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Minutes of

Stakeholder Workshop, 20th May 2014, 10:00 – 16:00, Nationalparkzentrum Molln, Upper Austria

The workshop was held in German language with Italian/German translation

After the greeting through director Mayrhofer and the representative of ALPARC Guido Plassmann and a round of introductions director Herbert Wölger (National Park Gesäuse) started with his overview over the regions characteristics. He mentioned three main topics: size – value – organisation. Beside the high density of protected areas there are complex structures which are not coherent for many stakeholders. It would be good to have structures that exceed a certain critical size to be more effective. Maybe a biosphere reserve would be an efficient solution to establish effective structures.

Director Erich Mayrhofer (Nationalpark Kalkalpen) amended that the region is the opposite of the wealthy area around Vienna, where a biosphere reserve is already established. As infrastructure diminishes, brain drains to cities, etc. the brand of a National Park and forests are a *unique selling point* (USP) of the region.

The LEADER manager Felix Föbleitner gave a lively overview of the region, its history, its character, the personality, etc. Then he gave an introduction to the strategic process which is going within LEADER and the ideas coming up. There is already a kind of common feeling as a protected area region even if there are still many steps to go. One milestone was the framework contract most of the municipalities signed already. As the LEADER budget will diminish, new ways of funding should be sought after. He confirmed that a critical size should be exceeded. As

the National Park covers less than ten percent of the region and 100% percent of the inhabitants live outside the protected area it is obvious: the region itself is responsible for its development and strategy. Guido Plassmann (ALPARC) confirms that interreg projects are an attractive way to get funding for regional development. Director Herbert Wölger pointed out the balancing act concerning the core competence of protected areas (protection of natural dynamic processes) and the work on regional development.

After coffee break Christoph Nitsch (Netzwerk Naturwald) presented the project Netzwerk Naturwald. Based on the work started in ECONNECT the three protected areas (NP Kalkalpen, NP Gesäuse and the wilderness area Dürrenstein) work together to establish an ecological network or continuum in the region of the northern limestone area. Beside the outstanding natural situation there is an interesting history which formed the region. In former times iron industry had a big influence on the region. Starting at the Erzberg in Styria the iron ore was transported northwards. Along the lines of transport, the ore was converted to iron and this iron was processed by many different companies. The region was famous for its iron products and therefore called Eisenwurzten. This Eisenwurzten topic is a common theme in the region and is one of the potentials a common strategic planning of the region could be based on. After an analysis done via aerial photographs at the moment there is an ongoing GIS based modelling of the stepping stones corridor done with habitat models of different indicator species. In this model every available data are used to get the best results. Parallel there are first attempts to establish some pilot stepping stones. End of the year 2014 the planning concept for the ecological compound shall be finished and published. The implementation could be done within a common project – for example an integrated LIFE project. Christoph Nitsch is convinced that especially if national funding diminishes the efforts to get European and private funding for the region should be focused on by all decision makers.

Director Andreas Holzinger (Styrian federal state forests - SLF) appreciates the planned ecological compound of the three protected areas and highlighted that he and the SLF are supporting the work of Netzwerk Naturwald actively. He agrees with the concept that stepping stones (relatively small

areas) should be taken out of silvicultural use and innovative concepts should be implemented in forests uses by forestry.

During lunch there has been intense exchange between the participants.

After lunch break Max Rossberg (Wilderness Society) talked about the idea of biosphere in the context of UNESCO man and biosphere programme. As he travelled 42 biosphere reserves he can give an experts view. He thinks that a biosphere reserve would be a rewarding goal for the region to work on even if it will take time to get results. It is a strategic decision for the future. Max Rossberg pointed out that it will be much easier to get funding for a well-established structure. That the core zones of a potential biosphere reserve already exist is obviously a real big advantage. As Felix Föbleitner also Max Rossberg highlighted that the region is responsible for their strategic alignment. He sees a high potential for the biosphere idea in the region. Therefore a broad discussion process should be initiated to get a common direction → multi-stakeholder-process. But it is obvious that only a small part of people are really interested in strategic planning. Max Rossberg advises to work with the interested engaged people The rest will follow. Often the time which is necessary for this process is not taken and therefore more time is needed afterwards as things don't work as they should. The presentation started a discussion about the role and the responsibility of different stakeholders within this process.

