://www.weltnaturerbe-buchenwaelder.de/en.html> with detailed information in German and English.

Since the recognition as WH in 2011 numerous activities have been implemented by the BR and by further regional actors. Amongst them are the development of new hiking trails, the installation of an information point, the equipment of information centres and the information point with new exhibitions, the development of new touristic offers to the WH site (e.g. by guided tours), the building of touristic infrastructure (e.g. parking lots, toilets).

The core zone, as already mentioned, is managed according to the BR order from 1990 under a strict non-intervention regime, also including the closure of forest roads within the core zone.

Access to the core zone for the public is possible via guided tours by certified nature guides that can be booked for a fee at the local tourism agencies.



Some stakeholders were against the closure of the roads through the core zone and are not satisfied with the actual situation.

New hiking trails that can be used individually were developed and marked along the borders of the core zone towards the buffer zone or through the buffer zone.

Private forest owners were partly against the development of new hiking trails through the buffer zone forest as they are afraid that more visitors would disturb game hunting and forestry use, e.g. when extracting timber. Further they fear that they as forest owners have the duty to maintain safety on hiking trails, nevertheless the forest and conservation laws as well as several court decisions disprove this duty related to forest typical dangers as forest owners have to accept the installation of new hiking trails on their private land by law, this cannot go along with an additional duty for them.

Nevertheless, the BR engages a specialized company to remove carefully dangerous trees and branches beside the trails along the border of the core zone.

The BR plans to establish in 2020 new information boards at the forest edges explaining the zonation and specific regulations.

In the buffer zone within the legal limits of the protection categories and regulations, named above, land owners are allowed to use their property e.g. for timber extraction and agriculture.

The forest areas that are owned by the registered society supporting the BR are out of any use, supporting the natural forest dynamic processes of the BR core zone/WH property. The management of agricultural areas owned by the registered society supporting the BR bordering the buffer zone were changed to organic agriculture. The intensity to which private forest areas in the buffer zone are used has a broad variety. Some forest owners do not use their forest at all, some use it only very little for firewood, others use it more intensively for timber extraction going close to the limit of what is allowed (e.g. cuttings < 0,3 ha).

As there was not a change in legal regulations going along with the recognition as WH and thus neither new restrictions or rules coming up for the buffer zone, the BR administration communicated the borders of the WH buffer zone in general at information events, but did not explicitly inform the private land owners about the new situation that their land is now part of the WH buffer zone.

In this context some stakeholders express that they do not trust that on the long-term the WH buffer zone will not go along with additional restrictive consequences for them.

According to the Operational Guidelines (WHC) the buffer zone has the function to protect the property from external threat impacts. This becomes legally binding through the ratification of the World Heritage Convention by the respective States Party, as well as the Nomination Dossier. The topic of the function of the WH buffer zone is not specifically addressed in federal nature conservation law neither in the protected



area's management plan, but the management plan fully considers the requirements of the protection zone II (buffer zone) of the BR and the FFH site as relevant legal fundamentals for the area.

In 2019, a new funding instrument was introduced (valid until end of 2020) for conservation measures in Natura 2000 forest habitat types by the Federal State of Brandenburg to compensate for old trees, deadwood, and to maintain the conservation status A or B (according to the EU-Habitats Directive). The core zones of protected areas are excluded from this funding. The funding scheme is administrated by the federal forestry administration and within the BR the approvals of the requests are agreed with the BR administration. Within the funding scheme there is no special priority given to the buffer zone of the WH, nevertheless the BR administration and the forestry administration had several meetings to ensure that emphasis is given to the WH buffer zone and to inform specifically private forest owners of the buffer zone and adjacent to the hiking trails around the WH about the new funding scheme. The offered funding scheme for conservation measures in forests is due to information of some private forest owners not attractive enough for them as they are using their forest intensely. Other forest owners are interested in the application to the funding scheme.

There have been water management retention measures in the region organised by the BR to restore the natural water regime by closing drainage channels etc.. According to information by the BR the restoration of the natural hydrology leads to a delay of the runoff and holds the water in the landscape so that the decline in lake water tables is minimized. Nevertheless some local stakeholders state that in recent years the water level of two lakes that are important for them for leisure activities (e.g. fishing, swimming) declined and they attribute it to the water retention measures. Anyway the last 2 years were very dry and water levels declined everywhere.

A management issue and challenge is how the WH can contribute to sustainable regional development including e.g. gastronomic offers in the villages around the WH as well as the creation of higher regional added-value to local products and services. Here the joint logo developed between all WH member countries, which can be used for commercial purposes, could be a helpful instrument to support further marketing of local products and services.

#### 4.2.2.4. History of public engagement

According to the information of the BR, the WH nomination of the Grumsin as part of the beech forest world heritage was widely announced and discussed in the public in advance during several public meetings in the villages and the visitor centre Blumberger Mühle. The message about the recognition by the World Heritage Committee was then mainly welcomed and celebrated in the surrounding villages.

Regarding the communication with stakeholders, the management body of the BR already installed an 'advisory board' of regional stakeholders, shortly before the recognition by UNESCO in 2011. This advisory board met often in the beginning (every two months) and later on a still regular basis. The last meeting of the advisory board took place in June 2018.



As a result of the interviews, numerous members of the advisory board would appreciate the continuation, as there is no other occasion/platform to directly share information about the WH management. Nevertheless, there are different conceptions to the function of this group - some stakeholders appreciate it to share information, other stakeholders ask for a panel that develops and coordinates actions regarding the WH.

Later on, the BR installed another informal group composed by the private forest owners holding forests (1) along hiking trails close to the WH and (2) in the core zone, in order to address specific challenges related to them and to improve communication.

Further there is offered a regular consultation hour for the citizens by the head of the BR in both nearby cities Angermünde and Joachimsthal.

In the last years have been organised dialogue meetings with the BR by the local communities once a year altering between the counties Barnim and Uckermark. These meetings have been valued by all involved parties, the BR as well as the stakeholders.

There have been several processes involving stakeholders regarding the area of the WH in the last years.

- The management planning process for the Natura 2000 management plan by the BR since 2014 with information events
- The planning process for the integrated urban development concept by the City of Angermünde with stakeholder workshops (2018/ 2019)
- The participatory process 'World Heritage Region 2030' about touristic development within the WH region with stakeholder workshops (since 2018 - ongoing)
- Participatory situation analysis regarding the 'Grumsin' component part by the BEECH POWER project (Nov. 2019)

Various stakeholders regarding the recent participatory processes gave the feedback at the BEECH POWER workshop in November 2019 that until now they do not see concrete impact of the elaborated results and do thus not have the feeling that their involvement was meaningful. Therefore they requested from the BEECH POWER project concrete action. Thus it will be important to report back to the stakeholders how participatory processes and their contributions have influenced the results and show an impact on the ground as soon as possible.

Further within the BEECH POWER project workshops several stakeholders requested an overview about the organisational structure of the responsibilities and activities related to the component part 'Grumsin' as well as to the overall WH site.

The local actors describe that they are informed and consulted in planning processes e.g. in Natura2000 management planning, development of hiking trails around the WH property. Nevertheless, from the perspective of several stakeholders the decision-making is later on not very much taking into account their concerns.



The analysis within the BEECH POWER project shows that some planning documents like the Natura 2000 management plan including the WH area do not have a focus on being user-friendly (e.g. do not contain legends for abbreviations used for measures, the explanation documents are not publically available). Regarding this topic the BR informs that the Natura 2000 management plans are widely standardized (in the federal state of Brandenburg) technical documents as guideline especially for the BR and nature conservation administrations and not addressed to the wider public. But, additionally to the public information events that have been taking place, everybody had the opportunity to inform himself at the BR administration about his/her specific property.

In terms of participation, there is a need that citizens are informed regularly and broadly about development and news around the WH component part, on national level as well as on the level of the overall management of the transnational WH property in order to give a possibility to connect more to the Grumsin forest and to the topic of Beech forest conservation and the transnational WH.

#### 4.2.2.5. Other issues

As a further challenge by many stakeholders was named to organise long-term financial support by the federal state for the WH as the information centers have a need for more trained staff as e.g. one information point is run by volunteers of the village since 2012.

Also the BR was not provided with increased staff capacities to fulfil the additional tasks coming along with the WH recognition.

Further the exhibitions at the information centres were identified by the stakeholders to have a need to be repaired and updated as well as new information material in different languages (English and Polish) should be produced.

The project has identified also a need to organize possibilities that local and regional stakeholders (communal actors, rangers, NGOs, employees of the BR, county administration) can experience the European idea of the transnational UNESCO World Heritage property to later develop and live it in their environment and inform visitors. Therefore, they have to get to know other European component parts to exchange experiences and build up personal contacts. Until now, there is almost no exchange on the regional and local level (e.g. experts and stakeholders) of the counties, municipalities, and villages with other component parts of the serial WH property.

Educational activities for schools and other groups are offered in the frame of Education for Sustainable Development by the *Naturwacht* (the Ranger Service of the Biosphere Reserve). They developed a flyer 'Educational offers at the Beech Forest Grumsin - World heritage for discoverers' related to the WH presenting their offers for the different age classes. According to their own information, these offers are not used by the schools until now. Specific World Heritage education contents are not developed as specific offers until now.



The public transport related to the WH has been improved in the last years from the northern part (county of Uckermark and city of Angermünde). An additional bus line was introduced, running from spring to autumn, and it is planned to establish a second one. The improvement of the public transport possibilities around the WH as well as the management of private car parking outside the official parking spaces is an actual challenge.

Disregarding the challenges there have also been already many achievements, motivated initiatives and qualitative products such as the photo-publication 'My Grumsin'<sup>2</sup> and the 'Best Practice Handbook - Nature Conservation in Beech Forests. Nature conservation objectives and management recommendations for mature beech forests in north-eastern Germany'<sup>3</sup>.

