



Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement in Preparation of Integrated Management Plans for Protected Areas

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Disclaimer

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Acronyms and abbreviations:

PA	Protected area
SWOT	Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities
JSIMPA	Joint Strategy for Integrated Management of Protected Areas
MP	Management Plan
NATREG	Managing Natural Assets and Protected Areas as Sustainable Regional Development Opportunities

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I. Introduction

Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement in Preparation of Integrated Management Plans for Protected Areas is one out of 5 documents of the JOINT STRATEGY FOR INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS (JSIMPA) which aims to help NATREG project partners in planning the management of protected areas. This document is based on the conviction that management planning is most successful when key stakeholders and particularly local inhabitants are informed and consulted during the planning process, so that they gain a sense of ownership and commitment for the implementation of management actions.

The main purpose of this document is to provide strategic guidelines and practical tools for the engagement of stakeholders in the management planning process.

Specific objectives of the Guidelines are:

- to bring stakeholder engagement to common understanding,
- to define common principles and approaches for stakeholder engagement in NATREG protected area management planning and implementation,
- to provide guidelines for designing/planning of stakeholder engagement in the management planning process,
- to identify barriers and needs for capacity-building,
- to support consistent evaluation of the engagement process through identification of indicators.

The document consists of two parts. The first part is more theoretical and aims to bring to common understanding the relevance and importance of stakeholder participation. It presents the rationale behind stakeholder participation in management planning, a definition and a broader meaning of stakeholders and stakeholder involvement in the context of good governance of protected areas. It also presents benefits and barriers, main principles, ways to identify stakeholders as well as different levels and tools for involvement. It concludes with the presentation of indicators for monitoring and evaluation of inclusive planning processes.

The second part presents guidelines for putting stakeholder engagement in practice in NATREG pilot areas. Based on NATREG project objectives, it provides recommendation for cross-cutting management planning phases with the activities related to the engagement of stakeholders. For each planning phase, there is a description of the stakeholder involvement relevance along with suggestions how this could be implemented in practice.

The specific contexts, local conditions and traditions in each pilot area should be considered in order to achieve objectives of nature protection and rural well-being. For this reason, the “one-model-fits-all” approach is not appropriate. Based on these Guidelines, each pilot area should define the most appropriate and site-specific inclusive planning process.

Part one: General aspects of stakeholder participation

II. Background

Planning is the intellectual or »thinking« component of the conservation management process. It is in itself a dynamic, iterative process. It is about recognizing the things that are important and making decisions about what we want to achieve and what we must do. Planning is about sharing this process with others so that we can reach agreement; it is about communication; it is about learning. It is the most important of all conservation management activities.

Management planning must be an inclusive process. Everyone who is involved in the management of the site, is or could be in any way affected by management decisions should be at least consulted and whenever possible and appropriate included in the decision-making process.

This quotation from Mike Akexander's book "*Management Planning for Nature Conservation*" presents in the best way the importance of stakeholder involvement in management planning. Stakeholder involvement is largely recognized as a mechanism that can help in protecting and managing effectively protected areas, as collaborative relationship between the site management authority and the local stakeholders may significantly contribute to solving complex planning questions. Today we face a demanding challenge how to balance in the most appropriate way the development and the nature protection aspect, and at the same time how to find the balance between the environmental, societal and economic potentials of protected areas. One of the preconditions for achieving this balance is a good relationship and mutual trust between relevant stakeholders which could be raised through empowerment of these actors for participation in planning and implementation processes.

As Diana Pound says in "*The Ecosystem Approach, What does it mean in practice?*" for the ecosystem approach to be achieved it will be necessary for people with very different interests and expertise to be brought together to share knowledge and develop common understanding. This includes different disciplines, different sectors, and the different interests of those who live, work or play in the ecosystem under consideration. It is only when this happens that it become possible to find mutually acceptable ways forward and to manage the ecosystem in an equitable way. We need a shift in understanding about decision-making. It is not commonly realised just how much the way decisions are made affects what decisions are made. A poor decision-making process which alienates stakeholders, or ignores some forms of knowledge, will get poor results how ever good the quality of scientific information and experts advice.

Stakeholder engagement is a means to enable local people to become involved in the planning and delivery of innovative local solutions to local problems. Stakeholder engagement process provides stakeholders with an opportunity to state their opinions, creates an opportunity for debate, empowers stakeholders in decision-making, and ensures that stakeholders have a sense of ownership in the decisions taken. To be engaged means an opportunity to get informed, to learn and to deliberate. In this approach, stakeholders communicate not only with decision-makers but also among each other.

