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# STRATEGY FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN BUFFER ZONES OF WH BEECH FORESTS

Final version

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**Figure 1: The roadmap for involvement of stakeholders within BEECH POWER project**

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## 1. Introduction

The thematic work package 2 - Creation of a sustainable model for buffer zone management around World Heritage Beech forests targets pilot areas in Slovenia and Slovakia, where high potential for conflicts between different interest groups exists. 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.

Managing conflicts with and between stakeholders is one of the main challenges that numerous protected areas face, especially the strictly protected ones. The present Output addresses this challenge by providing a strategy for conflict management in buffer zones of WH beech forests. The presented Strategy is designed in a way to be readily incorporated into the management plans of World Heritage “Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe” component parts. The Output itself was based on different deliverables completed within work package 2 as well as a number of different activities within all project’s work packages (mainly 2, but also 1 and 3) which contributed to the successfully completed deliverables. The Strategy was reviewed by the project consortium and the project advisory board. All comments were considered and integrated to ensure the greatest possible applicability of the Strategy.

Output T2.2 was based on Deliverable D.T2.1.3 (A strategy for conflict management) and further evolved to be ready for incorporation into management plans of World Heritage “Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe” component parts. This Output is concentrating more specifically on conflict management in buffer zones of WH beech forests. This output is thematically linked with other deliverables (D.T2.1.1, D.T2.1.2, D.T2.1.3, D.T1.1.2, D.T1.2.1, D.T3.2.1) and outputs (O.T2.1, O.T1.2) (Table 1).

**Table 1: BEECH POWER project deliverables and outputs, related to the present deliverable**

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 Krokar, Slovenia) - Participatory vulnerability and risk assessments in buffer zones around protected areas
Deliverable	D.T2.1.2	Guideline for stakeholder involvement and a related communication strategy
Deliverable	D.T2.1.3	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.T2.1	Strategy for the active involvement of stakeholders in WH beech forests
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The aim of this document is to inform and present options for World Heritage site managers about the different de-escalation strategies about conflicts and how to resolve them in a constructive way, with an emphasis on the preventive actions.



## 2. Challenges of WH beech forests

### 2.1. Overview

The nomination “Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe” is the largest transnational site on the World Heritage list. It encompasses 12 countries, with 78 components in 45 protected areas. Therefore, from the start, this nomination represents an unprecedented level of international cooperation and is the most challenging and complex site to manage in the UNESCO portfolio.

On a more local level, since only small remnants of undisturbed forests remain, those are to be very strictly protected, on par with IUCN Category I (IUCN, 2008). 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*”. 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. In order to avoid negative human impacts, public access to the component parts is often restricted to certain parts and certain conditions (e.g. with guided tours). Some of the component parts are partly privately owned, but the majority are publicly owned (Kirchmeir and Kovarovics, eds., 2016). 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.

The conflicts with local communities are especially common in buffer zones, as these areas have more varied legal protections and conservation regimes and therefore stakeholders have more options for conducting different activities in the area. Therefore, direct and often uninformed comparisons, on both national and international levels, can fuel stakeholder resentment of their activities being restricted. Even IUCN, in their evaluation of the nomination, while recognising the protection regimes in the component parts themselves are adequate, was concerned 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, further conflicting with the wishes of the local communities. While UNESCO designation provides additional incentive for better protection and management, 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 (IUCN, 2017).

Long-term and sustainable protection of these exceptional beech forests is largely dependent on positive relationship between the property and the surrounding communities, which can justifiably expect to gain benefits from the World Heritage site in their vicinity. Reconciling the often opposing perspectives will therefore play a crucial role in the future conservation of European beech forests.



## 2.2. Challenges

### 2.2.1. Current protection regimes and management situation

Component parts are protected by different decrees, acts and regimes. The buffer zones around the component parts have milder regimes than the component parts themselves, where all regimes should be more stringent. Protection regimes vary between different countries as well as component parts themselves. If we concentrate on the buffer zones only, regimes usually allow visitors on marked trails while many restrict anthropogenic activities that have a bigger influence on the buffer zones areas.

Management situation on the other hand is more diverse in different component parts. Some component parts do not yet have an official manager, while others have the management regime regulated with different acts/decrees. Established management is the ultimate goal for all component parts since this is the best option to implement suitable protection regimes and activities in the component parts and buffer zones. The manager who is responsible for component part and buffer zone area is a key factor in communication with local stakeholders, government and other official services who are responsible for nature, environment, spatial development and other associated areas. The manager can address different issues which usually appear regarding different activities in component parts and buffer zone areas. Only with effective communication on the relation between manager - stakeholders, these different issues can be successfully addressed and right actions can be taken towards the main goal which is the preservation and protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of ancient and primeval beech forests.

### 2.2.2. Buffer zone modifications

According to IUCN Technical evaluation (IUCN, 2017), buffer zone sizes in different component parts do not always meet the criteria and therefore should be reviewed and should meet the minimum standards. The Coordination Office prepared zonation and management guidelines for the approval of the Joint Management Committee and relevant WH Committee Decisions (41COM 8B.7, 42COM 7B.71, 43COM 7B.13), which specify that the protective buffer zone function requires at least a 100 meter wide buffer zone, unless justified exceptions can be made<sup>1</sup>.

Different buffer zone sizes, together with protection regimes, management situation and stakeholders, have diverse effects on anthropogenic impacts inside the buffer zones. Too small buffer zones cannot efficiently mitigate anthropogenic influences that are consequently more easily transferred inside the component part. Large buffer zones can mitigate such influences more effectively but due to their vast size, it is in some cases necessary to define different regimes and sub-zones inside the buffer zone itself.

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<sup>1</sup> The coordination office and State Parties currently have established two working groups, which are working on Guidance document on buffer zone management. According to plan, the guidance document should be finalised by April 2021 and confirmed in the same month in face-to-face meeting (or online meeting if COVID19 preventive measures will not allow face-to-face meetings) of the JMC.



In some cases, it is necessary to spatially separate two different sub-zones of whole buffer zone in order to comply with different management approaches which are required due to different activities and factors inside the zones. These parts are (Joint Management Committee, 2020):

- Part of the buffer zone with protective function from short distance threats (protection buffer sub-zone or p-buffer)
- Part of the buffer zone with landscape conservation and connectivity function (landscape conservation buffer sub-zone or l-buffer)

Larger the buffer zone is, harder it is for the management authority to control directly or indirectly all different activities, stakeholders and factors in buffer zone. In some cases, there is the necessity to include a private forest ownership in the buffer zone area. In that case, it is important to ensure the guarantee of full control on the buffer zone management. The best option is to find a long lasting and binding agreement with the owner of the neighbouring forest stand and landowners of agricultural and other uses about adequate management (JMC, 2020). In case an agreement cannot be met, different solutions in modifications of buffer zone are in place (e.g. size reduction). Before doing this, we need to evaluate how this size reduction will affect the component part and what actions need to be taken there in order to protect the Outstanding Universal Value.

### 2.2.3. Existing stakeholder involvement

Stakeholders are usually divided into two different groups. One group consists of official, state-designated institutes, ministries, regional units, municipalities, agencies, organisations and other representatives. The other group consists of local stakeholders, which mostly include different tourist agencies, associations and other local unions, private forest and land owners and other individuals, whose activities are present in the buffer zones and other nearby areas. In many cases, local stakeholders feel they are not sufficiently involved in the decision-making and due to their presence in the area, they should have been included deeply.

This stakeholder “dispute” is in many cases linked directly with the management situation in component parts as well as in buffer zones. With UNESCO’s inscription on WH map, this gap, in some cases, became even bigger and is recognised on an international level.

The interest of the state on the national level should follow the guidelines to ensure a priority of the conservation of UNESCO WH site. Only restricting the activities is not enough and could be harmful. Restricting without sufficient explanation, argumentation and agreement of different stakeholders can cause more harm than good. Visitors and stakeholders need to know why some restrictions are in place and be offered alternative solutions that are as good as their primary selected options. An important task is to ensure the real interest in working with stakeholders on all levels to define objectives and priorities in the territory, the instruments to achieve them and to determine responsibility for their implementation. Financial mechanisms need to be established to compensate for increased costs or losses in the transition from normal land use and resources to the required finer, near-natural, or non-intervention regime and land use. This can also contribute to involving other stakeholders (e.g. non-state forest owners) in the process since they receive a “compensation for their loss” and they have a feeling of being included and respectively treated. Legislative and economic prerequisites for the development of infrastructure in the region are expected. This will bring greater interest to tourists and the local population and will help to start the



sustainable development of the region. This will create the preconditions for reducing regional unemployment, improving the socio-economic situation, reducing tensions and lead to a more positive perception of the UNESCO brand. If the local stakeholders will find that their role is sufficient in this process and the output they get is satisfying, they will include more actively and better contribute to better well-being of the whole local community and the component part with buffer zone area.

BEECH POWER project allowed the commencement of structured and sustained stakeholder involvement through different activities in all three thematic work packages. The project will continue to allow these activities to take place throughout its duration. The main goal is that all component parts have by the end of this project either already established management structure or at least started the process with different activities that will lead to the established management structure. With established management structure all the activities referring to the component part and buffer zone are accordingly coordinated with stakeholders in order not to interfere with the status of Outstanding Universal Value of WH beech forests.