#### 4.2.3. Challenges - Poloniny and Vihorlat (Slovakia)

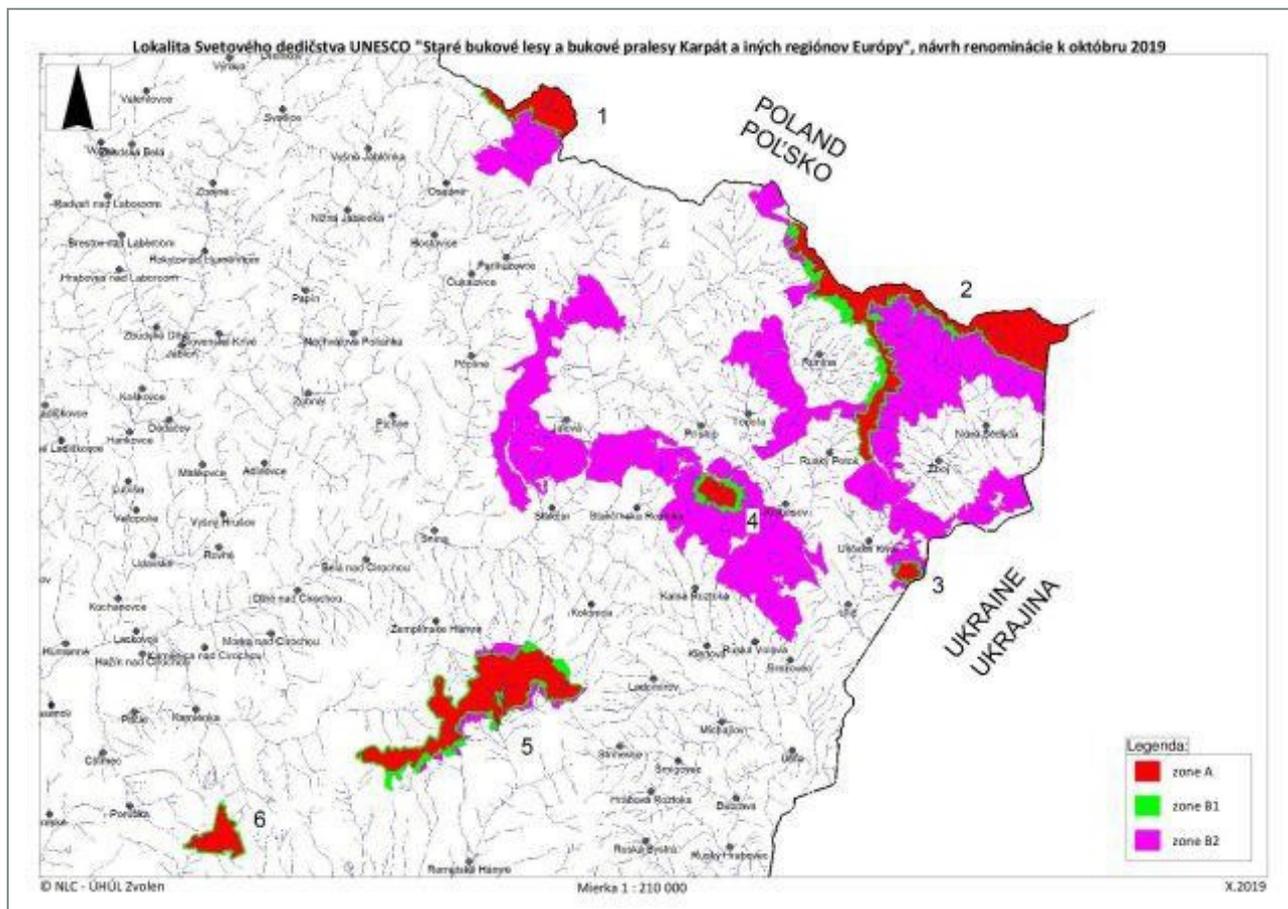
##### 4.2.3.1. General overview

Slovak component parts form part of the original inscription of primeval beech forests on the UNESCO List. The inscription includes four components in two clusters. Three component parts - Havešová, Rožok and Stužica-Bukovské vrchy, are part of the Poloniny National Park, while the fourth component Vihorlat is part of the Vihorlat Protected Landscape Area (see Figure 6).

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.weltnaturerbe-grumsin.de/?page\\_id=420](http://www.weltnaturerbe-grumsin.de/?page_id=420)

<sup>3</sup> Susanne Winter, Heike Begehold, Mathias Herrmann, Matthias Lüderitz, Georg Möller, Michael Rzanny & Martin Flade: Best Practice Handbook - Nature Conservation in Beech Forests. Nature conservation objectives and management recommendations for mature beech forests in north-eastern Germany. Editor: Federal Ministry for Rural Development, Environment and Agriculture of Brandenburg, English Version expected in 2020. German version can be requested under [www.lugv.brandenburg.de](http://www.lugv.brandenburg.de) or via e-mail [Vertrieb@geobasis-bb.de](mailto:Vertrieb@geobasis-bb.de).



**Figure 6: The renomiated zonation of Slovak component parts in the Poloniny (1, 2, 3, 4) and Vihorlat (5, 6) clusters , with component parts in red, strictly protected buffer zones in green, and landscape protection buffer zones in purple (source: NFC, 2019).**

#### 4.2.3.2. Ownership

In its present form, after the resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic on the adjustment of the borders of Slovak components, more than 90% of the territory has been managed by state organizations - State Forests Enterprise, Forest-Agricultural Estate Ulič, state enterprise and Military Forests and Estates. The rest is managed by private persons, resp. associations representing small forest owners. A significant share of non-state managers is in the components Vihorlat, Stužica-Bukovské vrchy and Rožok. It follows that most of the restrictions, increased costs and losses will be borne by state forest managers. Based on new legislation (Act no. 543/2002 Coll. on Nature and Landscape Protection as amended, coming into force since January 1 2020) also state owned forest enterprises are eligible for financial compensation.

#### 4.2.3.3. Management situation



Following the amendment to the Nature Conservation Act, close-to-nature forest management has been required since the beginning of 2020 in areas with a 3<sup>rd</sup> and higher level of protection, especially in national parks, and according to this intention also for the whole buffer zone B2.

From the perspective of existing infrastructure, there are only existing forest roads and huts in the Vihorlat component part buffer zone. In recent weeks, one NGO has even started a public debate on the exclusion of existing buildings from the component part. Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic wrote an official letter to the UNESCO WHC explaining the situation. Hiking trails are well marked and mainly lead through buffer zones outside the component part. However, some individuals also offer excursions and nature experiences to the visitors in the untouched old-growth stands of the territory, mainly in the Poloniny cluster. Such excursions without a permission issued by the relevant nature conservation authority are illegal according to the legislature on nature and landscape protection. Preventing these activities will require more control in the field in order to enforce the law.

From the perspective of forest management in the buffer zone, the most important question is the future management, especially in forest stands with unnatural tree species composition and structure. Here, different stakeholders have conflicting views on management practices, the impact of specific management on future forest development, and the functionality of such forests in the buffer zone (especially zone B1).

Agreed management measures in mentioned forest stands will be a part of integrated management plan which is currently in the process of development.

The rezonation already addressed the issue of improving the legislative basis for effective site protection, with some legislation needed to complete this process in the pipeline now. However, other crucial needs remain unattended.

#### 4.2.3.4. History of public engagement

The involvement of the local population in the management of the site is still insufficient in both clusters despite the fact that Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic and State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic organized several meetings and workshops with stakeholders. The cause is seen in the persistent state regulations, where the limitations of nature protection on the one hand, and the unfulfilled expectations of new sources of income (mainly from tourism) on the other, do not meet. More support is needed for the regional development schemes and activities from the state.

On a more regional level, the need for a more active role of municipalities, particularly in the development of the region, was identified. Small and medium enterprises in various sectors would need support and new jobs should be created for “redundant” forestry workers to allow for smoother transition. On the other hand, tourism is recognised as an economic sector with the highest potential for development of the area. Active cooperation and creation of regional associations around the UNESCO component parts and the use of brands for sustainable development are required, which could also be related to the establishment of local action groups.



Communication has not been very effective up to date, with numerous private forest owners and NGOs being quite negatively positioned towards WH component parts. This has also been illustrated in a number of reports and complaints sent by them to the WH Centre in Paris in recent years. Therefore, improvements in communication with all stakeholders, and their closer integration into the WH management is crucial for long-term sustainability of protection of these sites. Communication with local stakeholders became more intensive during the negotiations within the nomination process during the last 10 years. Better involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making processes is still needed to improve site management.

Initiation of cooperation between regional tourist organisations and tourist service providers has been recognised as necessary for future development of tourism in the region. This should also include assisting the stakeholder to develop and submit projects to increase tourism activities in the region. Until now, the positive promotion of the site has been outweighed by negative information about problems in the management of the site, especially in forest management. The UNESCO brand is not sufficiently used to attract clients and make services more attractive. There is also a great opportunity for landowners and land managers to offer their services and use their knowledge, for example, to guided tours. The competences of the stakeholders need to be determined in advance, as there is rivalry.

A long-term and significant problem of the Slovak part of the site is management in relation to forests and their owners and managers. Already unmanageable communication during the original bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian nomination resulted in confusion in the proposed component boundaries. These persisted after the extension of the site in 2011, and the conflicts between the administrator of the PAs and the landowners deepened. The ambiguous attitude of the national authorities together with the unfulfilled expectations of forest owners led to the withdrawal of some private owners from the nomination.

#### 4.2.3.5. Boundary modifications

Due to discrepancies between the text and maps in the original nomination, the Slovak Republic in line with the UNESCO WHC decision 42 COM 7B.71 has developed a mayor boundary modification of their component parts, and completed the process of renomination in 2019. The renomination project was submitted to the UNESCO WHC in February 2020. Since then, the process of mentioned renomination project evaluation by UNESCO WHC has started. The rezonation resulted in new clusters and components. Four components are in the Poloniny cluster (Havešová, Rožok, Stučica - Bukovské vrchy and newly proposed component Udava, which was part of the original component Stučica). In Vihorlat cluster, there are now two components (Vihorlat and newly proposed Kyjovský prales).