NATREG approach in stakeholder engagement

According to Eurosite Management Planning Toolkit, the consensual/participative management planning approach can be achieved in different ways:

- consultation before drafting of the plan begins,
- cooperative working during the whole drafting process,
- consultation following various stages of plan production,
- consultation on completed draft plans.

The NATREG approach considers continuous consultation in various stages of management plan production to be the most appropriate since this approach also respects to the highest degree the requirements of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice and the Convention on Biodiversity where the management of land and water and living resources is seen as being a matter of societal choice.

The NATREG approach also considers that for the success of the engagement process it is crucial to inform and involve stakeholders in the early stage in order to build the commitment and trust for future actions. Stakeholders should be involved when all options are still open and engagement should continue throughout the planning process. If stakeholders are involved at a late stage of the process, or at the stage when the decisions have already been made, this can create a feeling of manipulation and increase distrust. In these cases it is better not to open the participation at all.

(The NATREG approach for stakeholder engagement is described in Part 2 of this document.)

Benefits and barriers of stakeholder engagement

The overall benefit of stakeholder participation in management planning is a better quality of a management plan. As stated in IUCN Guidelines for Management Planning in Protected Areas, the list of benefits includes the following:

- increased sense of ownership,
- greater support for the protected area,
- links planning for conservation with planning for development,
- provides a mechanism for communication.

Engagement of stakeholders brings knowledge about problems and needs into the planning process, it solicits the views of citizens on proposed options, allows the development of alternative solutions, and provides an opportunity for the public to discuss and understand complex issues. It enables better quality of decisions, and creates common basis for harmonized actions. It raises awareness about behavioural modes, helps to overcome conflicts and increases public support and social empowerment. Stakeholder engagement also increases the legitimacy of the planning and decision-making process as it enables a dialogue and deliberation about the issues. It also enables stakeholders feedback on the acceptability and usefulness of management actions. Engagement of stakeholders is a demanding process, often accompanied by barriers which are mainly related to weak capacities and skills for participation, difficulties in reaching consensus, prolongation of the planning process due to the engagement, and increased costs.

(You can read more about barriers also in the chapter Challenges and risks in stakeholder engagement.)

Stakeholder participation principles

Following main principles are crucial for successful stakeholder engagement:

Efficiency: The efficiency principle requires clear and well-designed procedures as well as a stakeholder engagement plan for informing, consultation, and active participation of stakeholders in decision-making.

Inclusiveness and transparency: This principle requires an open and transparent engagement process and inclusion of a wide range of participants from the community with special focus on the proper selection of key stakeholders and tailored consultation processes.

Effectiveness: The effectiveness principle requires that stakeholders' views are taken into account and have a real impact on plan or policy development and implementation.

In cases when there is no clear genuine role for stakeholders to play or when it is not sure that they can influence decisions, the involvement is not reasonable and could bring negative effects.

III. Stakeholder identification and analysis

A stakeholder is any individual, group or community living within the influence of the site or likely to be affected by a management decision or action, and any individual, group or community likely to influence the management of the site.

In general the stakeholders in a participatory process are represented in three main stakeholder groups:

- public sector,
- business sector, and
- civil society.

Table 1: **Stakeholders** typically involved in the protected area management are:

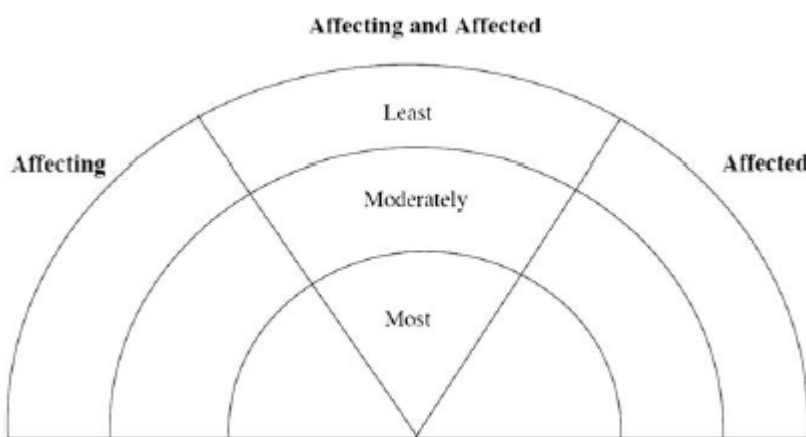
Government/ Authorities	Businesses	Civil Society	Others
Ministry of environment	National business associations	Nature protection and environmental NGOs	Research institutions
Ministry of agriculture	Major employers	Landowners	Universities
Other national ministries	Private financiers	Trade unions	Schools
Regional government	International/ national business	Media	Experts from other cities
Local authorities	Regional/ local business	Local forums	Foundations
Local public agencies / services	Local business associations	Local community organizations	Training institutions
Protected area managers	Small businesses	Local interest groups
Regional development agencies	Retailers	Visitors	
Partnership bodies	Utility services (e.g. electricity, telecom)	Local inhabitants	
Agriculture sector representatives	Engineers/contractors	

Forestry sector representatives	Transport operators/ providers		
Tourist sector representatives	Consultants		
Spatial planners		
Transport planners			
...			