#### 2.2.4. Visitor and tourism pressure

Lack of control, attractiveness of the UNESCO brand and unspoilt nature and the accessibility of the component parts are usually the main factors for visitor and tourism pressure. Online information, maps, photographs, videos and other material about (local) UNESCO beech forest component parts can in some cases do more harm than good. Attractiveness of the area with unspoilt nature in combination with easy access to reach the component part (cars, GPS locators, etc.) and insufficient knowledge and/or awareness of the anthropogenic (individual) impacts on the buffer zones and component parts are the main points why visitor pressure can very quickly have a negative impact on the area. With insufficient control and management, the visitors with their activities put too big of a pressure on the environment and leave their traces in the buffer zone as well as component part area.

On the other hand, the UNESCO brand can be used as a reason in order to extend the knowledge about the fragility of the area, sustainable development, importance of the buffer zones and restrictive measures. With a suitable management, control and improvement of conditions for small and medium-sized enterprises in various sectors (tourism, gastronomy, woodworking, traditional crafts ...) this will create more favourable environment for visitors to the region. The benefits will increase local government revenue from local taxes and increased interest of keeping residents in the region and even attracting new people to move in the area. If more financial resources are gathered from the address of the visitors, more financial resources can be invested in the protective measures, education of visitors and local stakeholders and improvement of the infrastructure in order to protect the area.

Since the UNESCO brand is attracting new visitors in these areas (component parts and its buffer zones, as well as in regions in general), this will require more active and comprehensive direction and redirection of visits, as well as potentially some new infrastructure (or renovation of the current one), where conflicts between different stakeholder groups could be expected.

On the other hand, in some component parts and buffer zones with previously established hiking/mountaineering trails many visitors are visiting the area for the recreation and experiencing the



nature regardless the reasons for which the component part was designated as UNESCO natural heritage. In some cases, these visitors could be even in majority.

### 2.2.5. Ownership

Ownership of the different areas inside the buffer zone area has a big influence on the management and related issues. This chapter about Ownership is quite strongly linked with chapter Buffer zones modification (2.2.2.) where we already mentioned how private owners can influence buffer zone modification and which the best measures to avoid these issues are.

The majority of the forests in the component parts are state-owned. In some cases, some forests' parts in buffer zones are owned by private owners. To incorporate all buffer zone areas in the same management model, the privately owned parts need to be either bought by the state or agreed with private owners to follow the guidelines for WH buffer zones management. If none of the previous mentioned options can be achieved, a re-zonation and boundary modification has to be implemented on these areas and the private forest owners and their owned areas have to be excluded from the buffer zone areas and therefore also from UNESCO WH property.

A re-zonation is the last option since the problem with its origin which has the impact on component part is still there. If possible, this should be avoided and the problems solved another way. A part which is moved out of the buffer zone with re-zonation is still there and "in proximity" of the component part and therefore still having the same impact. Inappropriate activities inside this area can still reflect inside the component part and OUV has the same level of protection as before.

### 2.2.6. Other challenges

There are many different challenges that the managers face with. These challenges differentiate between states, component parts and buffer zones. The task of the area manager is to recognise these challenges fast enough and address them correctly.

Some illegal, small-scale logging still occurs in some state forests. Currently, this is considered negligible and happens outside of reserves and does not have any direct or indirect impact on them. However, for example, with the extension of buffer zones, these activities can become more topical and could cause conflicts with local populations.

Some component parts located on border areas have the problem with illegal border crossings and therefore trespassing through component parts and buffer zones. These activities will cause some conflicts between law enforcement agencies, migrants, users of the space (i.e. hikers, bikers), and nature conservationists.



Hunting is still a contentious topic in some component parts. Prohibition of hunting can, on one hand, have a positive impact since there will be less human-made damage inside the component part. On the other hand, the animals can find the shelter inside these non-hunting areas, which can lead to uncontrolled extension of population and even increased overgrazing and other damage to the component part. Since hunting is in most cases allowed inside the buffer zones, any potential size modification (increasing) would not have any negative impact on component part, since nothing would change for the hunters or animals. The effect of overgrazing by large herbivores on natural regeneration has not been conclusively established yet inside the UNESCO properties. We suggest closely monitoring the impacts of large herbivores on the natural regeneration in the component part. Different State Parties have already set up system of monitoring plots to monitor the grazing in managed forests. This system can be copied in the component part, which will give a manager a feedback on overgrazing situation inside component part. Different actions can be taken as a following response to the observed situation inside the component part.

## 2.3. Conclusion

UNESCO beech forests, included component parts, and their buffer zones, are marked as having an Outstanding Universal Value. To keep this title of OUV and even further evolve the role of beech forests there are some criteria that need to be meet and some challenges that need to be addressed. Every state and even component part with its buffer zone has a unique situation due to its historical development, regional and national role, different stakeholders' interests and management structure. Due to these reasons, each component part with its buffer zone has a different variety of challenges that need to be identified, analysed, confronted, addressed and managed. In generally, most of the challenges can be addressed and resolved through an effective and clear management structure and cooperation with involved stakeholders.

Buffer zones are usually the areas where different stakeholders with their activities, impacts, desires and pressures meet and confront. While some states and component parts have the desires and plans of bringing their component parts "closer" to the tourists and local residents by increasing the tourist offer and infrastructure in the surrounding areas, others aim to redirect the visitors and human activities even further from the component parts and buffer zones. Visitor and tourism pressure pose (or can pose in the future) a threat to the sites' integrity and their OUV if the wrong measures are taken. With clear management situation, sufficient funding and active involvement of all stakeholders in order to address the issues and find a solution through different conflict management measures, the component parts and buffer zone areas can efficiently solve their challenges and continue representing the OUV in the future.

There are some stakeholder involvement and communication activities ongoing in all states. These are relatively restricted and often follow outdated and ineffective communication strategies, where stakeholders are mainly just informed about the decisions taken on other levels and do not have the option to object the decision, suggest alternative solutions or help with their involvement that better solutions are proposed. With this kind of communication, there is in many cases lost an important aspect of any potential improvements since the stakeholders are left out of a two-way communication and they do not feel appreciated. Some states are already experiencing some of the fallout due to that, as there are a number of open conflicts between different national authorities and private owners, as well as NGOs. Moreover, the communication and visitor information has not been adapted yet to the specificities of UNESCO inscribed



sites and component parts, where public and visitor interest are increased (and will increase further in the future). This has to be taken into the account when different strategies are being adopted.

Component parts and their managers in all countries need to improve their stakeholder outreach and update management practices to be more inclusive and assure more widely accepted strict management of the protected areas or even develop adjacent areas for the sole purpose of experiencing WH forests, outside of actual WH component parts. This is important in all countries, as some are currently redesigning the component parts' boundaries and some are in the process of extending the strictly protected buffer zones in their component parts.



## 3. Methodological note

In the following subchapters we present the methods we used in order to collect the data which were necessary for the completion of related activities and lead to this output. To collect the required data, we conducted different workshops in order to receive from the stakeholders the input information which we implemented in different activities and documents in order to deliver the final results and outputs.

### 3.1. MARISCO workshops

Participatory vulnerability and risk assessment workshops were undertaken for Slovenian and Slovak pilot areas (Snežnik, Krokar, Vihorlat and Poloniny clusters), using MARISCO methodology (Adaptive Management of vulnerability and risk at conservation sites, Ibsch and Hobson, 2014). These workshops 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 also supplemented with field trips, which allowed for more focussed and knowledgeable discussions. A field trip to the Virgin Forest Krokar 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, using Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (The Conservation Standards, 2020), were organised in Germany, Slovenia and Croatia. 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 2019 in Kočevje, for the component part Krokár and 30<sup>th</sup> November 2019 in Ilirska Bistrica, for the Snežnik component part. The Croatian workshops were implemented on 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2020 on online tool ZOOM due to the Covid-19 situation.

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 they gain from the areas and where more work should focus. They have also focused 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 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 Krokár and in Loška dolina on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2019 for component part Snežnik.

The aim of the workshops was mainly educating people on how to constructively approach heated situations and de-escalate 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.



### 3.4. Regional Studies

Project partners in collaboration with selected key stakeholders or experts on national level also prepared regional studies, which focused 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 focused 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.

### 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, expertise and experience 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. If there is a group of different experts who cover different areas of expertise (forestry, biodiversity, ecology, climate, social studies, etc.), they can propose better ideas, strategies and solutions. With more diverse input there is better chance to gather different views and knowledge which at the end produce better outcomes, measures taken and final solutions.



## 4. Guidelines for buffer zone stakeholder identification and involvement

In order to create a suitable strategy for conflict management, we firstly need to identify all stakeholders that are included with their activities, actions and presence in the buffer zone area. We must study their role, impact and contribution to the buffer zone, component part and surrounding area. After we have this information, we can address the possible issues or conflicts in combination with specific stakeholder(s). To have the best possible output it is important to include all stakeholders which play an active role with finding a suitable solution to protect the Outstanding Universal Value.

### 4.1. Stakeholder identification

The process should always start with a stakeholder analysis, where stakeholders are identified and grouped in terms of their roles and activities in the component part and buffer zone area. Additionally we can also classify them according to their potential impact on the component part from lowest to highest and rate them on currently obtained information (this rate has to be in future monitored, reviewed and changed if needed). If possible, it is beneficial to conduct interviews with them, to establish what their interests and opinions are and what kind of cooperation would work best for them. The first step is to compile a database of all stakeholders around WH component part. A number of different data sources should be consulted:

- 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,
- Online forums,
- Official and unofficial partnerships.