The process of renominating the territory also involves changing the boundaries of components and their buffer zones. At the same time, the buffer zones will be divided into a strict part B1 and a wider part B2. The component parts consist largely of nature reserves with a strict protection regime (non-intervention), buffer zones are composed predominantly of economic forests with a lower level of protection.

Following the proposal to modify the component part boundaries, to declare new nature reserves in those parts of the UNESCO site where the highest level is not yet valid, proposals will be prepared. This will also legally secure a strictly non-intervention regime as required by the World Heritage Committee. At the same time, the requirements for buffer zone management will be reflected in the management regime in the

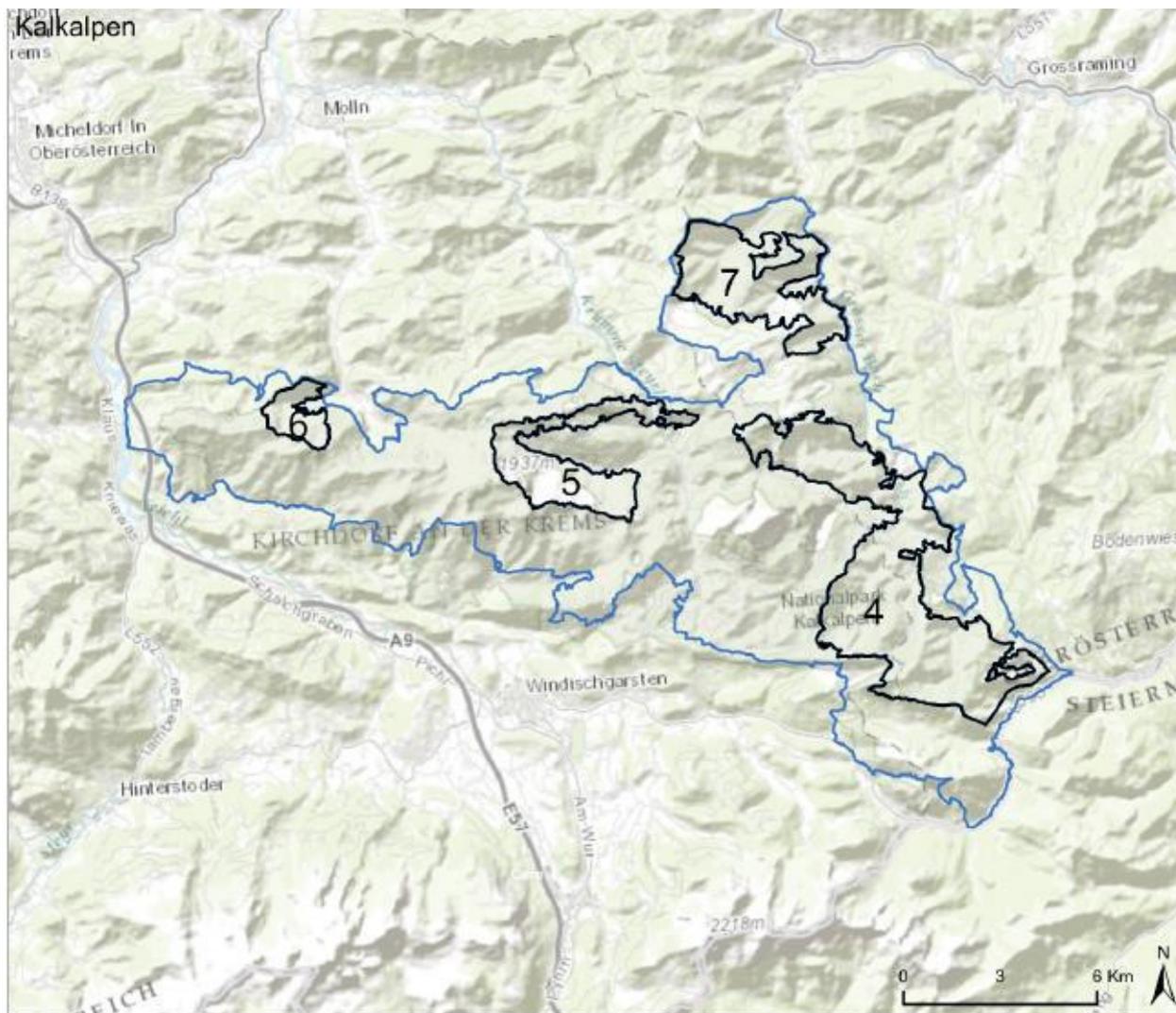


protection zones of these nature reserves, which will correspond to the integrated site management, resp. integrated management system. In the buffer zone (buffer zone B1) or, where necessary, the fourth level of protection will be declared, the third level of protection in the buffer zone B2 (depending on conditions and recommended management) will ensure legal protection of the property throughout the Slovak territory.

#### 4.2.4. Challenges - Kalkalpen (Austria)

##### 4.2.4.1. General overview

The component part Kalkalpen consists of four areas with ancient Alpine beech forests, covering about a quarter of the National Park Kalkalpen. The component cluster represents the largest remnant of primeval beech forests with enclosures of virgin forests under strict protection in the Alps. The area is protected as a National Park (IUCN category II), as well as containing Natura 2000 areas and wetlands of international importance (Ramsar). The wilderness zone, in which the cluster is situated is defined as a strict non-intervention area (Figure 7).



**Figure 7: The WH component cluster of Kalkalpen (within black lines) and its buffer zone, which is represented by the boundaries of National Park Kalkalpen (blue lines, source: Nomination dossier, 2016)**

#### 4.2.4.2. Ownership

In Kalkalpen National Park, the main parts of the UNESCO component parts and the buffer zone is property of the Austrian State forests (Austrian Federal Forests) and is also managed by them. Forest management - in detail measures of bark beetle combat - is only done in a very small area on the borders of the National Park. Regarding forest management there are no challenges expected, because the component parts entirely and most parts of the buffer zone are subject to process conservation.

Still there are minor overlapping of old grazing rights (some are used, some are not applied anymore but legally still exist). Some grazing rights are in conflict with a closed belt of protective buffer zone surrounding the component parts.



#### 4.2.4.3. Management situation

There are challenges to harmonise the zoning and regulations of the WH with other layers of protection status (National Park) and with the target setting of other PA categories (Natura 2000, Ramsar). Needed infrastructure for natural hazard management (avalanche control along mountain roads) might also be a conflicting issue in future. The WH obligations and regulations need to be integrated into the existing Management Plan including all maps and zoning regulations.

Apart from the challenges in site management, there are also financial challenges. While the Administration of the National Park got no new or additional human or financial resources within the annual budget, the WH status comes up with new tasks and obligations that have to be covered:

- Reporting (Periodic reporting, States Parties Reports, inquiries),
- PR-Activities,
- International Meetings and Workshops,
- Additional human resources and travel costs,
- Language barrier: not all experts are fluently speaking English. This limits the communication with colleagues in other component parts in the serial property.

#### 4.2.4.4. History of public engagement

Kalkalpen National Park has, in general, longer history of stakeholder involvement, as well as clear and well-funded management priorities and staff. There are still areas for improvement, but overall the situation is better organised than in most other PAs. Kalkalpen National Park cooperates with more than 500 stakeholders in the region. In the regional study, five stakeholder groups are distinguished:

- National Park (regional) communities: *these are anchored in the National Park Act and have committed to sustainable regional development.*
- National Park Board of Trustees: *an advisory body, “consists of representatives of the national park communities, the Provincial Association for Tourism, the Upper Austrian Provincial Hunting Association, the Upper Austrian Alpine Association, the Upper Austrian Forest & Landowners Association, the Austrian Alpine Association and the Austrian Nature Conservation Association and WWF.”*
- Regionalforum Steyr - Kirchdorf: *important organisation for regional development, Kalkalpen National Park is an advisory member to the board.*
- LEADER Region Kalkalpen National Park: *important partner to this EU fund allocating organisation.*
- Partner schools in the National Park region: *there is six partner schools based on a cooperation contract.*

Many visitors and the local community are not aware of the appreciation the area got 2017 when it was listed as part of the UNESCO WH property. It needs strong efforts to communicate the new status and to