When developing a participatory process it is important to understand who is or could be affected by the decisions and actions taken, and who has the power to influence their income. Before starting an engagement process the key stakeholders should be carefully identified in order to ensure the representation of everyone whose interests are directly or indirectly affected by the action, who have information, knowledge and expertise about the issue, or can control or influence the implementation instruments relevant to the issue.

The most efficient way to get a clear picture of who are the relevant stakeholders is to carry out the stakeholder analysis, i.e. to identify all relevant stakeholders, to differentiate between different categories of stakeholders and to investigate the relationships between the protected area and stakeholders and between stakeholders themselves. The stakeholder analysis enables the prioritization of stakeholders regarding their interests and potential influence on the planning process.

Figure 1: The rainbow diagram classifies stakeholders according to the degree they can affect or be affected by a problem or a management action. (Source: *Journal of Environmental Management: Who's in and why? A typology of stakeholder analysis methods for natural resource management*)



The stakeholder analysis could be prepared in a matrix form where the stakeholders' interests, their actual roles, power, and responsibilities, their capacities for participation and their potential contributions to the planning and implementation of management actions are presented.

The matrix in Table 2 below shows an example of stakeholder analysis.

Table 2: Stakeholder analysis matrix										
Stakeholders (by categories)	Contacts	Mission, competence, responsibilities related to PA	Human and other resources related to PA	On-going activities, projects, processes related to PA	Degree they are or could be affected by the planning / management of PA	Interests related to PA management	Relationships with other stakeholders	Potential role* in PA management planning process	Desired ways of engagement, need of support	Other comments, suggestions
Public sector stakeholders										
Private sector stakeholders										
Civil society										

***Stakeholder potential role in PA management planning process:**

Key players - stakeholders with high interest and influence.

Context setters – highly influential stakeholders, but having little interest. They may be a risk, should be monitored and managed.

Subjects - stakeholders having high interest but low influence. They are usually supportive, but they lack capacity for impact (need empowerment); they may become influential by forming alliances with other stakeholders.

Crowd – stakeholders who have little interest or influence over desired outcomes. There is little need to consider or engage them.

*(Source: *Journal of Environmental Management: Who's in and why? A typology of stakeholder analysis methods for natural resource management*)

Methods for identification of stakeholders:

For identifying stakeholders we can use different approaches, such as:

- expert opinions,
- focus groups,
- interviews,
- self-selection in response to advertisements,
- through events,
- using a check-list of likely stakeholder categories,
- or combinations of these.

Usually through the process additional stakeholders are added as the analysis continues.

Identification of stakeholders is only possible when the overall context of the planning process is clear, and when the purpose we want to achieve through stakeholder engagement is defined. Only in such context it is possible to identify those who are affected or can affect decisions related to the management planning issues. Without knowing this it is difficult to know which stakeholders should be involved.

It is also important to consider that in different stages of the planning process different stakeholders may be consulted: in some stages the planning issues require the inclusion of all stakeholders concerned, in other stages only particular groups of stakeholders should be addressed to deliberate specific issues.

When the stakeholders are analyzed, it is important to establish when and how they should become a part of the participatory process, and how their participation could be most effectively incorporated into the planning process. This is described in an engagement plan which considers the engagement objectives and characteristics of particular stakeholders, and based on that defines appropriate techniques and tools for information, consultation, and active participation of stakeholders in decision-making.

IV. Different levels of stakeholder participation

When involving stakeholders we can choose between different levels of participation:

1. Provision of information - a one-way, top-down process to keep those with an interest informed;
2. Consulting – one step up from informing, stakeholders are consulted, their views are taken into account, but not necessarily considered and acted upon;
3. Deciding together – those affected by an issue are invited to actively participate in decision-making;
4. Acting together – stakeholders become involved in the implementation of decisions;
5. Supporting independent community interests – the highest level of participation where the local authority enables community interest groups to develop their own strategies and implement the decisions they make.