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

- Responsible 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,
- Sport clubs and societies dealing with outdoor activities (e.g. hikers, MTB cyclers, cave explorers),
- Land owners and business operators,
- (Schools).

These and other stakeholders should be grouped into at least three different categories:

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 and expert committees, which can take over this role and conduct regular meetings and advise to management regarding the implementation of different actions and activities.

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 where they can express their opinion regarding the implemented activities and future actions.

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 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 (Kuslits and Sólyom, 2019). All stakeholders should have an option to present their views and be able to participate on corresponding level in different workshops, presentations and other activities regarding the buffer zone and component part. If stakeholders feel that their input is valued, desired, respected and their suggestions and comments noted and included, the manager and stakeholders will work more efficiently and have better relationship.

## 4.2. Stakeholder involvement

It is important to determine structure of 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. A good example of this is the stakeholder roadmap, which was



developed within BEECH POWER project (see Figure 1). Generally, the participative action planning consists of, at least, three rounds of stakeholder events:

1. Situation analysis

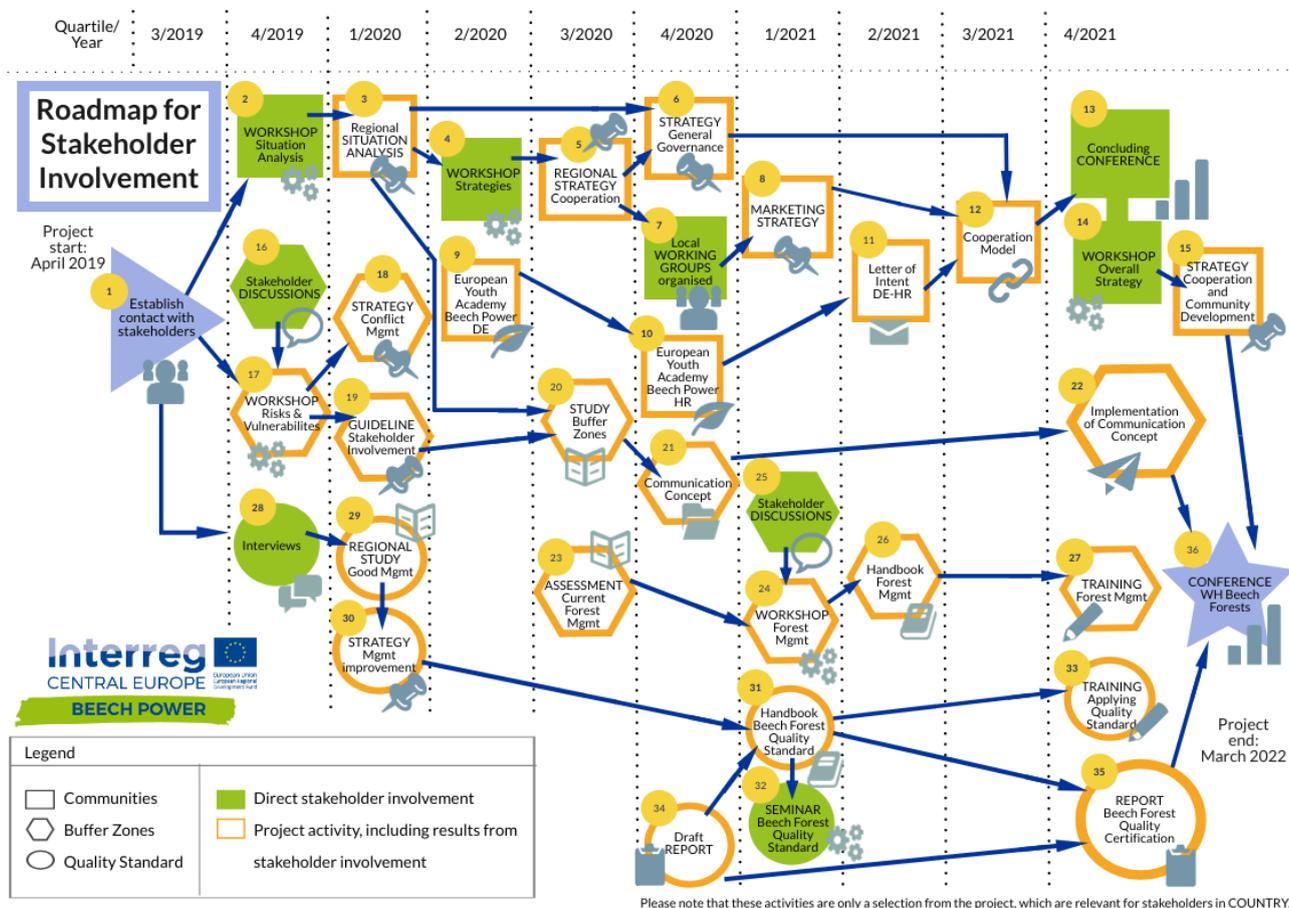
- Where a variety of different stakeholders is invited. In certain cases, it might make sense to divide them into different groups and events, to be able to better capture their inputs (i.e. local stakeholders in one group, experts in the other). There is also a number of different methodologies to be used. BEECH POWER suggests the use of Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation and potentially MARISCO (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 (International Association for Public Participation, 2020).



**Figure 1: The roadmap for involvement of stakeholders within BEECH POWER project**

Oftentimes, it is also beneficial to establish cooperation with other organisations outside protected areas and their managers to lead similar, parallel processes with wider regional stakeholders. These organisations could include regional tourist organisations or sustainable development agencies, as well as some sectorial agencies. There can be issues with improper stakeholder involvement, when public participation is implemented on paper, but the actual level of involvement of the public 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 and assist with solving and/or avoiding any potential issues and disputes.

The World Heritage sites and in particular component parts of the “Ancient and Primeval 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 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 and therefore conflicts escalate easier. The stakeholders and public 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. 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. Due to this, it is important that communication on relation manager - stakeholder(s) is efficient and two-way and stakeholders are aware of what can be (and is) transferred to the upper levels and what is the feedback.

Stakeholder participation is crucial and should be planned well, starting at the level of the manager. A number of elements need to be defined:

1. Purpose and programme for each workshop,
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.

Invitations are an important and often 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, it is desirable, and often needed, to also engage stakeholders personally (e.g. by telephone) and talk to them about their indispensable role in the process (Golob, 2019).

Successful stakeholder involvement will require certain skills from the manager and his team. A background in social sciences and experience with empirical methods and in design and implementation of participatory processes is an advantage, 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 actors in discussions, ensure equal representation, keep the debates on topic, and are trained in the solution 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 that 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 is made (Bryson, 2003).



## 5. Stakeholders

Stakeholders have different roles in the area. We have local stakeholders, which are usually united in different associations, societies, and groups, which use the area for a variety of activities - recreation, tourism, forestry, photography, scouting, caving etc. Here we need to mention that not all stakeholders are members of societies, but are also using these areas as individuals (e.g. individual hikers or photographers). In many cases, there is more chances that these individuals do not obey the rules (entering the areas which are closed for visits, wandering off trails and therefore causing a bigger damage to the buffer zones and component parts as do groups). Other stakeholders which use the area include activities connected with scientific and academic research - environmentalists, biologists, foresters, geographers and other earth-related sciences. We must not forget the education sector which includes kindergartens, schools and universities. Areas can be also used for different trainings, military activities and other activities connected with law enforcement and protection. In some countries, the buffer zones also include agricultural lands (e.g. pastures, meadows), so the stakeholders are also farmers. The above mentioned activities are just a few most common examples which are being conducted (or were conducted in the past) in the buffer zones or the surrounding nearby areas.

Since different activities nearby were already conducted in the past or are still conducted - legally or illegally, it is hard for stakeholders to understand that with the definition of a PA manager and implementation/enforcement of laws regarding the preservation of the component part, their role and presence in the buffer zone and surrounding area has to change.

The manager has to understand and respect the importance of stakeholders and their contribution to the area and its status. The manager has to have a firm position and opinion regarding the protection of Outstanding Universal Value and a good understanding of how stakeholders can impact it.

### 5.1.1. Stakeholders and their role in the area

Different stakeholders, especially local stakeholders play very important role in the buffer zone area and the component part itself. We can say that local stakeholders and forest services with their knowledge, futurism (e.g. their decision to leave some areas intact and completely to the natural processes) and activities, made a significant contribution that the component part is inscribed in UNESCO world heritage. Without their vision and activity in preservation, these pristine areas would surely be now just a normal forest. Remoteness of the area and difficult terrain also played an important part in the story. We must not forget the individuals or different services who help with their knowledge and activities to keep these areas intact.

In the course of dealing with a conflict we have to keep in mind the fact that different stakeholders protected this area for decades, centuries or even longer. If in the past, this could be solved and protected, why not now when we have more extensive knowledge about the ecosystems, environment and the importance of preservation.



A manager's main role is to protect the area and recognise the importance of local stakeholders and their non-interventions in the protected area. Local stakeholders "live" with this area and they must be aware of the fact that without their help (and with their excessive impact on the area), in a few years or decades, the area itself can lose its importance and Outstanding Universal Value. Stakeholders have the vital role here since their activities and actions shape the area and affect its future development. For the component parts and buffer zones we must plan in the long term, that all future generations can profit from having this Outstanding Universal Value in their area.