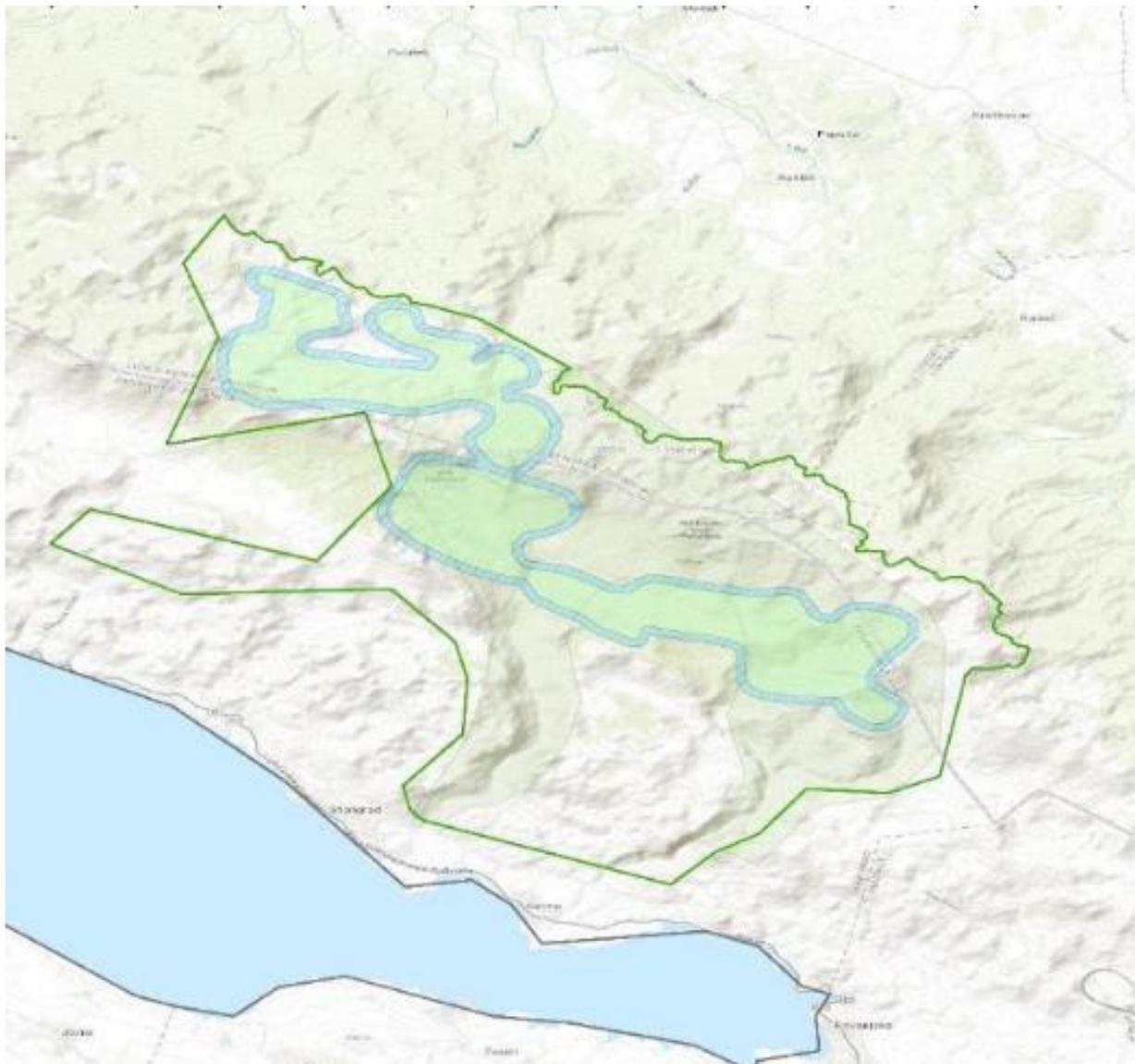


inform the local population as well as local and national stakeholders on the status and the 'story' behind the WH.

#### 4.2.5. Challenges - Paklenica (Croatia)

##### 4.2.5.1. General overview

The old-growth beech forests in Paklenica National Park represent the largest and oldest beech forest complex on the East Adriatic coast. The relief of the area also allows for the beech forests to expand into the higher lying grasslands in the future. The cluster is composed of two component parts. The two components of Suva Draga - Klimenta and Oglavinovac-Javornik lie within the PA designated as a national park (Figure 8). National parks in Croatia are managed by public institutions. The two component parts and their buffer zone fall under the management of the Public Institution Paklenica National Park. According to the Nature Conservation Act, any economic use of natural resources is prohibited in a national park and the management is based on the presumption that all the processes in the ecosystems must remain undisturbed. The area surrounding the Paklenica National Park is designated as the Velebit Nature Park. Economic activities and ecosystem services exploitation take place in Velebit Nature Park, under the provision that environmental protection conditions are fulfilled. This area besides nature protection also provides resources for development of sustainable forestry, agriculture, water-use, etc. Some of the key activities of this area are forestry, followed by hunting organized in hunting grounds, cattle-breeding, bee-keeping, etc.



**Figure 8: The WH component cluster in Paklenica National Park (green line), following the proposed minor boundary modification, with two component parts represented in green and buffer zone in blue (source: State Parties' State of Conservation report, 2020)**

#### 4.2.5.2. Management situation

The component cluster is managed by Paklenica National Park, while the entire area is under the Velebit Mountain Nature Park as well. The forests are under strict protection under Croatian law for the protection of nature. The Public Institution applies the visitor management model as well, which determined which sites are allowed to be visited, the number of visitors, the visiting mode and the organisation of the Park's presentation centre.



#### 4.2.5.3. History of public engagement

There is a history of public engagement for the whole area of Paklenica National Park. The most extensive participation of stakeholders was in 2006 as a part of the process of drafting the first Public Institution Management Plan.

Since the Paklenica National Park is one of the main drivers of development of tourism in Zadar County, there is an active cooperation with the touristic sector, e.g., Tourist Board of Zadar County, Tourist Board of Starigrad Municipality). The local Tourist Board has recognized the value of having a WH designation in its closest vicinity and has already expressed high motivation and need for additional skills and tools in promoting and communicating the WH. Generally, as it would be expected, there is positive feedback from the tourist sector when speaking of the opportunities that the WH provides to the development of the local community which is mainly tourism oriented.

The Ministry of Environment and Energy, which is responsible for supervising the work of the Public Institution, has been included in the management of the WH from the beginning. Local Action Groups together with Paklenica National Park are members of Coordination Body of Velebit Mountain Biosphere Reserve and they have important role in communicating the management issues and opportunities towards other stakeholders involved. NGOs, which conduct research on the area of Paklenica National Park and on the area of WH component parts, provide valuable data as well as recommendations for management based on study results.

There has been a general concern that service providers and private land owners in Paklenica National Park, especially those in the vicinity of the WH component parts are still not entirely aware of the importance and potential that the WH designation offers. Therefore, future efforts of the Paklenica National Park should be directed towards better communication of the WH.

#### 4.2.5.4. Boundary modifications

Currently, the modifications of the protective buffer zone of both component parts (Suva draga-Klimenta and Oglavinovac-Javornik) are taking place. Some technical corrections were made with the protection buffer sub-zone of one component part, due to the fact that on a larger scale it was noticed the protection buffer zone extended beyond the boundaries of the National Park, which if not corrected, might have caused managing problems in the future and possible conflicts with the Public Institution managing the Velebit Nature Park. In order to fit the minimum management regulations regarding the protection buffer sub-zone, a small modification of this sub-zone was made. Namely, the area of the small hamlet where locals had restored their old houses and use them as guesthouses and the mountain hut in the vicinity has been excluded from the protective buffer sub-zone. The modifications resulted in a slightly smaller surface of the buffer zone, which should not affect its protective role since the whole area surrounding the protection buffer sub-zone is managed according the IUCN Category II.



### 4.3. Conclusions regarding the situation of the studied component parts

The BEECH POWER WH pilot areas are facing a wide variety of different challenges, which given their geographical and subsequent socio-economic spread is not surprising. The pilot component parts are very diverse from large component clusters in Kalkalpen and Slovakia, to smaller ones such as Grumsin and Krokár. The target areas also represent different stages of the nomination process, with Slovak component clusters being part of the original designation, Grumsin being part of first extension (2011), and Austrian, Slovenian, and Croatian components joining the designation with the second extension (2017). The variety of different experience and specificities give a good foundation for preparation of a general strategy, which can address the entire transnational designation, while on the other hand some generalisations are challenging on such a diverse sample.

Vast majority of the pilot areas are state-owned, as there is a wide spread consensus that the imposition of restrictions and management of the areas is easier in such cases. Nevertheless, there are still some privately owned properties in Grumsin and Poloniny component parts and more prominently their buffer zones. Some of these situations have already been resolved, some are in the process, while some are likely to continue potentially causing threats to the integrity of the forest, while also pose challenges for productive stakeholder involvement in the future.

When we start discussing the management situation in the different pilot areas, the differences start to appear. Some of the studied component parts have very effective and generally well-funded managers, such as is the case of Paklenica and Kalkalpen National Parks. On the other end of the spectrum are less well-funded components without a clearly designated manager for specifically UNESCO WH component parts, such as is the case in both Slovenian components. Slovak component parts have clearly designated managers. However, they often struggle with complicated decision-making procedure in governance structure related to forestry and UNESCO designated areas.

#### BEST PRACTICES

- Identify a wide range of stakeholders
  - Linked directly to the component parts and buffer zones
  - Wider in the region
- Initiate collaboration programmes and certification schemes to support local communities
- Sustained, structured, and regular stakeholder involvement
- Collaborate with most relevant sectors to establish common benefits of strictly protected forests

All component parts and their managers have already been part of different public engagement activities. However, the spectrum of public engagement practices used is very wide. Kalkalpen National Park has established collaboration with over 500 stakeholders in the wider region and different schemes in place to ensure the wider public acceptance of the area. Paklenica National Park would follow with a well-



established, but more sectorial approach to public engagement, which is more focussed on touristic sector. Slovenian component parts have not seen much wide ranging and structured public engagement yet, however, there are well-set foundations and collaborations established between the relevant competent institutions. While Grumsin has been part of numerous stakeholder involvement activities, it seems like there are still some challenging discussions to be had, which has led to stakeholder expectations, which were not always fully met. The situation in Slovakia is somewhat improving, yet still the majority of stakeholder engagement activities are organised through bilateral meetings and focusses only on most contentious issues and the expert level.

Additionally, Slovenian, Croatian, and Slovak component parts are all in different stages of boundary modifications of various importance levels as well. The changes of boundaries, areas protected, and the protections regimes in place are some of the topics that should and must be discussed with the widest possible variety of stakeholders in order to ensure that the set protection regimes will be sustainable and accepted by the local communities. Therefore, this is a precondition for long-term successful protection of these forests and enabling the wider regional sustainable development.

## 4.4. BEECH POWER best practices

### 4.4.1. BEECH POWER stakeholder identification

BEECH POWER project is oriented towards transparent and engaging public participation throughout its course. As such, one of the first activities undertaken on the project was to identify the relevant stakeholders for each of the pilot areas by the relevant project partners. Particular focus was applied to stakeholders directly involved or impacted by the buffer zones. However, it needs to be emphasised that the general principle for compiling stakeholder lists is not specific to buffer zones and can be used in any context. However, it is helpful to structure the stakeholders identification with the geographical zones as well, i.e. identifying stakeholders relevant for the component part, then stakeholders to be involved also in the management of buffer zones and finally also wider. Often the same stakeholders will be identified in more than one geographical scope. In some cases, the lists of relevant stakeholders have already been prepared in previous projects (e.g. ECO KARST - NP Kalkalpen, Austria), or for the purposes of UNESCO nomination (e.g. Krokar and Snežnik, Slovenia). In these cases, the existing lists were reviewed, contact details updated, if needed, and supplemented with new stakeholders, which were not considered or involved before. Local experts and rangers, who are intimately aware of the situations on the ground, helped identify these new stakeholders. The new stakeholders are often smaller NGOs and societies, which operate on mostly voluntary and recreational basis, making it more difficult to keep track of their activities, as well as wishes.