V. Tools for informing, consulting and decision-making

Numerous tools and combinations of tools are available for information, consultation and active participation in decision-making. Selection of methods and tools depends on the objectives and effects that we want to achieve with the participatory process. If the desired effects are related to public awareness and knowledge, tools concentrating on information are adequate. If the

objective is to receive feedback from citizens, we select consultation tools. If the desired effect is to engage stakeholders in developing new policy options, tools for active participation should be applied.

a. Tools for informing

Appropriate provision of information is a precondition for any participation as “informed decisions” can only be made based on adequate information. In order to be able to participate effectively in the process, stakeholders need adequate two-fold information, consisting of:

- technical information related to the management planning and
- information on the participatory process which includes the objectives, calendar of consultation events, available help for stakeholders to participate, ways on how the comments will be considered, etc.

The goal of informing (or educating, raising awareness) implies the development of appropriate public information materials which should be easy to understand and interpret by their target audience.

Various communication tools are used to reach stakeholders, but careful planning is needed to identify proper tools and channels to reach specific stakeholders, especially the youth and vulnerable stakeholders.

Tools for providing information:

- passive provision of access to information based on stakeholders' requests:
 - interfaces for stakeholders' access,
 - internal information management,
 - catalogues, registers,
 - Q&A, etc.
- active provision through a variety of information products or publications
 - official documents,
 - preparatory policy and legal papers,
 - reports,
 - letters,
 - info sheets,
 - handbooks, guides, leaflets & brochures, posters,
 - newsletters,
 - audio tapes, films, games.

When selecting information tools we should adapt the tools to suit the objectives. To be appropriate to the specific public, we should make sure that the information is attractive and that it reaches the target audience.

Channels of delivery:

- direct channels:
 - statements/speeches,
 - direct mailing,
 - internet techniques (info pages, news) and web-based forums (chat rooms, questionnaires, public message boards, on-line feedback),
 - telephone information line & surveys and interviews,
 - info centers and stands,
 - own events and exhibitions,

- advertising.
- indirect channels:
 - press releases,
 - press conferences and interviews,
 - radio & TV shows, announcements and advertisements.

b. Tools for consultation

Consultations with stakeholders are especially relevant for discussions about existing problems, visioning, searching for alternative solutions and scenarios, setting special objectives, and value judgments. Depending on the objectives we want to achieve, stakeholder involvement may be undertaken as a large or small part of the activities of any particular stage. Through consultation, stakeholders can influence the decision-making indirectly. Stakeholders' feedback can be reached passively and unsolicited, or actively through inviting them to respond.

Tools for unsolicited feedback:

- letterboxes,
- information management software,
- analytical reports.

Tools for solicited feedback: (when stakeholders are asked for their views):

- questioning, listening and reporting,
- comment periods and actions,
- focus groups,
- surveys,
- public opinion pools,
- inclusion of individual stakeholders in consultative bodies,
- workshops, seminars, conferences,
- public hearings,
- non-binding referenda,
- open hours,
- citizens' panels,
- advisory committees, etc.

c. Tools for active participation in decision-making

Active participation tools enable stakeholders to exercise significant influence on decision-making, but the final decision still remains with government. These tools are relevant for pointing out and deliberating about specific questions and aspects regarding an issue and making recommendations.

Tools for active participation:

- consensus conferences,
- citizens' juries,
- working groups,
- participatory visioning and scenario-development,
- stakeholders' forums,
- dialogue processes.

More elaborated descriptions of these tools are available in the following documents:

- OECD Handbook on information, consultation and public participation in policy-making;
- Community Planning Handbook, Nick Wates; Communityplanning.net.

VI. Challenges and risks of stakeholder engagement

There are several reasons why stakeholder engagement is not an easy task. Mainly, this is due to the lack of understanding, trust, knowledge, and the lack of participatory culture and skills on both – decision-maker and stakeholder – sides. From recent experiences we can point out some risks that could potentially make the inclusive process even harder. These risks should be considered as starting points of any stakeholder engagement planning.

1. Political will and commitment to respect stakeholder engagement principles and rules is a precondition. Without this commitment from the highest level, it is impossible to implement successfully any inclusive process.

2. Doubts in participation - there is still existing and prevailing scepticism and distrust between citizens and other stakeholder groups.

3. Local inhabitants – a weak stakeholder group - while the stakeholders from public and business sector are evidently stronger and well-established actors in the planning and decision-making processes, citizens have been recognized only lately as the actor that should have a stronger say in planning and implementation of policies and solutions that affect their lives. Especially in Central and Eastern European countries we face a severe deficit in this aspect of participatory governance. Local inhabitants often remain out of planning and decision-making processes, that's why they need additional support in order to participate effectively. When citizens are not organized as an interest group and have no representatives, the engagement of a big number of interested individuals is difficult to manage effectively; it requires effective organization, skilled facilitators, and more time for the consultation process.