In the next presentation Filippo Favilli (EURAC Blozano) talked about the actual results of the work done yet in the project greenAlps. There has been desktop research and site visits in the pilot regions. There is also an online questionnaire. The results show some first needs of the regions and structural problems. All information gathered in the project will result in recommendations for European policy.

In a common discussion there were following points mentioned:

- funding should enable best practice
- often municipalities cannot afford to participate in projects as they do not have money for the part not funded

- the topic of ecological connectivity should be extended to topics which helps regional development
- all three federal states should be part of a network and work together on a vision which makes value out of the natural jewels and the common history (Eisenwurzen); therefore the steering board of Netzwerk Naturwald should be supplemented with representatives of culture and economy
- existing structures should be questioned and new thinking should be done

Perspectives

A clear need for a superior structure has been identified in order to drive and coordinate project at regional level (for example being able to sign contracts with the land owners that are willing to contribute to the project Netzwerk Naturwald by applying certain specific measures on their land). This need should also be formulated in the recommendations give to the EU and the program authorities by the greenAlps project.

The topic of ecological connectivity is also a central topic of the alpine Macroregional strategy.

Three steps are proposed to start working on the biosphere idea:

- prepare a concept (definition of potential, needs, etc) -> feasibility study
- define a roadmap (organisation, funding)
- Communication (participation of local stakeholders and inhabitants, etc)

Annex:

Agenda:

10:00 – 10:15: welcome by project leader of greenAlps (Guido Plassmann/ALPARC)

- overview over greenAlps and actual developments in the Alps

10:15 – 10:45: „potential for regions surrounding protected areas“ (Erich Mayrhofer/Nationalpark Kalkalpen und Herbert Wölger/Nationalpark Gesäuse)

- statements of the directors of the National Park Kalkalpen and of the National Park Gesäuse

10:45 – 11:15: overview of LEADER region Nationalpark Kalkalpen (Felix Föbtleitner/LEADER Management)

11:15 – 11:45: coffee break

11:45 – 12:15: ecological connectivity – Netzwerk Naturwald (Christoph Nitsch)

- work done
- actual status of project Netzwerk Naturwald
- perspective and chances
- planning concept

12:15 – 13:00: common lunch – interexchange within participants

13:00 – 14:00: „potential of the biosphere“ (Max Rossberg)

14:00 – 15:00: discussion

15:00 – 15:15: coffee break

15:15 – 15:45: „actual results within greenAlps“ (Filippo Favilli/EURAC)

- report about site visits
- questionnaire
- what is next

15:45 – 16:00: common conclusion

Participants

Guido Plassmann, ALPARC

Yann Kohler, ALPARC

Filippo Favilli, EURAC

Isidoro de Bortoli, EURAC

Erich Mayrhofer, Nationalpark Kalkalpen

Hartmann Pölz, Nationalpark Kalkalpen

Regina Buchriegler, Nationalpark Kalkalpen

Franz Sieghartsleitner, Nationalpark Kalkalpen

Christoph Nitsch, Nationalpark Kalkalpen – Netzwerk Naturwald

Herbert Wölger, Nationalpark Gesäuse

Alexander Maringer, Nationalpark Gesäuse

Sabine Fischer, Wildnisgebiet Dürrenstein

Andreas Holzinger, Steiermärkische Landesforste

Gerhard Fischer, Österreichische Bundesforste

Felix Fößleitner, LEADER Nationalpark Oö. Kalkalpen Region

Martha Riess, Österreichischer Alpenverein

Leo Enzlberger, Naturfreunde

Irmgard Gruber, Tourismusverband Admont

Max Rossberg, European Wilderness Society