### 5.1.2. Different types of stakeholders

Different stakeholders are present in all component parts and their buffer zones. We can group most of the stakeholders by similarities of their activities. Since each protective area has its own characteristics, we need to point out that some stakeholders or groups are not present in all buffer zones, maybe have different roles or positions or their activities have different (more/less destructive) impacts on the component part.

#### 5.1.2.1. Responsible management bodies

Component parts, buffer zones and protected areas in general have usually many responsible management bodies which have different jurisdictions over the area. These include responsible ministries, municipalities, national public institutions, expert institutions, enterprises and similar. These bodies usually have one of the following roles, which are the owner, main decision maker, main manager, certifier, financial decision maker, expert conservation decision maker, etc. Responsible management bodies usually lead all the main decisions regarding the area, from designation of area manager, funding, intervention, activities in the area, issuing permits, confirmation of management plans, supervision to other similar tasks.

Responsible management bodies are in many cases final decision makers which confirm or reject specific activities or interventions in the area. That is why they are often in dispute with other stakeholders - especially local and private ones since the decisions and conclusions of responsible management bodies often contradict the desires of other stakeholders.

In the relation between component part and buffer zone manager and other responsible manager bodies, no bigger conflicts are expected. Minor disagreements will of course arise, but it is expected that they will be solved without the need for de-escalation strategies.

#### 5.1.2.2. Landowners

Landowners are divided into two groups - public and private ones. Majority of the forests included in component parts and buffer zone areas are usually state-owned (public landowners). In buffer zones there are some areas which have, in some instances, a private owner. Especially private landowners can come in



dispute with the buffer zone manager or with other responsible management bodies since the interests of both parties can be very different.

Private owners, in some cases, wish to manage their area differently than what is the main vision of the manager. Most common cases of disputes are different activities connected with tourism or forestry. If we want to keep the integrity of the area it is easier if the area is completely state-owned and therefore it is easier to settle the conflict of interests since there are none or not many. If the area is not completely state-owned, then we suggest to offer a private owner two options: either the state buys off the area or the owner agrees to follow the guidelines for WH buffer zones management. If none of the mentioned options can be achieved and the owner does not follow the principles of WH buffer zones management, a re-zonation and boundary modification has to be implemented in these areas and the private forest owners have to be excluded from the UNESCO property.

Conflicts between landowners and buffer zone manager can occur. Since most of the areas are usually state-owned, it is not expected that the conflicts would escalate. In the relation between manager and private owner, there is a higher probability that conflicts will arise. We suggest that all conflicts (if possible) are solved with participation processes.

#### 5.1.2.3. Tourism organisations, societies, institutes, tourists (visitors)

Since UNESCO WH title draws a lot of attention and interest to tourists and visitors, it can happen very fast that tourism and visitors put too much pressure on the OUV with their presence (they do not always follow and obey rules of behaviour). We need to acknowledge that tourism organisations and tourism in general can bring quite some economic benefits to local residents - employment, better infrastructure and more local taxes gathered, which means that more financial means can be invested into the local area. On the other hand, tourism pressure can cause substantial damage and negative impacts to the ecosystem of beech forests. We must be aware of both direct and indirect effects of tourism on the local benefit and area.

It is expected that tourism is one of groups of stakeholders where there will come, in general, to the highest amount of conflicts - as well as in the relation between manager and tourism organisations and societies, and in the relation between manager and tourists. Tourism organisations and societies are expected to put more pressure on the manager with additional tourism infrastructure and activities. Visitors and tourists will come in conflicts with manager through inappropriate use of tourism infrastructure and disregard of the rules of behaviour in the buffer zone area. Most common conflicts will include walking outside marked and official trails and foraging mushrooms and other forest food. We also need to anticipate other illegal activities (e.g. sports activities like biking and skiing, hunting...) which will happen in some areas.

When dealing with these kinds of conflicts it is important that we first try to use participation processes in order to resolve the conflict. If these processes will not bring any success, then de-escalation strategies are needed.



#### 5.1.2.4. Recreation, alpine and sport societies and individuals

This stakeholder group is in one way quite similar to the one containing tourism stakeholders. This group also consists of different individuals and groups who wish to implement different recreation and sports related activities in the buffer zones and component parts.

One of the most important activities taking place inside these areas is hiking. Hiking is in general one of the most widespread activities in nature which you can do alone, in small groups or even in bigger groups. Individual hikers are usually more spontaneous, in many cases locals, while group hikes are usually well organised. If hiking is conducted on legal trails and all component part and buffer zone behaviour rules are honoured, then the activity does not present a negative impact on the component part and its buffer zone. Problems arise when many hikers do not use (official) hiking trails at all and they wish to discover other spots and areas which are otherwise inaccessible. With this they interfere in the natural processes and put negative impacts on the area.

Beside hiking societies and individuals, there are numerous other activities like mountain biking, backcountry skiing, jogging, caving (on karst rock grounds) and other close-to-nature activities and societies which are present in the area. Again, if these activities are conducted in an inappropriate manner, they can have a negative impact on the area. We need to emphasize that some of these activities do not belong in the component part and buffer zone area even if they are conducted on legal trails.

When it comes to the conflict, it is similar to conflicts with other stakeholder groups. The manager should first use participation processes, following by de-escalation strategies if participation processes are not successful.

#### 5.1.2.5. Local residents

Local residents are the stakeholder group which usually understands the WH and its meaning quite differently. Due to this, their behaviour patterns differentiate a lot.

Some local residents understand this Outstanding Universal Value as something which has to be preserved for all future generations and the only way of doing this is to follow the rules and strictly avoiding activities which could lead to negative impacts in the buffer zones and the component part. With this part of the group, no conflicts are expected. You could even expect their help in solving the conflicts with other stakeholder groups.

Other local residents understand the buffer zone and component part as something, which is in the possession of the local community and they have historical right of usage of this area. This means that they use the area in the same way as it was used before legal protections were set and component part inscribed as a UNESCO WH Site. In general this means that local residents feel that they have the right of provisioning



mushrooms or other local forest food, hunting, entering the area where no activity is allowed or simply not using the official and existing trails. They proceed from the idea that the area was used in this way in the past and no harm was done. Due to this, they believe they have the right of also using it in the future.

This second group usually do not consider the fact that nowadays areas, which in the past were not accessible, are now easier to access with transport means, nearby roads and trails and GPS locators and maps. We must keep in mind that the population size of local residents has also probably increased and this leads to bigger pressures on the area.

It is expected that conflicts will happen in the relation between manager and local residents. Manager must make sure to recognise any unwanted and illegal activity and pressure on the OUV in advance and proceed with participation processes. If participation processes have no impact and the conflicts escalate, different de-escalation strategies are needed in order to solve the conflict.

#### 5.1.2.6. Other

Beside the above-mentioned stakeholder groups, which are the most common ones in the buffer zone areas, there are different stakeholders and stakeholders groups that vary from one area to another. Common to all stakeholders is that they all use this area in one way or another and all wish to do so in the future as well.

The manager must ensure the protection of OUV and coherent cooperation with stakeholders. Fruitful relationships between area manager and stakeholders can be easier to achieve if stakeholders are included in the communication, decision-making and implementation. In some cases this is possible, but in some it is not. In some cases potentially big conflicts are prevented with participation processes and in some cases even the smallest conflicts can escalate to heights where de-escalation strategies are needed.

#### 5.1.3. Stakeholder activities

The manager is responsible to have a wide overview of all stakeholders and their active and planned activities inside the buffer zone. The manager must evaluate the activities and if needed consult with States Party services, ministries and other experts about the potential impacts on the OUV.

We must distinguish between three different types of activities that stakeholders wish to perform inside the buffer zone:

- I. Allowed activities and interventions: activities where there is no impact and any negative effects are done in the buffer zone and none are transferred inside the component part.
- II. Potentially allowed activities and interventions: these activities are allowed if additional conditions are met, different protective cautions are taken or any other terms are met.



- III. Prohibited activities and interventions: due to the nature of these activities, they are not in any case allowed inside the buffer zone since an impact on component part and Outstanding Universal Value will happen.

When these activities are categorized and evaluated, the discussion between the manager and the stakeholder is needed in order to have a deepened discussion about the activity, their course, timeframe, audience, (potential) impact on OUV, protective measures and all other important issues that arise.

In some cases, different experts need to be included in this activity assessment. Experts can assist with different field inspections, reviews, opinions, reports or even more extensive analyses in order to assess the potential impact. Beside the experts it is also important to include different ministries, state services and institutes, which are responsible for UNESCO heritage, environment, spatial planning, forestry and similar areas. Although the manager is usually appointed by one of these services, in some cases they still have to give the last confirmation, opinion or decision that an activity or intervention can happen.

If the manager agrees that an activity or intervention has no impact on buffer zone and component part, then the whole procedure with the stakeholder is very smooth. The same goes if the experts, ministries, state services and agencies submit a positive opinion.

Problems can appear if stakeholder activity or intervention in buffer zone is only potentially possible. If too strict measures need to be taken, this can already reach the level where preventive approaches need to be followed and taken in order that this situation or potential dispute does not escalate. The protective approaches need to be taken even faster if the manager assesses that the stakeholder is implementing (or wishes to implement) an activity which is prohibited or would cause environmental damage to the component part. In that case, it is more likely that the situation will escalate and de-escalation strategies will be needed.