4. Clear purpose and objectives to avoid unrealistic expectations of stakeholders - we may face severe problems and even conflicts if the purpose and objectives of the inclusive planning are not clear. The distinction between the issues that are not negotiable and those where the stakeholders' contribution is relevant for the planning process should be clearly presented in order to avoid raising expectations that can not be fulfilled.

5. Private interest is often put prior to public interest - stakeholders often give priority to individual rather than to public interest – which makes dialogue more difficult.

6. Lack of motivation for participation – if stakeholders are engaged too often, than we may face the “stakeholders' fatigue”, but if the intervals between the engagement events are too long they may loose the interest as well. Sometimes we may also face the lack of readiness for sharing the responsibility.

4. Balanced representation of stakeholders is a pre-requisite for effective participation – identification of stakeholders and especially local inhabitants to be involved in a participatory process is demanding and stakeholder analysis can be helpful. Special attention is needed with marginalized groups.

5. Careful consideration of stakeholders' concerns - stakeholders' comments and proposals should be carefully elaborated and should have real impact on final decisions. If stakeholders' comments are not considered and fed back, participation does not make sense; nevertheless,

final decisions remain with the authorities. The issues that stakeholders find important should always be put on the agenda of the meetings.

VII. Monitoring and evaluation of participatory process – indicators of success

Involvement of stakeholders requires well planned communication, an open and interesting engagement process, tailored engagement techniques, well facilitated opportunities for debate/deliberation, and support to those stakeholders who need it. Learn from experiences and that we improve our approach in following processes. For this reason the critical evaluation of the process and definition of relevant indicators is crucial - experiences and lessons learnt should be used for better performance in the future. The following parameters will be used for evaluating stakeholder engagement:

1. Relevant two-fold information was available to stakeholders (information related to technical aspects of the management planning and to the engagement process).
2. Informing and the engagement process started in an early phase of measure implementation when different options were still open.
3. Representatives of all three main stakeholder groups were represented in the participatory process.
4. Stakeholders were provided with appropriate support that enabled them to participate.
5. Consultations were implemented in a manner that enabled stakeholders to deliberate problems and solutions together.
6. Stakeholders were provided with the feedback on due account taken on their opinions and comments.
7. The number and quality of best practice in participatory planning significantly increased.
8. The knowledge and skills of participants in the engagement processes improved.

Part two: Guidelines for practical implementation of stakeholder engagement in management planning of NATREG pilot areas

Guidelines for practical implementation of stakeholder engagement in management planning in NATREG pilot areas

VIII. Purpose and objectives of stakeholders engagement in protected area management

The NATREG partners are committed to involve stakeholders in the management planning in pilot areas in order to find out about their perception of problems and needs, their vision and future orientations for developing sustainable solutions, and ways for involving stakeholders in the implementation of management actions.

Main objectives of stakeholder engagement in NATREG pilot areas are:

1. To raise the participatory culture in all NATREG pilot areas (to inform and raise awareness of stakeholders, to open consultation processes and to take into account the stakeholders' opinions and suggestions in management planning process);
2. To enhance the cooperation among sectors in the inclusive planning process through informing and engagement of stakeholders from different sectors, to bring them together and to enable them listening to each other and deliberating PA management issues and solutions;
3. To contribute to changing practices (especially at the local level) through the development of partnership relations between public authorities, private sector and the civil society in implementation of sustainable management actions. This will enable discussions and support of practices that contribute to sustainable development of protected areas and are aimed at nature protection and solving environmental problems.

