

Biodiversity for the Community – Biodiversity Communication Plan for Retezat National Park

Transfer project in the framework of the Klaus Toepfer Fellowship Programme

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Executive summary

Communities inside or near Protected Areas have a long tradition of using natural resources, being in most of the cases the owners of the land under protection. The management plan of the protected areas concerns them the most and they are directly affected by the conservation measures which imply restrictions in the land and resource use. This is why they only see the disadvantages of the protection status, considering the protected area a wall blocking the development. Communication strategies, plans and skills are needed to change their perception about the protected areas by jointly searching for the advantages.

My project aims to show a good practice example of a Biodiversity Communication Plan from one protected area, Retezat National Park.

The approach was to remake the Stakeholder analyses of the protected area discovering and then taking into consideration each of the target group's interests. After finding out the interests of each group within the community, key communication messages were provided and specific activities to pass on the messages were planned.

The target groups identified and addressed by the communication plan are the children, the landowners and farmers, the locals, the hunters, the NGOs and the authorities.

Because the main interest of the children is playing and having outdoor activities, the key message for them is that Retezat National Park is fun and provides many opportunities to spend time in a healthy environment. This message will be highlighted through presentations in the schools, educative activities, Junior Ranger Camps, excursions, etc.

For the locals, one of the main interests is the ownership, that is why the key message for them is that the Retezat National Park is theirs. The message will be sent by putting the Visitors Centre at their disposition for different events and activities they want to organize and supporting them in touristic initiatives, local products fairs, branding, etc.

Involving the administration team in the stakeholder analyses helped them to put themselves into the shoes of local community members the other side of the door and developed their ability to better understand and take into account (in decision making) the views and interests of stakeholders.

A communication training aimed to increase the capacity of the Retezat National Park staff in communicating with the community and implementing the Communication Plan.

Through ProPark website the Communication Plan will be disseminated, being an example easy to adapt and implement in other protected areas as well.

The partners involved in the project were the Park Administration and The Retezat Tourism Association, as the most important link with the community, representing its interests and contributing to the dissemination of the messages and the implementation of the plan.

The partners play a very important role in the viability and continuity of the project, as the implementation of the Communication Plan depends on their involvement and action.

This project may have a wider relevance for conservation in Romania as well as in the whole Europe, because if it manages to change some mentalities it will create a precedent and it will prove what is possible. The change starts from people. Making it easier for local people to accept a Protected Area and feel proud about its existence is a huge step in the conservation work.

Participating in the Klaus Toepfer Fellowship Programme, was not only an advantage for the project implementation but the starting point for this initiative.