## 6. Strategy for conflict management in buffer zones

### 6.1. Vision for resolving conflicts in buffer zones of WH beech forests

In order to have the best possible strategy in place for the protection and conflict management of the component part and its buffer zones, it is important to have a clear vision of what and how our ideal component part and buffer zone looks like. If we have ideal model or version somewhere written and presented, it is easier to execute this version with different strategies, activities and measures, which will help us to implement the steps to reach the desired state - or at least getting close to it.

**Our vision for WH beech forests: “All conflicts in buffer zones of WH beech forests are managed between the manager and stakeholders themselves in a manner where everybody has in mind the greater good of conservation, protection and development of WH beech forest buffer zone at the expense of sacrificing their own activity. Stakeholders and manager have All potential conflicts will be resolved in advance, before de-escalation strategies will be needed.”**

Successful management and conservation of WH beech forests can be a challenging task. A successful management of a buffer zone area where some activities (like hiking on marked trails) are allowed and some are strictly forbidden is maybe an even more challenging task since the manager needs to correctly assess which activities in the buffer zone also affect the component part. Each WH beech forest and surrounding area has its own characteristics and sensitivity level, which are defined by geographical and socio-economic factors. While due to specificities of the WH status, not all stakeholders can be equally involved in the management of the component parts and buffer zones, 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 area and avoid conflicts.

The overarching goal for all stakeholders should be to deal with all possible conflict in a productive and a constructive manner in a way to avoid any potential damage to buffer zones and protected areas. All the conflicts should be, following this manner, solved quickly during the participation processes and do not escalate to the level where a de-escalation strategies are needed.

### 6.2. Objectives, strategic actions and specific activities

To be completely satisfied with the results and to successfully manage any potential conflict situation in buffer zones, we need to follow different priorities and objectives.

The highest priority for all stakeholders is that WH beech forests and their buffer zones retain their Outstanding Universal Value and we need to do all in our power to protected it for all future generations.



Since some of these component parts are still intact by “human hand”, this is the highest aim that needs to be protected in the future. Buffer zones have a very important role with buffering the effects of human activities in the surrounding area and preventing that impacts are shown inside the component parts.

All stakeholders must organise, develop and implement their activities in a manner that does not harm component part and its buffer zone in either way.

The overarching objective for the manager is that no impact is made on the Outstanding Universal Value. It must be ensured that human activities have no impact, interference or effect on the component part, which is developing and evolving by its natural order and processes. To do this, the manager has to have expert knowledge about the forest, environment, society, processes and activities, pressures and contributing factors, which can affect the component part. The manager needs to recognise and define these activities in advance and assess their potential impacts and prevent it if possible or at least mitigate it on the level that is acceptable.

United Nations developed a publication “Global Forests Goals and Targets of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030” (UN, 2019). This strategic plan provides a global framework for action at all levels to sustainably manage all types of forests and trees outside forests, and to halt deforestation and forest degradation. These goals are :

- I. Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation and contribute to the global effort of addressing climate change.
- II. Enhance forest-based economics, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent people.
- III. Increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests.
- IV. Mobilize significantly increased, new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management and strengthen scientific and technical cooperation and partnerships.
- V. Promote governance frameworks to implement sustainable forest management, including through the United Nations forest instrument, and enhance the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- VI. Enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels, including within the United Nations system and across member organisations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, as well as across sectors and relevant stakeholders.

These goals are very important for all forests and should be considered for the objectives of this strategy. When we talk about WH component parts and their buffer zones, we must add specific objectives, which target the preservation of the Outstanding Universal Value for all future generations.



### 6.2.1. Objective 1: Increase the protection

Increase the protection of component part and buffer zone area with various protective measures.

- **Action 1:** Analyse the different aspects of the various potential impacts on the component part and its buffer zone.
- **Action 2:** Set up strategies for protecting the area by limiting harmful activities - including through cooperation with relevant stakeholders.
- **Action 3:** Set up a system of control over the area - video recording, forest rangers, limiting access to the area and redirecting it on adequate entry points.
- **Action 4:** Review of applicable legislation and the drafting of new corresponding legislation.
- **Action 5:** Delete unofficial trails from maps, so less visitors are aware of their whereabouts.
- **Action 6:** The manager has to make an assessment of the extent to which it is safe / appropriate to offer information, develop a new offer for tourists, etc. If too much information and activities are offered to visitors the pressure on the component part and buffer zone can be too big to maintain the integrity of ecosystem.

### 6.2.2. Objective 2: Increase of the awareness

Increase the awareness of local residents and all stakeholders as well as visitors about the importance of the area, the need for preserving and avoiding the visit of the component part itself and observing it only from the buffer zone area.

- **Action 1:** Set up of information sets about the uniqueness of the component part and buffer zone.
- **Action 2:** Offer visitors additional information about the development of the area, its history and why we need to keep it intact.
- **Action 3:** Educate local residents, stakeholders and visitors through different workshops, lectures, field visits and video material. Address them through different organisations, associations and services.
- **Action 4:** With transformation of hiking trails in the buffer zones into educational trails, visitors will lose interest in wandering off trail since the experience of the area will be better by staying on the trail and visitors will better comprehend the importance of non-interference with their presence in the component part.
- **Action 5:** Internet posts about component parts and its buffer zones should be limited and strategies of how to present area to potential visitors should be orientated towards increasing the awareness. Marketing activities of the component parts and its buffer zones should be orientated towards attracting and increasing the numbers of long-stay visitors who are already visiting the region for other activities and sights and reducing the number of half-day visitors who arrive only for visit of the buffer zone or component part. On this way, the visitors can have more unique experience, gain



important knowledge about the preservation of these areas instead of only putting a tick on their bucket list.

- **Action 6:** Clearly mark the borders of component part and buffer zones so that every visitor knows his whereabouts and what are the protection regimes in the area.

### 6.2.3. Objective 3: Strategy for conflict resolution

Before we start talking about different strategies for conflict resolution, we need to mention that we need to do everything in our power to ensure the conflict does not escalate and to be settled between the stakeholders and area managers in a peaceful and quiet manner. The activities and desires of component part and buffer zones managers often dispute with other stakeholders. Different conflicts arise everywhere where different stakeholders are in one way or another included in the area through their activities and actions. It is important to be aware that the conflicts are present or will be present also in buffer zones of WH beech forests and to start with the process of settling the conflict as soon as we detect its presence - or detect that it can appear.

To predict the current and future possible conflicts in the buffer zone it is firstly important to do an exact stakeholder identification. Only after we are familiarised with all stakeholders and their role in the area, can we start on the use of different strategies for conflict resolution.

We can start with preventive approaches where we recognise the potential conflicts in advance in order to educate the managers and staff how to deal with them. If we follow different regular participation processes, it is much more likely that the potential conflict will be recognised and solved in advance or at least will not escalate to the level where sharper de-escalation strategies are needed to settle the conflict. This usually means that all stakeholders will be more satisfied with the result and much more energy can be directed into adjusted situation instead of dealing with the conflict.

When conflict with stakeholders reaches the level where different de-escalation strategies are needed it takes everybody much more time and energy to settle the conflict. There is a much bigger chance that the final result will not suit all stakeholders, which can, in a worst case scenario, lead to a state where stakeholders' activities can have a negative impact on the buffer zone and protected area. To avoid this least wanted scenario all stakeholders always need to keep in mind that all of their actions can reflect in WH beech forests and can cause irreparable damage to the component part.

The manager of component part and buffer zone area has a double role. He needs to protect the area (component part and buffer zone) in order to preserve its ecosystem integrity. He also needs to listen and include the different stakeholders with their activities in the buffer zone area which are not always without negative impact on the buffer zone area. These potential negative impacts need to be recognised in advance by manager. Protective measures needs to be taken in order to prevent the any damage to component part ecosystem integrity. In some cases the compromises need to be found on both ends and these activities should be transformed and organised in the way that they do not harm the component part and follow the rules in buffer zones.



### 6.2.3.1. Action 1: Preventive approaches

It is important to recognise that individual perspectives are always framed and incomplete, as they are formed by individual perceptions of the world and each perception has a bit different view and philosophy. This can be studied through frame theory, which can result in a greater and deeper insights into socio-spatial conflicts. Frame theory can be applied using frame analysis, which studies the internal dynamics of conflicts and how different actors dispute each other in order to gain hegemony over the dominant narrative (Lewicki *et al.*, 2003). Each frame is founded on a central organising idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue (Gamson, 1995). Thus, it functions as an interpretative lens that leads the attention to certain aspects of an issue. Frames, typically, also suggest the desired solutions, as well as what is regarded as facts, and which arguments, events and experience are considered relevant for understanding of the issue (Buijs *et al.*, 2011). To simplify, the socio-psychological frames are the lenses through which each human looks at the works around them. Due to this, the perceptions of different people of the same situation can be completely different. These different perceptions of the same situation can quite easily lead to conflicts which can escalate into heights if it is not properly handled by manager or responsible individual.

#### ❖ Trainings for managers

It is important to be proactive at recognising potential conflicts and preventing their escalation. The manager of protected areas and their buffer zones should invest into trainings and education of their staff to be able to detect and recognise the signs of disagreements on their own. Many disagreements usually starts as misunderstandings and by solving them, we can avoid further disagreements. These trainings should be coupled with communication trainings to teach the staff how to recognise any potential problematic situations, de-escalate them and act proactively in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

The trainings will also give the manager and their staff the necessary skills and tools for effective preparation of a strategy for managing conflicts. These strategies need to be tailored to local situations and stakeholders, as the perceptions of their surroundings will vary from region to region. Different local stakeholders conduct different activities in buffer zone areas of their component parts. Since the activities can be local-like it means that the strategies can also vary from one area to another and need to be sometimes modified before applied.