IX. Practical guidelines for stakeholder engagement in management planning in NATREG pilot areas

The NATREG approach

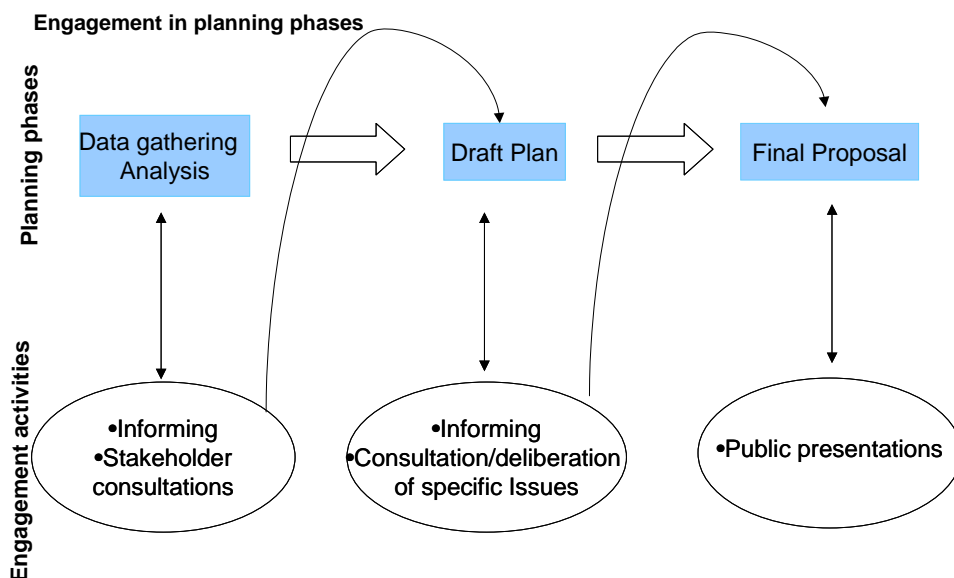
According to Eurosite, stakeholder engagement is »*something that we do in order to improve site management.*« Also in the NATREG context stakeholder engagement is in the function of preparation of a good-quality management plan which is based on the needs and priorities of relevant stakeholders. This inclusive approach takes account of the interests and encourages involvement of stakeholders in all aspects of management planning.

Involving stakeholders is part of a complete set of activities. Communication and consultations with stakeholders start early in the preparatory phase of management planning and continue throughout the whole planning process, depending on the specific issues relevant for each planning phase. Stakeholder engagement is not equally important in all planning phases. In each planning phase the objectives related to stakeholder engagement are different, therefore the engagement activities should be designed for each stage depending on these objectives. Nevertheless, the most relevant moments where the stakeholders could contribute the most are

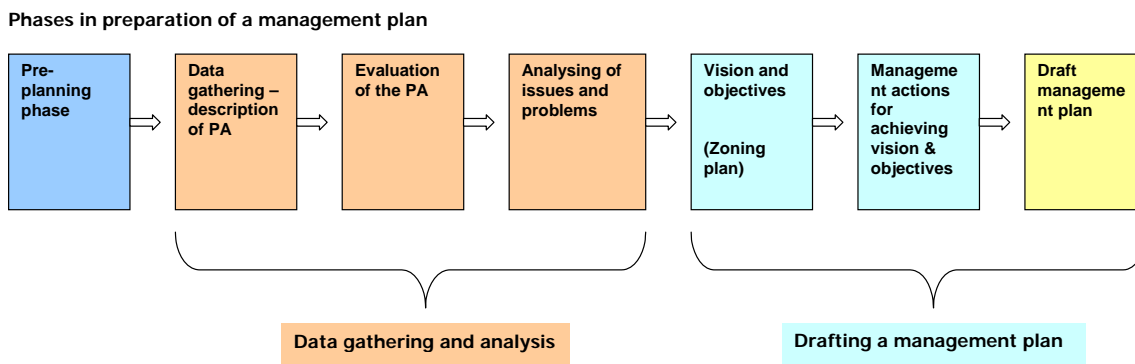
the identification of problems and needs, development of a vision and development/selection of management objectives and activities for solving the problems or satisfying the needs.

The initial step in designing stakeholder engagement is a definition of the overall purpose of stakeholder involvement in relation to the management plan under preparation, and specific issues and objectives of individual planning phases. Based on objectives and issues that arise in each planning phase we identify relevant stakeholders to be engaged in the process (stakeholder analysis), and we select engagement activities which are necessary to meet these objectives and are tailored for specific types of stakeholders. Based on engagement objectives and types of relevant stakeholders, the management planning phases are “cross-cut” with the engagement activities (information and consultation).

Results and outputs of each consultation with stakeholders are integrated as inputs in the next planning phase as it is shown in the Figure 2 below:



Using this approach in the continuation of this document, practical guidelines for stakeholder engagement are defined according to main phases of protected area management that are described in World Commission on Protected Areas (WPCA) and IUCN *Guidelines for Management Planning in Protected Areas*, as presented in Figure 3:

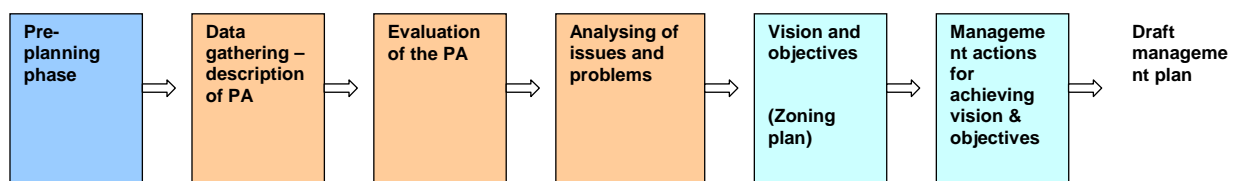


These planning steps could be modified in order to suit best the circumstances in individual NATREG pilot areas.