For some of the other pilot areas, more extensive stakeholder identification studies had to be undertaken to establish these lists for the first time. In Slovakia, most of the stakeholders communicated in the previous period were forest owners and managers, and some ministries, professional organizations and NGOs were also involved. The associated project partner, the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, provided the list. During the project, a broader range of groups was involved. Therefore, all the affected



municipalities, regional self-government, universities, tourism associations, supplemented the existing lists, and so on. It was necessary to explore a lot of information and gather contacts to these partners.

In Croatia, while being responsible for management of the National Park, Public Institution Paklenica NP has been involved in long-term communication and collaboration with the stakeholders. The success and intensity of this collaboration has been different depending on the type of stakeholders. During the development of the first management plan for this PA, in 2006, several workshops had been held including the whole range of stakeholders. Their inputs have helped to shape goals and activities of the Management Plan. The two component parts in the Paklenica National Park are located on the Velebit Mountain which has been protected on several levels. The majority of the surface is protected as a nature park and there are two national parks both of which have WH components inside their borders, managed by three Public Institutions. Additionally, all three Institutions are involved in management of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Velebit Mountain and are currently involved into simultaneous development of their Public Institution's new Management Plans. The two other Public Institutions, therefore, stand out as very important stakeholders who have been involved in the decision-making processes from the start. Paklenica National Park had a pre-prepared list of stakeholders for other events and projects in which was involved earlier. The existing list was reviewed, contact details updated and supplemented with new stakeholders for the purposes of BEECH POWER project. Stakeholders are involved on different levels; from direct involvement in planning processes and decision making to public information. The stakeholders are ministries, municipalities, local action groups, public institutions of surrounding PAs, tourist boards, private landowners, locals, etc. Within the implementation of an EU-funded project, that gives accent to the development of sustainable, active and safe yearlong tourism in Paklenica National Park and wider surroundings, numerous workshops had been held which included wide range of stakeholders.

In Grumsin, the stakeholder identification was based on personal knowledge of key persons, on contacts that the BR Schorfheide-Chorin, as associated partner and official management institution of the Grumsin, holds about the advisory board members for the Grumsin, as well as about private forest owners in the core zone and along hiking trails. Referring to the privately owned land in the buffer zone, a new investigation of contact details of the land owners had to be made at the respective public entity holding the ownership data, as the data was not available at the associate project partner, the BR Schorfheide-Chorin. The stakeholder list is thus a new product created by the BEECH POWER project.

Particular data were collected about all identified stakeholders, such as their contact details (telephone, email, and postal addresses), as well as notes on their relation to WH component parts, which can in subsequent phases allow for their grouping and easier planning of the public engagement events.

It should be noted that stakeholder identification is an ongoing process. Throughout the public participation activities, new information about stakeholders will likely emerge. Therefore, continuous updating of the stakeholder lists should be going on.

#### **4.4.2. BEECH POWER participative action**

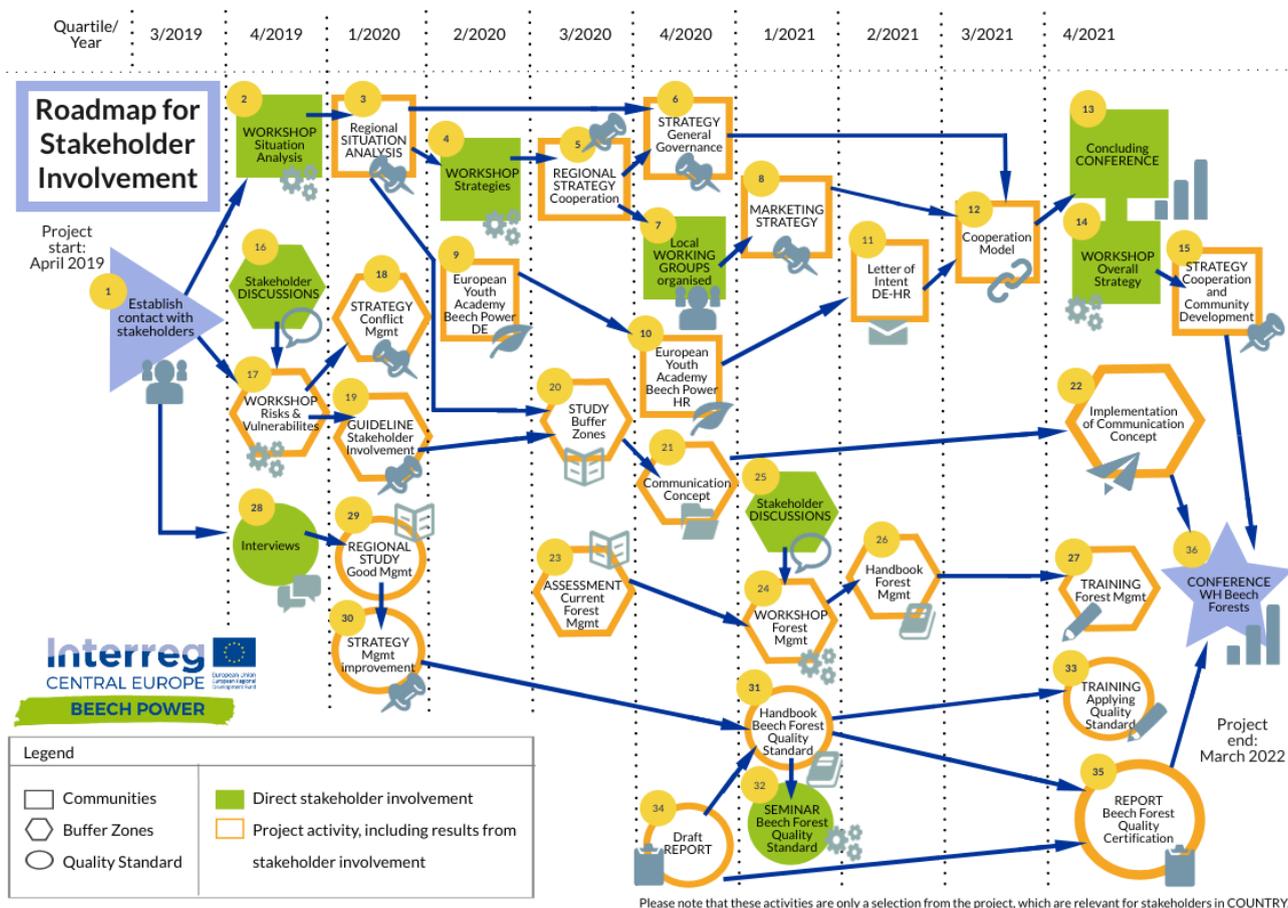
Through the BEECH POWER project, a number of different stakeholder involvement activities are being implemented (see Figure 9). Situational analyses with involvement of local and national stakeholders, using



the methodology of Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation were carried out for both Slovenian component parts, as well as Grumsin in Germany, and another workshop is still planned for Paklenica NP in Croatia. Additionally, a MARISCO workshop (D.T2.1.1) on vulnerability and risk assessment with national and international experts was conducted for both Slovenian component parts, which included also a brief situational analysis from a different perspective. For Slovak component parts, only the MARISCO workshop with national and international experts, and some local stakeholders was carried out, which also allowed the preparation of situational analysis. Moreover, in Slovenia, a set of educational conflict resolution workshop were organised to give participants better knowledge for effectively and constructively resolve any existing or potential new conflicts. These workshops allowed a better insight into the existing tensions between stakeholders, thus offering important knowledge to be taken into account in the next steps.

All above mentioned workshops also provided the opportunity to jointly define goals and objectives for management of the component parts, while also explaining the existing restrictions of land use, that are ingrained with the UNESCO status and cannot be changed.

Through BEECH POWER project further stakeholder involvement activities are planned in Slovenia and Germany in the form of Strategy workshops, where management measures and activities will be jointly defined with wide group of stakeholders for both component parts. These workshops are planned in May 2020. Furthermore, in Autumn 2020, the formation of local action groups which would focus on productive communications with the manager and implementation of some measures is planned, again for both Slovenian component parts, through the work in WP T1.



**Figure 9: Roadmap for stakeholder involvement and participatory activities within the BEECH POWER project**

## 4.5. Conclusions on opportunities and best practices from BEECH POWER project

Experience of the BEECH POWER project so far clearly demonstrates the importance of well implemented stakeholder engagement activities. The preparation of a thorough and regularly updated stakeholder lists was the foundation for this work and regardless of how well prepared the stakeholder lists were before the start of this project, all project partners could provide meaningful updates, which improved their outreach. Thus, further illustrating the point that regular updating of these lists is vital for sustained stakeholder engagement.

Structured, well-thought out, and thorough preparation of workshops and events that followed was another key best practice and something that should take place before any stakeholder engagement. While this is a time-consuming and often rather expensive endeavour, as professional facilitators engaged are needed external service providers, as well as adaptations of the methodologies in order to tailor them best to specific, local needs often require the involvement of professionals (such as mediators, facilitators, communicators). While the investment can be considerable, the benefits are immeasurable. The experience



from this project alone demonstrated that even in areas where stakeholder fatigue has been pronounced, or where existing conflicts with and between stakeholder usually dominate discussions, well-planned events were able to by-pass that to a large extent and create a productive and constructive atmosphere. The value of produced results, has already also been recognised, as they have already been integrated into national reports (e.g. State Parties' State of Conservation report) or are being integrated into draft versions of new conservation policies, as well as being considered as relevant inputs for preparations and revisions of management plans.