This step will provide the necessary skills, as well as demonstrate a clear intention that the manager will work with people in a constructive way, that none of the parties will be privileged and the higher goal is the preservation of OUV and ecosystem integrity of component part and buffer zone area. The trainings should cover both the skills necessary for engagement of stakeholders at targeted events, public consultations, workshops, lectures and similar, as well as interactions in the field and guiding tours. Interpretation of nature and UNESCO World Heritage will also be key elements in the skillsets of managers and field staff.

The trainings should include rhetoric, transferring from prescriptive and consultation type communication (top-down) to inclusive and open participation processes and preparation of engaging communication materials. Ways for increasing the effectiveness of invitation procedures should also be explored.

A particular skill to train and acquire is active and empathetic listening, which is an effective and, in theory, simple method to employ. This method requires both parties to let the other express their views, while the other does not try to come up with counter arguments, but primarily tries to understand the view of the



other. If both parties know that they will have the chance to present their views, position and arguments, it is much more likely that the whole process of conversation will evolve in more civilised way, since each side will have time and chance to speak and to be heard. This method allows each side to try and understand how the other perceives the situation, not just on the surface, but also examining the underlying motivations. For this to be successful, the establishment of a so called “safe space” is essential, to come up with common values, and use subtler and step-by-step approaches. The aim is for each of the parties to summarise the point of the other in a way that is completely consistent with the view of the speaker. This allows people to calm down, as is the case when people are heard and understood in their entirety. Thus opening the space for an actual discussion is crucial. It is important to understand as many details as possible about the positions of the other parties, since conflicts usually stem from disagreements in very small details. Especially, when views strongly clash, this method requires a certain amount of discipline on the part of the listener, as keeping the conversation “polite” is important and does not take anything away from anyone. Both parties need to keep in mind that they wish to listen and understand the other side, since this is the best strategy towards the understanding process (understanding not agreeing!) of opposite views, position and arguments. Heated discussions have physiological effects on human bodies, as they induce stress and fight-or-flight instincts (“survival mode”), which redirect blood flow away from the brain to the muscles, making it even more difficult to concentrate on the issues at hand. Therefore, without neutralisation of the situation, the conversations often stop. We must ensure that every party will know that they will have the option to present their view and if the discussion is heating up, it should be paused and asked for every party to take a step back and remind them that all parties are here to solve the disagreement and not to deepen it. In case if too much is said and discussion is heating up and turning into a wrong way (away from solving the conflict through understanding and active listening), then both sides are turning away from solving the problem and towards escalating the conflict. In many cases, the lack of training and knowing different tactics of communication management can create the conflict. The managers and staff need to be aware of this.

#### ❖ Active listening

Conflicts have to be addressed with a strategy in mind and need to be humanised in order to avoid dehumanisation of opponents. Dehumanisation of opponents never leads to solutions, but once this is done, it is hard to calm the conflict. Agreement can come only after understanding each other, which first requires good and active listening of everything what the opponent party has to tell. The negotiations can happen only after the understanding has already been achieved, where the potentials for each party to loosen some of its positions in order to reach the final solution and compromise for the “greater good”.

The active listening strategy follows three easy steps:

1. Ask for the opinion
2. Attentively listen
3. Summarise the point of the other’s response (main thoughts and feelings)
  - a. “Do I understand you correctly?” “Did I understand you correctly from what you said?”
  - b. If the other agrees that the understanding has been achieved (“Yes, exactly” response is ideal), the roles (listener, speaker) can now reverse.
  - c. If the understanding is not complete yet, the three steps are to be repeated, until the other is satisfied with the summary.



In all the process of active listening strategy we need to have in mind and respect that the opposite party has the right of having different opinions than the area manager. Sometimes more than one solution is possible and with active listening we can better understand the “unpreferred option” and even though it does not seem as the best option on the first ball, it can be evolved, modified, transformed or some other way reorganised that both parties are satisfied with final result.

If we actively listen and try to cooperate with the opposing party, there is more chance that they will do likewise and the final agreement will satisfy all, be reached faster and the inside relations between different parties will be better. Due to this, also any further future cooperation will probably be better and easier since both parties will already know what can expect from each other and have already built some trust between them.

#### ❖ Participation processes

After the staff has been properly trained, the gained knowledge should be put into proactive practice and used to carry on engaging participation activities. Active participation processes, such as regular consultations, workshops, meetings, and other events, where all relevant stakeholders can be involved in the happenings in the protected areas and around them are incredibly important to minimise potential conflicts. If the stakeholders will see that their presence is desired, input wanted, comments and ideas considered and the relations in general nurtured, the better outcome will be produced for the component part and buffer zone area. Some additional trainings for managers might be needed in areas, where the reliance on top-down style management has been prevalent.

The participative processes should follow the below-specified general steps:

1. Identification of stakeholders
  - The stakeholder lists should be a living thing and should be updated regularly, with addition of stakeholders after their expressed wish possible at any time.
  - Already listed stakeholders also need to be monitored since their involvement can change and impact differently on the area.
2. Invitation of stakeholders to meetings
  - Various techniques to increase the turnout should be explored and applied.
3. Meetings
  - Introductory meeting
    - i. Where does every stakeholder see him/herself in relation to the protected and buffer zone area?
    - ii. How can each stakeholder help with protecting Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of ecosystem in buffer zone and component part?
    - iii. Open Space for everyone to air their opinions.



- iv. The manager team should also clearly present their plan, which should outline their intentions for the future and then discuss this with the assembled stakeholders.
- v. The manager should also review the past activities and discuss what can be done better.
- At least annual meetings (if needed they can be organised more often)
  - i. The meetings should not only be linked to different project activities, but part of the normal management of the component parts.
  - ii. Manager and stakeholders should discuss past and future activities, plans and review them in order to produce the best possible outcome from integrity of ecosystem.

The participative processes build relationships, and it is the relationships in the background that play an important role in shaping peoples' perceptions and their responses to any situation. These processes also show that the manager takes the stakeholders' opinions in account and that they care about the varied needs - not only by the area manager but also by the stakeholders and in a way also to the local region since the stakeholders are actively involved in it through the component part. Stakeholders (especially local ones) are in many cases on daily basis included in their coexistence with forests, component part and its buffer zones. Oftentimes their views with manager clash, but both parties need to work towards better resolving the issues and finding the balance between the greater good for the component part and greater good for stakeholders, local residents and the region. While the participative activities can be time demanding, they build a base of support in the local communities and thus increase the legitimacy of the manager, in the long run paving the way for more inclusive, smooth and effective managing of the areas. If the stakeholders feel being treated respectfully and wanted, they will put more energy into cooperation with manager and manager will be able to dedicate more time to other matters and less time to dealing with conflicts - since there will be none, or the ones occurred will be resolved faster. Therefore, the participation processes are key for conflict management and should be incorporated into management plans of all component parts and their buffer zone areas. While the participation activities can be used also for resolution of some conflicts, they are the main tool that any manager has to avoid conflicts altogether and ahead of time.

#### 6.2.3.2. Action 2: Deescalation strategies

Once a conflict has flared up, there are a number of techniques to de-escalate the situation. Usually, people have their favourite or default method, to which they instinctively stick. However, this method is not always the right one to employ, or does not work the same on all situations, areas, regimes, stakeholders or parties. The manager needs to be aware that stakeholders' response on one situation can completely differ from one another. These reactions are often automatized and are founded in individual personalities, and changing them requires levels of maturity and discipline. Particularly, argumentation, even though still very popular, is very often completely ineffective, as people are not interested in just accepting the facts that are perceived as the other's views. Removal from the scene, often with a thought "The smarter will stop first", protects the person using it, but it does not lead to the successful resolution of the conflict.

Generally, there are four formalised procedures for resolving existing conflicts, if the need to involve an external party is unavoidable, which are court procedures, arbitration, entry into the political arena, and mediation. Each of these procedures has its pros and cons and each take different methods to settle the



conflict if it cannot be settled with different preventive approaches. In some cases there is more than one suitable strategy to de-escalate the conflicts, but in others, there is only one right solution or procedure. Since this depends completely on the situation, the manager has to use his skills and knowledge in order to assess the situation and take the best course of action.

Although all four de-escalation strategies mentioned above and in the following chapters are quite “sharp” procedures in comparison to participation processes, we still need to differ between them. Mediation is a softer procedure than a court procedure. If possible, the manager is advised to first try with procedures which are based on agreement between both parties.

In some cases, possible disputes can flare out quite quickly. In that case we can use a few de-escalation tips in order to prevent the escalation of conflict or to calm the situation. These tips are:

- Respect personal space,
- Set limits and honour them,
- Honour the other’s opinion,
- Do not act on the first ball,
- Use empathy and be non-judgmental,
- Use polite and nonthreatening language,
- Keep the voice tone on normal level,
- Present real state and avoid overacting,
- Focus on feelings,
- Ignore challenging questions and allow time to think and present the answers,
- Choose wisely what you insist upon,
- Allow silence for reflection,
- Allow enough time for decisions.

If we follow the above stated rules, it might give us some time to prevent the conflict or at least allow both parties to use the normal tones in communication with each other and avoid any unnecessary actions which could lead to further inappropriate actions.