Cross-linking management planning phases with stakeholders engagement activities:

The stakeholder engagement approach is presented in the Figure 4 below. For each management planning phase there is a description of main objectives/issues that are relevant for consultation with stakeholders in a particular planning phase. The engagement methods and techniques are presented in boxes in the continuation of the text.

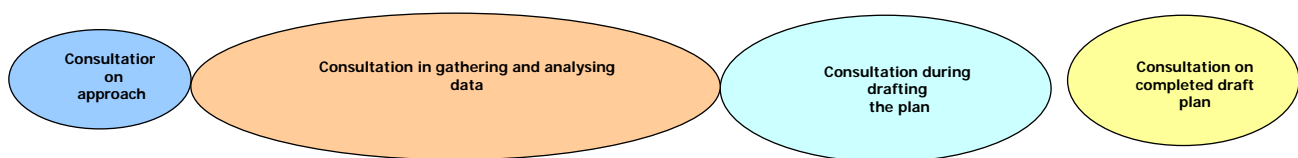
Phases in preparation of a management plan



Objectives and issues relevant for consultation with stakeholders:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stakeholder engagement plan - Identification of stakeholders - Stakeholder analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Announcement of the intention - Gathering relevant local knowledge - Identification of management issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding stakeholders' values and needs - Identification of key features of exceptional values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Definition of the desired result of the policies for the conservation of the PA - Definition of a focus or direction for management objectives (environmental, recreational, cultural, social, economic) - Describing and prioritising management objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliberating options, alternatives for management actions, criteria for prioritisation - Potentially zoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public presentation of draft Plan - Review of the draft, final comments - Report on stakeholders' impact and influence
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Cooperative working and consultation in various stages of management plan production



Phase 1 of management planning: Pre-planning

Planning of stakeholder involvement depends in the first place on the specific circumstances and the level of democratic culture in a particular pilot area. In this regard the situation analysis of participatory culture is a good tool to get familiar with up-to-date tradition and practice in stakeholder participation in a local community, most used instruments of involving stakeholders and specifically local inhabitants, the legislation and the institutional mechanisms if they exist, and best practice cases of stakeholder engagement to be used as examples in the future.

The second relevant factor that defines the engagement is a set of objectives that we want to achieve through the participation of stakeholders in each planning phase. When these objectives

are defined, and when the stakeholders are identified, this is a good basis for preparing the stakeholder engagement plan.

Stakeholder engagement activities:

We prepare the stakeholder engagement plan with cross-linking the management planning phases with the engagement actions (actions for informing and consultations with stakeholders). Its main aim is to make clear to interested stakeholders how and when their participation will take place.

The steps in designing the **stakeholder engagement plan** are as follows:

1. identification of objectives for stakeholder engagement,
2. stakeholder identification and analysis,
3. definition of specific issues to be discussed/deliberated with stakeholders, cross-linking management planning phases with engagement activities, selection of appropriate techniques, preparing a list and timetable of engagement activities (activities for informing, consultation and/or joint decision-making), announcement of the stakeholder engagement plan.

For the successful organization and coordination of the process, a coordinator of stakeholder participation should be appointed, and adequate financial resources should be assured.

Phase 2 of management planning: Data gathering and analysis

The following management planning steps are parts of the data gathering and analysis phase:

1. Data gathering and issues identification;
2. Evaluating the information about the protected area;
3. Identification of constraints, opportunities, threats.

In practice, a protected area is established on the basis of an initial data set which is used to determine management objectives. The information collected include both information about the area as it is, and about trends affecting it (management issues). The data relate to both the physical aspects of the area and to its social/cultural and economic significance.

In the data gathering process, besides the expert knowledge which means the basic and most important input for the planning process, the local knowledge can also significantly contribute to a clear presentation of the situation, and to the identification of management issues. Local people often know more than experts about the specifics of the area (for example the traditional knowledge of local people regarding plants and animals and skills they use).

In addition, a joint effort for naming and assessment of issues related to nature protection, land use, environmental protection and economic development creates a broader understanding and allows stakeholders to generate collectively the information that will be used for planning of measures and solutions. In this way, the local knowledge complements the data gathered by technical experts through using scientific methods.

As stated in WCPA Guidelines for Management Planning in Protected Areas, it should be possible to use, and even pay local stakeholders to gather some data. This may be cost-effective and may enhance their interest and involvement in the management plan.

Stakeholder engagement activities:

The best way to gather these data is a direct individual approach to those stakeholders who possess specific knowledge or data through questionnaires, surveys, or topic workshops for groups of stakeholders.