An important lesson learnt was also that the approaches that work in certain areas, might not work in others. Another important result was producing comparable and easily exchangeable results, which already demonstrate the usefulness of applying the same methods for situation analysis and strategy development all over Europe and worldwide. Therefore, it is a balance between tailoring the stakeholder engagement approaches to particular stakeholder groups or local specificities and ensuring comparable results across the UNESCO property. The value of transnational cooperation and knowledge exchange has been a key success factor in this story. Therefore, going forward it is important that cooperation among different PA managers within this WH property and beyond is established, where various practices and experience can be shared and active stakeholder involvement can keep improving on a continental level.



## 5. Strategy for active involvement of stakeholders in buffer zone management

### 5.1. Vision for active stakeholder involvement in buffer zone management

All WH beech forests' buffer zones are managed with wide-ranging and encompassing support of groups and individuals with a stake in their development, conservation, or use, thus bringing ecological and economic benefits to the wider regions, as well as effectively protecting the WH forests.

Successful conservation of ancient and primeval forests, under strict protection regimes, can be challenging, as there is potential for public opposition, especially from local stakeholders, who have been using these areas the most. Active stakeholder involvement provides a way for them to get involved in the globally outstanding natural heritage in their region and create ownership of the forests. While due to specificities of the WH status, not all stakeholders can be equally involved in the management of the component parts, nor can the protection regimes be entirely co-created with the public, active stakeholder involvement should be one of the main tools that the PA managers use to effectively manage the (buffer zone) area and avoid conflicts.

The overarching goal for active stakeholder involvement should therefore be to identify the relevant stakeholders and determine the best ways to have them involved in all stages of management of the WH component parts' buffer zones in a productive and constructive manner.

### 5.2. Objectives and Strategic Actions

While the component parts of this serial, transnational UNESCO property are very varied in terms of their forests, management situations, public engagement histories, funding, and so on, the general principles of active stakeholder engagement in buffer zones should be applied across this diverse collection of PAs. As the vision outlines, active and meaningful stakeholder involvement is vital for long-term conservation of European ancient and primeval beech forests. There are already some great practices that have been implemented for years in and around certain component parts, but there is also room for improvement and extending those practices to other places as well.

Most of the BEECH POWER pilot areas have struggled in the past to sustain stakeholder involvement and make sure that the stakeholders' suggestions were clearly shown in the decisions. Often the PA managers also focus most on the protection of their component parts and forget the need to contribute to wider community. For example, both Paklenica and Kalkalpen National Parks have great outreach into the wider



region, while on the other hand they do not recognise any important stakeholders within their PAs. Since UNESCO and existing protection regimes already curtail the involvement of wider stakeholder groups in the management itself, it is important to still involve them and devise common ways for the component parts to bring benefits to their “hosting” communities. Numerous component parts are also going through boundary modifications and rezonations. These always have the potential to create disagreements and conflicts with local and national stakeholders. Active stakeholder involvement is one of the best strategies to counteract this and deescalate situations, while finding compromises.

Strategy objectives are formulated in order to achieve the vision of high stakeholder involvement and inclusivity in the management of the WH component parts and their buffer zones. Each objective includes a number of priorities linked to its successful achievement. The objectives and priorities are organised in a way in which they should be implemented chronologically, if they are not already.

1. Increase the number of involved stakeholders (individuals and groups) from local levels in the management of WH component parts and their buffer zones.
  - a. Establish links between events and decision-making
  - b. Establish appropriate communication channels and invitation procedures
  - c. Increase the number of events with active participation of stakeholders
  - d. Implement local action/working groups, organised by the relevant topics or geographic origin
  
2. Ensure compliance with relevant existing requirements of the WH Convention and its supporting documentation in all component parts, with particular focus on the documents relating to buffer zones
  - a. Elaborate a summary of key documents (WH Convention, Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the WH Convention, IUCN Evaluations 2006, 2010, 2016, WH Committee Decisions, Joint Management Committee Guidelines)
  - b. Provision of key documents in national languages and collection of additional management-related national documents to the interested publics
  - c. Provide guidance, consulting, and other necessary support to property managers to fully implement the requirements
  - d. Monitor the compliance and identify threats to the OUV and integrity due to noncompliance
  
3. Deescalate existing conflicts and actively avoid new ones in the buffer zones
  - This objective covers a broader scope and is dealt with in greater detail in O.T2.2 - Strategy for conflict management in buffer zones of WH beech forests and D.T2.1.3 - Strategy for conflict management in Slovenia and Slovakia
  
4. Assure the wider regional sustainable development around WH component parts and the use of the buffer zones for that purpose



- This objective covers a broader scope of topics and is dealt with in greater detail in O.T1.2 - Strategy for the creation of additional participatory processes in the surroundings of PAs

### **5.3. Strategic Actions and Activities related to active involvement of stakeholders into buffer zone management**

#### **5.3.1. OBJECTIVE: Increase the number of involved stakeholders (individuals and groups) from local levels in the (buffer zone) management of WH component parts**

##### **5.3.1.1. STRATEGIC ACTION: Establish links between events and decision-making**

#### **SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 1: Prepare a clear structure of stakeholder involvement and the decision-making processes they support**

It is important to develop a systematic plan for stakeholder involvement, which includes clear stipulations as to how and why the collected information and inputs will be used. A straight-forward way to achieve that is by designing a stakeholder engagement roadmap (see example Figure 9 8). At the same time, limits of participation and decision-making procedures and structures should be clearly explained (in relation to the second strategic objective). It is also important to be clear and transparent about the way that the stakeholder contributions will be used after the events and procedures through which they will go before being implemented in the management and how. Communication feedbacks should be established to ensure that the stakeholders get the information about what happened to their suggestions and rationale why.

Ensure the properly qualified staff to communicate with stakeholders on regular basis, both in the form of event and by responding to any concerns and questions raised. This can be done through a web-based channels and surveys that people can use to submit their thoughts. It is important to ensure that there are always responses to the concerns raised.

#### **SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 2: Identify relevant stakeholders and develop the most appropriate ways for their involvement**

The process of active engagement of stakeholders should start with a stakeholder analysis, where the stakeholders are identified and grouped in terms of their roles. Most PA managers will already have some stakeholder lists ready from past activities. However, if possible, it is beneficial to conduct interviews with the stakeholders, before inviting them to events, to establish what are their interests and opinions and what kind of cooperation would work best for them. The first step is to compile a database of all stakeholders



around the WH component part. The stakeholder databases should be continuously evolving, with new stakeholders identified and added. Thus, it is important to regularly consult a number of different data sources:

- Land-use contracts or GIS-based collection of land managers/owners,
- Management plans,
- Databases on tourism,
- Data on infrastructure elements around the area,
- Permissions issued for activities and events around the area,
- Event calendar (for local events),
- Local news sources (media),
- Municipalities, associations, chambers of commerce,
- Local distribution platforms (such through local groups, societies, and their media groups),
- Online fora,
- Official and unofficial partnerships.

The identified stakeholders should cover at least the following organisations or individuals:

- Responsible national, regional and municipal institutions, which have jurisdiction over the sites in question,
- Expert organisations on biodiversity and ecosystem condition,
- Professional and advisory institutions in forestry,
- Public companies, such as public forest enterprises,
- Organisations with concessions for wildlife, fish, and other natural resources management,
- Environmental and conservation NGOs,
- Tourism NGOs,
- Land owners and business operators,
- (Schools).

These and other stakeholders should be grouped into, at least, three different categories, to help with better structuring of stakeholder involvement process:

1. True collaborators
  - Stakeholders to be involved in the processes actively and which can contribute the most to the implementation of management decisions. They are expected to play an active role throughout the entirety of the process. BEECH POWER suggests the formation of local action groups, which can take over this role.
2. Consultation



- Stakeholders to be consulted in early stages, as they possess valuable information or power. They should be invited to events for stakeholders, although a less active role might be acceptable. BEECH POWER suggest inviting them to, at least, annual meetings.

### 3. Information

- Stakeholders to be only informed about new developments. While it is not expected that this group will play an active part in decision-making, there should still exist conduits for members of this group to propose suggestions.

It is crucial to ensure the highest levels of inclusivity, by continuously revising existing stakeholder databases. The grouping should not be entirely formalised, and would be best implemented by a group of people with a good overview of the (surrounding) area and the relevant stakeholders. Individual categories should reflect various legal statuses of stakeholders, decision-making powers and different socio-economic backgrounds. After the groupings are compiled, social network analysis can take place. Social networks represent an interconnected social sphere, where individuals and organisations interact in various ways. Nodes of the network represent players in this field. Edges of the network show some type of connection between nodes, which need to be standard, such as having business ties, communication, friendship, etc. Most PA managers do not have their stakeholder lists developed to such detail. However, this is of great help when properly structuring the next steps of active involvement and having a clear picture of who should be involved in which activities.

#### 5.3.1.2. STRATEGIC ACTION: Establish appropriate communication channels and invitation procedures

##### SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 1: Develop the appropriate and stakeholder-relevant invitation procedures

Ensuring effectiveness of invitation procedures can often be challenging, especially if stakeholder distrust or fatigue are present in the area. A variety of different methods should be tried and the most effective ones or combinations of them should be employed. These include email and paper invitations, as well as telephone calls, and personal visits.

Invitations are an important and often a crucial step in the involvement of stakeholders. The general option is an invitation letter, which includes the goal of the process and the desired role of stakeholders in it. However, in addition to that it is desirable, and often needed, to engage stakeholders also personally (by telephone, for example) and talk to them about their indispensable role in the process (Golob, 2019).

##### SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 2: Establish appropriate and effective communication channels to keep the stakeholders involved and informed



The World Heritage sites and in particular component parts of the Primeval and Ancient Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe have a number of specificities that have to be taken into account. A number of goals, objectives, and required activities is already set, either by the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines, or the World Heritage Committee decisions. Moreover, given the numerous extensions and evaluation by the IUCN, a number of challenges that have been identified have to be addressed. Considering also that this WH site is a transnational serial designation, and by far the most complex and extensive one at that, guidelines from the coordination office and decisions of the Joint Management Committee have to be respected as well. These considerations limit the scope of the stakeholder discussions and goals, as some of them are already pre-set and have to be adapted to by all.