#### ❖ Court procedures

Court procedures are well-established processes for resolution of conflicts and usually the last attempt to resolve differences in a peaceful manner. The procedures are usually lengthy, expensive, and result with one side triumphing over the other which means that the problem is not consensually resolved and one party is dissatisfied with the outcome. Therefore, the conflict itself is usually not actually resolved, only the winner is declared and the decision is binding for all involved parties. Due to these reasons, we recommend the choice of one of the other options (Vrbica et al., 2007).

If one party is forced to take some measures which they do not want to, there is a much bigger chance that they will probably do only what they are forced to by the court decision or law. Their relationship with the opposite party will be bad and a lot of work and willingness need to be done by both opposing parties in



order to repair the relationship. The length of court procedures can often take years before the court decision is final and in this time irreparable damage can be done to component part and buffer zone area. That is why it is important to avoid this measure if there is any other possibility or method to resolve the issue in a faster, easier and more effective way. If court procedures cannot be avoided and one party is clearly violating the laws in buffer zone area, then the final verdict of the court can have a positive impact on potential similar future disputes between the manager and other stakeholders. The court's final verdict gives a "warning note" to all stakeholders who find themselves in potentially similar situations.

#### ❖ Arbitration

Arbitration goes back to Roman law. This type of procedure allows the designation of an arbiter for every specific dispute. Those arbiters could be private citizens held in high regard, but not necessarily lawyers. All involved parties are bound to respect the decision of the arbiter. Thus there are two agreements necessary to start the procedure, one between the parties to respect the decision, and the second between the parties and the arbiter. Arbitration is an out-of-court procedure, where the participants leave the decisions to a specific person or persons and bind themselves to abide by the arbitration tribunal's decision. The number of arbiters is usually odd. It is a very formalised option, which produces a legally binding outcome, which is on the same level as a Court Order (Dolamič Gričar, 2012). Similarly to court procedures, our suggestion would be to avoid this option, if at all possible, although it could be preferable to the court process.

Although the arbitration is legally binding, it is a somewhat "softer procedure" and less formal than the court. The arbitration procedure itself is not so strictly tied on laws. The parties can for example decide if arbiters will follow the rule of justice (*ex aequo et bono*). Since arbitration procedures are a bit different, there is more chance that the final decision will be a better compromise for both parties than the court decision. The procedure itself is a bit less formal than court, there is more chance that the dispute will be handled on a more personal level and therefore both parties have more chance to find a compromise since more communication will be involved. In this context, chances for future cooperation are larger, but still very hard to achieve.

#### ❖ Entry to the political arena

Another option is to enter the political arena, either by joining an existing party or forming a new one and try to win a seat in parliament or city council or similar. The conflicts can then be resolved on those newly attained levels. However, admittedly this option is fraught with uncertainty and does not have a prescribed procedure or outcome.

Since this procedure is completely led by politics and democratic vote on the final stage there is no guarantee that your proposal will even come so far that your proposition will have enough support in your party and it will be put on council's or parliament's daily order to vote. It is very important that decisions about management or activities in component parts and buffer zones areas are not politically, economically and private interest driven, but are made on the basis of proof, evidence and expertise in order to protect the ecosystem integrity of OUV. The whole procedure from entering the political arena, to securing a seat on council or similar, presenting your proposal and that your proposal is agreed, confirmed and implemented



can take quite long time. It is important to understand how this conflict can impact on component part in order to assess any potential damage to the Outstanding Universal Value.

#### ❖ Mediation

Mediation is a voluntary, out-of-court procedure, in which the parties in dispute agree, with the help of a neutral third party, to find a solution in a equitable way, which would be agreeable to all involved parties. Due to its nature, mediation leads to solutions, which are usually more straightforward, cheaper and adapted to the wishes of the clients, especially compared to court procedures. The main point of a mediation procedure is that the decision about the dispute taken is not by a third party, but the clients in the process come to it on their own. Mediation is therefore more than just negotiation, as it includes meticulously planned and structured phases of the procedure (Vrbica et al., 2007).

If mediation succeeds, this means that both opposing parties, with assistance of neutral a third party, find a solution that is acceptable for both sides. Since there is a lot of dialogue involved it is easier to establish a good relationship after the end of the procedure. This has a very important value since inside buffer zone area, the relations and the roles between stakeholders and activities on one side and a property manager on the other side are changing and evolving. If the problem cannot be resolved with participation processes and de-escalation strategies are needed, then mediation is the best solution to solve the conflict in buffer zones.

- Pre-mediation procedures

In cases, where despite or in absence of the preventive measures outlined above, conflicts still escalate to the point where they threaten the normal functioning and productive relationships in the area, mediation procedures should be the preferred option. Even though there are currently no conflicts recognised which are at the stage where such procedures would be necessary, these provisions should still be included in management plans, as future situations might require them. In order for mediation procedures to have the highest chance of success, a pre-mediation process should be done first. Both pre-mediation and mediation procedures provide a way for reestablishment of relationships and communication, which were lost due to the conflict.

These pre-mediation processes involve a large amount of work, starting with identification of stakeholders and then followed by research of each stakeholders' background opinions, views, perceptions, needs, and so on. Since mediation is a voluntary procedure, the pre-mediation process is also focussing on obtaining the consensus of all stakeholders to participate in the process.

If the pre-mediation process is thorough and all aspects are taken into account, faster and easier will both parties agree on the final agreement. The only acceptable agreement for both parties is a win-win situation and in order to secure good relations in future, it is necessary that in pre-mediation process all factors, views, positions and aspects are stated, explained and communicated with both parties.

- Mediation procedure

If all the consensuses are obtained, the mediation procedure can start in earnest. It should be led by a team of professional mediators and both the managers and the stakeholders should give their full cooperation in order to maximise the chances of resolving the situation in the best way for everyone involved. Both parties



need to keep in mind that buffer zones play an important role in protection of the OUV (Outstanding Universal Value) of WH beech forests and each individual involved in this area has to be aware of the importance of his role in the preservation of the ecosystem and their services.

All mediations are:

- Voluntary,
- Private and confidential,
- Clients in the procedure alone reach a decision on how to resolve the dispute,
- Mediator is neutral, cannot judge or express his/her own opinions,
- Mediator is impartial and independent.

Mediation procedure can differ in the involvement of the mediator, from passive listening of dialogue and intervening only when the discussions become too heated, to a more active role with mediators posing questions themselves. Mediation is generally quicker, cheaper, and better for the protected area managers, and any other clients, than court procedures, as it is only successful if the “win-win” situation can be achieved, rather than “winner-loser” outcomes in the courtrooms. Participation processes are still at core of the mediation processes. However, it is important to keep in mind the setting of different places, as mediation is much more commonly practiced in countries like Germany and the UK, while in the south-eastern, eastern and parts of central Europe, it is much less common.

Mediation always delves into the background and the foundation of the issues, where consultations with only an attorney are insufficient. Therefore, even the pre-mediation procedures are already directed towards calming and de-escalating situations.

- **Environmental mediation**

For WH beech forests component parts and buffer zones managers, it is important that they are familiar with environmental mediations. These mediations are specific, due to the complexity of situations and involve delegated representatives, as they affect large numbers of people, whom cannot be all present at discussions. These procedures usually involve negotiating with authorities, private and public interests and include high interest of the media. Nevertheless, the confidentiality of the process is not compromised.

One of the main concerns and motivators of environmental mediations is the possibility that a permanent damage to the environment (in our case WH beech forest component parts and its buffer zones) can occur if the situation is not resolved - or not quickly enough. We must keep in mind that it is important that mediation process is finished with an agreement which does not have a negative impact on the integrity of WH component parts and its buffer zones. Since environmental damage can be, in many cases, permanent, it is important that all participants are aware that if there are additional delays in the process, the damage caused can have a huge, irreparable impact on Outstanding Universal Value.

As all mediation processes, this is also a voluntary process, which usually also includes a pre-mediation process. The complexity of the situations requires extensive preparation and usually, at least two to three mediators leading the procedure. The solution has to be acceptable to all and is binding. Win-win situation for both parties is also in this case the only possible option.



The procedures take from weeks to months, which can result in the issue of financing them, and the distribution of costs between parties, which are more often than not at very different positions of power and with vastly different financial backings (e.g. NGOs vs multinational corporations).

### 6.3. Steps taken in conflict management to resolve issues

Component part and buffer zone manager has a task to manage all different stakeholders, situations and activities inside the component part and buffer zone area. The manager needs to be aware that any situation or activity can create a conflict and therefore must act proactively in a course of recognising and addressing the conflict early enough. If the conflict is not managed carefully and sufficiently, it can escalate and the buffer zone and its component part can suffer an irreparable damage.

The manager has to make sure that his presence, activity and actions do not ignite conflicts but assist in calming them down. When it comes to conflicts, the manager has to use all his knowledge and expertise in order to solve the situation. To recognise and prevent the conflict of escalating, the manager needs to use participation processes to recognise the potential conflict and resolve it.

If the conflict already escalates and soft receptions are not successful, there are different de-escalation strategies which the manager can use. Some de-escalation strategies are sharper than others and in some cases we can first try with mediation or arbitration before the court procedures need to step in. If mediation is successful, we have more chances that the relationship between the specific stakeholder and manager will be better in the future. But if the conflict needs to be resolved in court, then the chances of having a good relationship with this specific stakeholder in the future, are very slim.