Before inviting stakeholders, the intention of preparing the management plan, together with the clear scheme of the management planning process and the ways how stakeholders could get involved, should be publicly presented.

In addition, the data gathering phase and the potential role of stakeholders in it should be described.

Next two steps in management planning are the evaluation of information about the protected area and the analysis of constraints, opportunities and threats. The main aim of the evaluation is to identify and understand why the protected area is important (assessment of the significance). It helps to describe the values associated with the protected area, explains why it was designated and identifies its benefits to society. The evaluation is carried out in two phases: i. the identification of the key features or exceptional values that must be protected, and ii. a succinct statement of significance which explains protected area's importance to society or particular interest groups. The aim of the SWOT analysis is to get a clear picture about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the management of the protected area.

Availability and evaluation of information about the protected area must be an open process. In this management planning phase it is essential to get the understanding of local people and other stakeholders' values that they hold for the protected area, in order for the management plan to address the local values and needs. Unless the preparation of the MP addresses the concerns of local people, their support will be impossible to secure. The same holds for the SWOT – stakeholders significantly contribute to the completeness of this analysis as they are the ones that live in and with the protected area.

Stakeholder engagement activities:

A mechanism through which the values and needs of local stakeholders can be identified and described is a well planned wide consultation with stakeholders. This can be performed in different ways, for example through questionnaires, interviews, or better through different events. The larger stakeholder event where all key stakeholder representatives present their views and listen to the opinions of others may be an added value to this management planning phase. It creates a common understanding of why it is important and worth to protect and manage the area in a sustainable way, and it creates also an initial commitment of key stakeholders to follow this path.

The same stakeholder event could be, if organized well, used also for the preparation of the analysis of constraints, opportunities and threats. The SWOT analysis may take different approaches, but it is essential that it is consultative as these factors can significantly affect the future of the protected area and its inhabitants. It may take a form of questionnaire sent to key stakeholders, but an interactive workshop can bring much better results. A combination of both – a preliminary SWOT and the stakeholder workshop on SWOT is the most effective.

The baseline information as well as the information on how the stakeholders' input will be used in the follow-up planning stages should be made available to stakeholders.

Phase 3 of management planning: Drafting a Management Plan

The following planning steps are parts of the drafting phase:

4. Developing management vision and objectives,
5. Developing (and evaluating) options for achieving vision and objectives, including zoning,
6. Preparing the draft management plan.

Visioning and objective setting is one of the most important moments for the participation of stakeholders in the planning process. The next step after vision development is to define the set of objectives to realise the vision. After the management objectives are set, the next step is to work on how to achieve them in the most efficient way. Therefore, the range of management options should be developed, and the appropriate ones should be chosen. Choosing among alternative options is also an important momentum in the participatory process. Stakeholders should be involved in the development of selection criteria and in the deliberation among alternative options.

Stakeholder engagement activities:

Stakeholders representing the widest possible range of interests should be brought together to a well-structured stakeholder event to think globally about their future, to identify common grounds and to put together either the elements or a statement of a vision. Special technique for visioning should be used at this event. In its second part, the stakeholder event could continue with setting strategic objectives and defining measures/activities for the achievement of the objectives.

This kind of stakeholder event (or several events) demands professional organization, therefore it should be prepared and coordinated by a professional facilitator. In large areas where stakeholders are numerous, their involvement becomes very demanding from the organizational point of view. Engagement should be enabled at different levels. Local communities or specific interest groups, for example, could discuss the issues internally and then appoint their representatives to speak also in their behalf at the final stakeholder event. If appropriate, very large events with a hundred and more participants could also be organized, but these events should be prepared professionally if we want to achieve the objectives.

The two-fold information should accompany the event: relevant information related to the management planning and information on stakeholder participation.

Putting together the draft management plan is the responsibility of managers and/or coordinators. After the final draft is ready, an opportunity for stakeholders and interested public to review the draft and to provide the final comments should be assured.

Stakeholder engagement activities:

Public presentations and public hearings are the last stage of stakeholder participation. In fact these final activities are not so important from the point of view of stakeholder participation. The stakeholders are most intensively involved in first phases of the planning process when their participation is more essential. At this final stage they just collectively assess if the final document meets their expectations and what real impact was made by their contributions throughout the planning process.

It is recommended that the final management plan is accompanied with the report on how stakeholders participated in the management planning process, and how they contributed to the quality of the management plan.

Next steps in protected area management (assessment of submission, revision of draft management plan, production of final document, and its approval or endorsement) are not subject of this Guidelines.

X. Useful links and literature

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