Nevertheless, the limitation is often that these restrictions are not communicated clearly. Therefore, the stakeholders and publics are unaware of the restrictions placed upon the area and their interactions with it, as well as broader UNESCO recognition, related to cooperation, intercultural exchange and public inclusion, amongst others. The latter in particular has been recognised as a significant gap across the majority of management levels (from the PAs to the State Parties). UNESCO WH sites are expected to actively engage in cultural exchanges and understanding, raising awareness and providing experiences of their OUV. These expectations should also be part of the communications with the local stakeholders. There are also limited possibilities for transfer of the local opinions and perspectives to the upper levels, both related to the management level, as well as to the transnational level.

This can be addressed by providing a clear communication strategy, both on the levels of the overall transnational WH property and for every component part or cluster, developing a set of tools, and if at all possible engaging a communications specialist to assist in disseminating the information in a way that will be most likely accepted by the local communities. The communication strategies developed at different levels should complement each other. Oftentimes, it is also beneficial to establish cooperation with other organisations outside PAs and their managers to lead similar, parallel processes with wider regional stakeholders and inform them about the news. These organisations could include regional tourist organisations or sustainable development agencies, as well as some sectorial agencies.

Alternative communication channels to personal meetings should be developed and employed as well, such as web-based channels, where responses have to be ensured by the management authority and dedicated staff to address any concerns raised, while also having a productive cooperation going with the leadership of the management authority.

The results of successful communication will be that PA managers, national policy-makers, representatives from the civil society and other relevant stakeholders understand the importance of UNESCO WH component parts and see them as compatible with their needs. The communication should aim to encourage stakeholders to be active in the wider management of the component parts and buffer zones. Communication of WH component parts and their buffer zones should focus on raising awareness, increasing knowledge and changing attitude and behaviour of the stakeholders, as well as engaging all target groups, relevant to the buffer zones, through the implementation of targeted activities.

The challenge in terms of communication of a transnational UNESCO designation will be to have a coherent message that incorporates, to a certain extent, all component parts from different backgrounds and countries. Such a message will also have to resonate at a European and a local level. This project must inspire the public and at the same time be understood by targeted stakeholders who are directly impacted



by this WH inscription. This will require communication materials in main languages used in the international arena (i.e. English, French), as well as the national and local languages relevant to all of the State Parties and if relevant specific component parts or clusters.

#### 5.3.1.3. STRATEGIC ACTION: Increase the number of events with active participation of stakeholders

##### **SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 1: Establish regular, high-quality participation events for local stakeholders**

There can be issues with improper stakeholder involvement, when public participation is on paper implemented, but the actual level of involvement of publics is questionable or their inputs are not translated into management action. Therefore, it is often recommended to use a trained, professional moderator to provide, at the very least, supervision of the public engagement, or, even better, lead the public engagement for the management authority. This should be implemented in general, not only for Slovenian and Slovak component parts.

It is important to structure the participation process in advance and lay out the plans for all stakeholders to see. Stakeholders need to know what is expected of them and when they will have the opportunities to contribute to the process. Generally, the participative action planning consists of, at least, three rounds of stakeholder events:

##### 1. Situation analysis

- Where a variety of different stakeholders is invited. In certain cases, it might make sense to divide them into different groups and events, to be able to better capture their inputs (i.e. local stakeholders in one group, experts in the other). There is also a number of different methodologies to be used. BEECH POWER suggests the use of Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation<sup>4</sup> and potentially MARISCO<sup>5</sup> (Adaptive Management of Vulnerability and Risk at Conservation sites) methodologies.

##### 2. Setting goals and objectives

- Goals, objectives, and strategies for management should be defined commonly, with all different stakeholders present. Nevertheless, the manager should know where the realistic boundaries are and keep them in mind and the participants informed of them. BEECH POWER again suggests the use of the above mentioned methodologies (Open Standards and MARISCO).

##### 3. Measures and activities (implementation)

- The implementation of defined measures should be divided among different stakeholders, where the three categories presented above come into play.

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://cmp-openstandards.org/>

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.marisco.training/resources/manual/>



Efforts should also be spared to organise innovative events and use different formats for stakeholder involvement, with particular focus on providing a good experience for the participants. One of the tried and tested options for that is to add field trips to the agendas. On a regular basis also guided tours for the local could be considered and implemented.

The events for stakeholders should take place at least annually, although it is strongly suggested to invite them more regularly, if possible. Apart from just the stakeholder fora, it is also recommended to establish other stakeholder engagement bodies.

### **SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 2: Organise well-structured and thought-out events**

World Heritage sites and in particular the component parts of the Primeval and Ancient Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe have a number of specificities that have to be taken into account. A number of goals, objectives, and required activities are already set, either by the WH Convention and its Operational Guidelines, or the WH Committee's decisions. Moreover, given the numerous extensions and evaluation by the IUCN, a number of identified challenges have to be addressed. Considering also that this WH property is a transnational serial designation, and by far the most complex and extensive one at that, guidelines from the coordination office and decisions of the Joint Management Committee have to be respected as well.

Nevertheless, stakeholder participation is crucial and should be planned well. A number of elements need to be defined:

1. Purpose and programme for each workshop (with concrete needs or topic defined),
2. List of invited stakeholders and the method of invitation,
3. Introductory presentations and what they will contain,
4. Engagement of a moderator and approval of a method (optional, but recommended),
5. Time and venue of the event,
6. Programme for field visits (if appropriate, but highly recommended),
7. Logistics and catering,
8. Post-event engagement.

Successful stakeholder involvement will require certain skills from the manager. A background in social sciences and experience with empirical methods of social sciences is an advantage or extensive facilitation experience, yet it is possible to work without these qualifications. Even better would be the involvement of professional moderators and facilitators in stakeholder activities. These are professionals that act as neutral participants in discussions, ensure equal representation, keep the debates on topic, and are trained in diffusion of conflict situations. Moderators as external service providers can also ensure that the gap between the manager and distrustful stakeholders can be bridged by a neutral party, which is seen as trustworthy on both sides. Facilitators become truly invaluable when more complex stakeholder involvement activities are planned and when an actual effort to co-create solutions to issues or to collaborate with local stakeholders. Preferred option would be to opt for long-term involvement of facilitators or a group of facilitators, which will get familiar with the context and past developments.



**5.3.1.4. STRATEGIC ACTION:** Implement local action/working groups, organised by the relevant topics of geographic origin

**SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 1: Formation of local action or working groups, as support systems**

In order to more directly involve also local stakeholders, which are organised on lower levels and do not hold decision-making power, the formation of local action groups is proposed. Local action groups will be self-organised and will meet according to their own schedules. They will be composed of the relevant representatives of stakeholders involved in buffer zones. Examples of such organisations could include hunting associations, tourism providers, foresters, land owners, NGOs, etc. They should have clearly established links and cooperation with the manager of the WH component part or cluster. The local action groups will also be tested in pilot areas as part of O.T1.3 - Testing of pilot model for local World heritage working groups.

Relevant groups will often relate to local and regional tourism organisations and providers, as well as any other major stakeholder groups in the areas and NGO sector.

**5.3.2. OBJECTIVE:** Ensure compliance with relevant existing requirements of the WH Convention and its supporting documentation in all component parts

**5.3.2.1. STRATEGIC ACTION:** Elaborate a summary of key documents (WH Convention, Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the WH Convention, IUCN Evaluations 2006, 2010, 2016, WH Committee Decisions, Joint Management Committee Guidelines)

**SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 1 Prepare short and easily comprehensive summaries of key documents for general public and various expert and decision-making institutions**

The breadth of documentation, legal and other requirements, on different levels, that governs the management and human activities within UNESCO WH sites is extremely wide and difficult to navigate for people who have not spend at least some time in this field. There should be a table prepared with the most important statements, WH Committee Decisions and their interpretations prepared on a transnational level, as well as including key provisions of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the WH Convention, IUCN recommendations, and JMC Guidelines.

This table should then be translated into national languages and further supplemented with relevant national legislations and restrictions that are in place, to provide a complete overview for every component part of cluster. Additionally, it would be of added value to have these national tables in English, as well, so



the coordination office has a more complete overview of the situation in each of the countries, and can therefore offer the needed assistance in an easier and more site-specific relevant way.

#### **SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 2 Disseminate the summaries in a targeted and stakeholder group appropriate ways**

The prepared summaries should then be disseminated to the appropriate stakeholder groups. As already mentioned, the coordination office should receive a copy. Additionally, the members of national steering committee and advisory board members should be fully aware of the relevant provisions of the documentation. Additionally, it would be helpful to prepare the further summaries of relevant restrictions and their underlying justification to be printed on informational boards to reach general public. Thematic summaries could be used to inform the local action groups. Furthermore, these materials should also be prepared as communication outputs and used during the organised stakeholder engagement activities.

##### **5.3.2.2. STRATEGIC ACTION: Provision of key documents in national languages and collection of additional management-related national documents to the interested publics**

Effective involvement of stakeholders is also, in large part dependent on the transparent provision of information, which should include a standard set of informative maps, clearly showing the boundaries of the buffer zones, uses of the land, boundaries of WH component parts and so on. Other basic information should include the conservation and other regimes in place, which should be made in an easy to understand way and widely available to avoid people breaking the restrictions unawares. This information should be provided in national languages and in English and posted along the main entrances to the buffer zones and component parts, as well as available online and in printed forms in the visitor centres and other visitor infrastructure. The provided information should also include information about the responsible and management authorities for all various fields of interactions (e.g. tourism, overall management, education and so on).