Stakeholders (especially local ones) will always be present in the buffer zone and component part. If the manager establishes a relationship with stakeholders, which is based on mutual respect and cooperation, then future activities and processes in component part and buffer zones can be directed more into protection of the Outstanding Universal Value. If relations between manager and stakeholders are bad, then the concept of protection of Outstanding Universal Value will probably be differently understood and stakeholder activity will not be aligned with manager's plans and actions.

### 6.4. Protection of Outstanding Universal Value

The level of protection of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) depends on all stakeholders. All stakeholders should follow the same goal, which in many cases means, to adjust their presence and activities (as well as in many cases decrease the potential economic profit of these activities) in the area for the highest goal - which is the protection of OUV for all future generations.

Human (stakeholder) activity can vary a lot. Some activities and their impacts are shown in the long term which can be a big problem if the impacts are negative. Some impacts can be recognised quickly and, if



needed, the activities can be reorganised, scaled back or even expelled from the area. Some impacts take a long time before they are shown in the area and in some cases it is too late to stop the process of causing damage to the component part - and the damage cannot be reduced or restrained.

## 6.5. Role of the manager

With understanding the fragility of the area, proactive activities, participation processes and swiftly resolving the conflicts, the component part can avoid damage from the negative impacts of different stakeholder activities in the area. The manager's role is to understand the component part and buffer zone area, understand the stakeholders, their activities and any potential impacts (positive and negative) and follow all the strategies needed for protection the OUV.

The main tasks of the manager are:

- i. Understanding the importance of the OUV and the area.
- ii. Understanding the importance of stakeholder activity.
- iii. Recognising the value and need of preservation of the area for different aspects (e.g. environmental, research, educational...).
- iv. Using his expert knowledge about the environment, ecosystem services, society, local area, component part, human activities and other important knowledge in order to successfully manage the area.
- v. Understanding the impacts (positive and negative) of stakeholder activity on the OUV.
- vi. Recognising potential conflicts and their consequences in the area.
- vii. Coordinate the activities in a manner that does not harm the OUV.
- viii. Cooperate with stakeholders in a constructive way.
- ix. Manage conflicts in a manner that does not cause any damage to the OUV.
- x. Use different techniques and strategies in order to manage and resolve conflicts.
- xi. Protect the OUV with different measures and activities for all future generations.
- xii. Follow his highest moral standards.

The above stated tasks are only the main ones, which the area manager needs to follow in order to successfully resolve and manage conflicts. We need to emphasize what clear guidance rules are firstly needed in order to avoid any misunderstandings and potential conflicts. Area managers are advised to use participation processes in order to recognise and address any potential conflict in advance. If these processes are not successful and conflict escalates, the manager has different de-escalation strategies at his disposal.

In some cases, more than one de-escalation strategies can lead to the final result. If possible, manager is advised to firstly use more "softer" de-escalation strategies like mediation where common ground between manager and stakeholder can be found. If suitable compromise is made there is more chances that both



parties will work more closely in the future and follow the common goal. Court procedure is in many cases the final measure of de-escalation strategies that we cannot avoid if compromise between both parties cannot be found.

## 6.6. BEECH POWER Activities - best practice example

In the chapters below we present some best practice examples from Interreg-CE project BEECH POWER (World Heritage BEECH Forests: emPOWERing and catalyzing an ecosystem-based Sustainable Development) where different workshops were conducted. Workshops were conducted on different locations, with various stakeholders in different periods in order to gather required results which were used as input information for further project related activities. During the workshops we identified factors, positions and views which contribute to the situation inside the specific component part. Below are presented the workshops which can be a very useful tool for managers of the component parts and buffer zones of WH beech forests in order to settle a dispute or avoid and manage a different stakeholder related situation.

### 6.6.1. Conflict resolution workshops (Krokar and Snežnik)

In order to jointly identify risks and develop solutions for existing and expectable conflicts between stakeholders, two conflict resolution workshops were organised in Slovenia, within the BEECH POWER project. SFS organised two workshops with local stakeholders on the topic of conflict resolution for each of the two Slovenian WH component sites (Krokar and Snežnik). Both workshops were targeted to the local participants, space users, and landowners, or managers and followed the same format. The workshop results were necessary for the preparation of Deliverable D.T2.1.3 (Strategy for conflict management) and Output O.T2.2 (Strategy for conflict management in buffer zones of WH beech forests) - this document. 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 Krokar and in Loška dolina on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2019 for component part Snežnik.

Both workshops commenced with an introductory round and a discussion on why certain disagreements escalate into conflicts, as well as how to best recognise different disagreements in early stages and mitigate them. Three communication techniques for neutralising the emotional charge of conflict situations were presented and a practical exercise was conducted in their use. Additionally, different and various approaches for resolution of environmental conflicts were presented, with a focus on environmental mediation.

The workshop in Kočevje was attended by 14 participants from a wide range of different institutions and variety of stakeholders. The workshop in Loška dolina was attended by 12 participants, which were mainly local and regional foresters, employed or associated with Slovenia Forest Service.



## 6.6.2. Other workshops

### 6.6.2.1. Situational analysis workshops (Krokar, Snežnik - Slovenia)

As part of thematic Work Package 1, situational analysis workshops, using Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation, were organised in Kočevje (Krokar) and Ilirska Bistrica (Snežnik). The workshop resulted in regional situation analyses, which were the basis for strategy development in later stages of the project. The workshops allowed the local stakeholders to discuss what was done well so far and what could be improved, as well as identify elements for local wellbeing, ecosystem services, objects that need to be conserved. Threats and their contributing factors to the beech forests were addressed in detail too.

### 6.6.2.2. MARISCO workshops (Krokar, Snežnik, Vihorlat, Poloniny - Slovenia and Slovakia)

Participatory vulnerability and risk assessment workshops for forest reserves Snežnik, Krokar, Vihorlat, and Poloniny 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. In preparation for the workshop a field trip to the buffer zone of the Virgin Forest Krokar 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.

The participants of Krokar workshop first visited the component's buffer zone, got acquainted with pressures *in situ* and learned about the wider surroundings of the component and the present infrastructure.

The participants of the field trip to Vihorlat component part visited the core and buffer zones of the component part, where they learned about the state of beech forests and their conservation status, current management and impacts, and learn about the wider surroundings of the component part.

The participatory vulnerability and risk assessment workshop utilised the MARISCO methodology, upon suggestions of the project lead partner. An external expert was involved to lead and facilitate the workshops, as detailed knowledge of the method is required for its implementation. The workshops were geared towards experts on both domestic and international levels and state-level institutions.

The first workshop day focused 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 outstanding universal value (OUV) of both component parts.



## 7. Conclusion

Buffer zones of the component parts are the areas where conflicts are expected. In component parts, all activities of stakeholders are already severely limited or even completely prohibited. Buffer zones are placed around component parts with the task of buffering the effect of human activity and protecting component part from it. Due to this reason, the activities in the buffer zone are selected and limited and organised in a manner which does not cause any negative impacts on the component part.

Since the inscription of beech forests on UNESCO WH list, the pressures on these areas have increased. With wider recognition, tourists and local residents visit the area more often. Different stakeholders with their activities and pressures are causing additional pressure on the buffer zone and component part. Some activities (e.g. hiking on a marked official trails) cause no damage to the component part, while other activities (e.g. mountain biking outside the marked trails) can cause substantial damage to the Outstanding Universal Value.

Managing different stakeholders and potential conflicts is one of the main challenges any manager of a protected area faces, even more so if the protected areas are strictly protected and globally recognised as outstanding, which brings that much more attention to them. This can often create an interesting and challenging conundrum. Ancient and primeval beech forests across Europe have their recognised Outstanding Universal Value mostly because they have never been used or been left mostly undisturbed throughout history. Yet now they have the mandate from UNESCO to increase general awareness and educate the public. This task often brings with it increased appetites and possibilities for using the component parts for wider regional development, mostly through the development of tourism.

The managers of individual component parts, therefore, face a wide variety of issues and an even wider variety of different stakeholders, needs, requirements, and wishes for the use of these areas. Especially because the World Heritage designation is of global importance to the entire humanity, managing these interests and keeping them from escalating into conflicts is one of the greatest challenges the managers will face.

For the managers it is important to have expert skills and knowledge to face the different pressures and sufficiently handle the situation. Since each component part and buffer zone differs in geographical, social and environmental factors, this also means that activities, pressures and their level of tolerance differs from one area to another. Due to this, each component part has to have its specific strategy of how to handle all the impacts and what is allowed there and what is not. Common guidelines and strategies in many fields of expertise (like society, social factors and behavioural patterns) are applicable on different areas. Geographical factors are something, which vary from one area to another and can mitigate the impact differently in different areas. With knowing these specific factors of a location, we can assess how a specific activity will impact the buffer zone and component part. Therefore, many strategies are in place, which area managers can use and apply, while others need to be adjusted or completely revised due to specific local factors.

With this document we identified the issues, tasks and challenges the managers will face. The most common conflicts arise in relation between area manager and stakeholders (especially local, tourism and recreation



stakeholders) and their activities inside the buffer zone and component part. The manager has a very challenging task - on one side he needs to protect the integrity of the protected area for all future generations and in the same time he needs to find the right balance with stakeholders and their activities. The manager has to recognise and evaluate the ongoing activities (as well as potential ones) and reach an agreement with specific stakeholders in order to protect the Outstanding Universal Value. All efforts should be focused on preventing the conflicts from happening in the first place. Such prevention can most easily be achieved by engaging in coordinated, planned, meaningful, and sustained stakeholder involvement.



## 8. Literature

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