##### **5.3.2.3. STRATEGIC ACTION: Provide guidance, consulting, and other necessary support to property managers to fully implement the requirements**

#### **SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 1 Prepare trainings for the general staff of the manager on the OUV and conserving the integrity of UNESCO protected beech forests**

It has been noted that often the general staff and conservation or forestry experts involved in the management of these WH component parts are not fully aware of why these particular forests have been inscribed on the UNESCO WH list, and what distinguishes them from other forested reserves. Therefore, it is vital to raise the awareness of the managers in the importance of the UNESCO designation. These trainings should include topics of beech genetics and the expansion models, as well as the importance of beech forests in general for conserving of European biodiversity and in particular ancient and primeval beech forests. The specificities in the management of WH sites should be presented, as well. Particular focus should be put on the main challenges that have been identified, such as visitor pressures, forestry practices around the component parts and the added value that strictly protected forests bring to the community and nations as a whole.



**SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 2 Provide necessary trainings for the national expert bodies and decision-making institutions on the specificities and importance of UNESCO protected beech forests**

Similar awareness raising events should also be provided to the national expert bodies and ministries, which prepare policies and opinions, which can affect the management of these areas, while often not being fully aware of the values the reserves protect and why. This is particularly important where the knowledge is low and people only see the UNESCO brand, but do not understand why the forests have received it. Such trainings should be the precondition before any tourism or development planning in near vicinity of the component parts or clusters.

**SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 3 Guidance document (Common code of best practice) developed and implemented**

Active stakeholder involvement is one of the tasks of PA managers. However, to be able to properly implement it, management of the PA has to be running smoothly in other areas, as well, otherwise the stakeholder inputs can hardly be integrated into meaningful management. Moreover, since these beech forests are part of a transnational WH property, it is important that they are all achieving excellent conservation and other standards. For this reason, a development of a guidance document for management, for example in the form of “Common code of best practice”, which will address conservation status, the quality of the component part and buffer zone management, as well as the contribution to the regional added value is needed.

The developed guidance should also be adopted both by the JMC, as well as by individual State Parties and component part and cluster managers. In order to ensure the smoothest and proper implementation, the development of the guidance should be accompanied by a training on its application. These trainings would likely start first on international level, but should then trickle down and get adapted on national and regional levels, as well.

**5.3.2.4. STRATEGIC ACTION: Monitor the compliance and identify threats to the integrity (and OUV) due to noncompliance**

**SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 1 Establish a monitoring system for compliance with the various requirements (local, national, transnational level)**

There should be an established and officially recognised monitoring system in place, which will ensure that the managers and State Parties comply with the requirements set for this UNESCO WH. Partly this can be done through the national steering groups and the established advisory boards. However, it would be beneficial if such monitoring could, at least in part, be done through the coordination office, as it will provide a more unbiased and neutral perspective, while also having the overview over the entirety of the transnational property.



## **SPECIFIC ACTIVITY 2 Establish a stakeholder monitoring system of threats (MARISCO, OS)**

It is also important to keep the stakeholders involved in continuous monitoring and identification of new threats. This can flow through established participatory processes or organisation of additional events, using either MARISCO or Open Standards methodologies in regular intervals (for example, every five years). This will allow the stakeholders to retain an active role in the steering of the management of PAs, as well as provide wider and more general perspectives on what is socially considered a threat at a particular point of time and how this should be addressed.

### **5.3.3. OBJECTIVE: Deescalate existing conflicts and actively avoid new ones**

For more information, please refer to the project Output O.T2.2 - Strategy for conflict management in buffer zones of WH beech forests and project deliverable D.T2.1.3 - Development of a strategy for conflict management.

### **5.3.4. OBJECTIVE: Assure the wider regional sustainable development around WH component parts**

For more information, please refer to the project Output O.T1.1 - Governance strategies for integrating natural heritage in regional development planning.



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## 7. Annex I

Provisional Statement of Outstanding Universal Value from 41 COM

Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe, Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Germany, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine

Criterion (ix)

*Approved Version (Joint Management Committee), 28. April 2020*

### **Brief synthesis**

The “Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe” are a transnational serial property comprising 78 component parts across 12 countries and 41 protected areas. They represent an outstanding example of relatively undisturbed, complex temperate forests and exhibit a wide spectrum of comprehensive ecological patterns and processes of pure and mixed stands of European beech across a variety of environmental conditions. During each glacial phase (ice ages) of the last 1 million years, European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) survived the unfavourable climatic conditions in refuge areas in the southern parts of the European continent. These refuge areas have been documented by scientists through palaeoecological analysis and using the latest techniques in genetic coding. After the last ice age, around 11,000 years ago, beech started expanding its range from these southern refuge areas to eventually cover large parts of the European continent. During this expansion process, which is still ongoing, beech formed different types of plant communities while occupying largely different environments. The interplay between a diversity of environments, climatic gradients and different species gene pools has and continues to shape this high diversity of beech forest communities. These forests contain an invaluable population of old trees and a genetic reservoir of beech and many other species, which are associated with and dependent on these old growth forest habitats.

### **Criteria**

**Criterion (ix):** The property is indispensable for the understanding of the history and evolution of the genus *Fagus* which, given its wide distribution in the Northern Hemisphere and its ecological importance, is globally significant. These largely undisturbed, complex temperate forests exhibit comprehensive ecological patterns and processes of pure and mixed stands of European beech across a variety of environmental gradients, including climatic and geological conditions, spanning almost all European Beech Forest Regions. Forests are included from all altitudinal zones from coastal areas to the treeline and, include the best remaining examples from the range limits of the European beech forest. Beech is one of the most important features in the Temperate Broadleaf Forest Biome and represents an outstanding example of the re-colonization and development of terrestrial ecosystems and communities since the last Ice Age. The continuing northern and westward expansion of beech from its original glacial refuge areas in the eastern and southern parts of Europe can be tracked along natural corridors and stepping stones spanning the continent. The dominance of beech across extensive areas of Europe is a living testimony of the tree’s genetic adaptability, a process which is still ongoing.



## ***Integrity***

The selected component parts represent the diversity of ancient and primeval beech forests found across Europe in terms of different climatic and geological conditions and altitudinal zones. The property includes component parts, which convey its Outstanding Universal Value, and represent the variability of European beech forest ecosystems. Together these components contribute to the integrity of the property as a whole. Additionally, each component part needs to demonstrate integrity at the local level by representing the full suite of natural forest development processes in its particular geographical and ecological setting within the series. Most of the component parts are of sufficient size to maintain such natural processes necessary for their long-term ecological viability.

The most significant threats to the property are logging and habitat fragmentation. Logging activities in the close vicinity of component parts can cause microclimatic changes and nutrient mobilising effects, with negative impacts on the integrity of the property. Land use change in the surrounding landscapes can lead to increased habitat fragmentation, which would be of particular concern for smaller component parts. Infrastructure development is a potential threat only in the surroundings of a few component parts. Climate change already poses a risk to some component parts and further impacts can be anticipated, including changes in species composition and habitat shifting. However, it should be noted that one of the attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property is its demonstration of the ability of beech to adapt to different ecological and climatic regimes throughout its range. Therefore, potential future changes need to be monitored and documented in order to better understand these processes.

The above-mentioned threats may affect the integrity of the component parts to a different extent and in different ways, for example through the reduction of structural diversity, fragmentation, loss of connectivity, biomass loss and changed microclimate, which reduce ecosystem functionality and adaptive capacity as a whole. To cope with these threats, buffer zones are established and are managed accordingly by the responsible management bodies.

## ***Protection and management requirements***

A strict non-intervention management is essential for the conservation of the OUV of this serial property across all its component parts. 69 out of 78 component parts are protected by law as strict forest reserves, wilderness areas, core areas of biosphere reserves or national parks (IUCN category I or II). Five component parts are protected and managed by Forest Management Plans (with regulations ensuring no logging in old-growth forests) however in four component parts the full area inscribed is not fully covered with the highest legal protection status necessary to ensure non-intervention management. As it is of uppermost importance to guarantee strong protection status in the long term, the protection status will be improved where needed.

To ensure the viability of the four component parts smaller than the established minimum size of 50 ha, an enlargement of the component parts with further non-intervention management will be considered by the States Parties. Additionally, an effective management of buffer zones to protect the property from external threats and to safeguard its integrity is of uppermost importance.

The integrity of each component part is the responsibility of the State Party and is ensured by the relevant local management units. For the coherent protection and management of the property, as well as to coordinate activities between the 41 management units and the 12 States Parties, a functional organisational structure should be established. To ensure this aspect, an Integrated Management System was developed during the nomination process and will be maintained to allow effective and coordinated management and protection of the property as a whole. The Joint Management Committee, comprising representatives of all States Parties, formulated a Joint Declaration of Intent. This Declaration regulates and structures the cooperation between all the States Parties whose territory is included in the property and ensures the commitment to protect and strengthen the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.



The position of a coordinator will be established and maintained to support the Joint Management Committee and the States Parties in their work.

The Integrated Management System and the management plans of the component parts will ensure a non-intervention management approach for the component parts while the buffer zones will be managed to avoid negative impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property with a specific focus on ensuring integrity remains intact. To harmonise the management approach across the 78 component parts, the States Parties will develop common objectives and coordinated activities which will cover property and buffer zone management, monitoring and research, education and awareness raising, visitor management and tourism as well as financial and human capacity building. It is proposed to establish a coherent monitoring system based on selected ecological (proxy) indicators of integrity within all component parts to compare long-term development. It is imperative that each State Party provides clear and committed long-term funding arrangements, to support consistent national site management as well as coordinated management.

Special attention is required to ensure the configuration of the property such that each component part retains ongoing viability to evolve with unimpeded ecological and biological processes and without the need for substantial interventions. This includes the integration of surrounding forest ecosystems to provide sufficient protection and connectivity, especially for small component parts. All component parts have buffer zones of various configurations including surrounding protected areas (national parks, nature parks, biosphere reserves and others). These buffer zones will be regularly monitored to ensure protection under changing environmental conditions such as climate change. The boundaries of buffer zones should, where possible, be aligned with existing protected area boundaries and should be expanded to connect components where they are in close proximity. Finally, where appropriate, special ongoing emphasis is needed to ensure effective ecological connectivity between beech forests and the surrounding complementary habitats to allow natural development and adaptation of the forest to the environmental change.

### **O.T2.1: Strategy for the Active Involvement of Stakeholders in WH Beech Forest Buffer Zone Management**

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