



Study on the Review of Policies and Legal Framework

**of the three Biosphere Reserves Aggtelek (Hungary),
Babia Góra (Poland) and Šumava (Czech Republic)**

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Glossary of Acronyms

ACBR	Advisory Committee on Biosphere Reserves (set up by UNESCO's Director General)
ANPD	Aggtelek National Park Directorate (Hungary)
BR	Biosphere Reserve
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEEC	Central and Eastern European country
EU	European Union
GEF	Global Environment Facility
ICC	International Co-ordinating Council of the UNESCO-MAB Programme
INTERREG	Community initiative which aims to stimulate interregional cooperation in the European Union
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
LEADER	<i>fr. Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale</i>
MAB	Man and the Biosphere Programme (UNESCO)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NC	National Committee (MAB)
NEP	National Environmental Programme (Hungary)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NP	National Park
NTO	National Tourism Office (Hungary)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Protected Area
PHARE	Pre-accession instrument of the EC to assist applicant countries of Central Europe in their preparations for joining the European Union
PLA	Protected Landscape Area
SEP	State Environmental Policy (Czech Republic)
SPA	Special Protected Area
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHC	World Heritage Convention (UNESCO)
WNBR	World Network of Biosphere Reserves (UNESCO-MAB Programme)

Executive Summary

1. Biodiversity governance is a global concern affecting the biosphere and putting the human being in the center. One of the most important arenas where different concepts for biodiversity governance are exercised and field tested is *in-situ* nature conservation. Protected areas as our main vehicle for nature conservation may take different forms, however, they stay in first consequence an attempt to safeguard biodiversity for the needs of humankind. In this review, we focus on human policies and legal frameworks being only one out of many aspects of biodiversity governance.

2. The overall objective of the review of policies and legal frameworks was to identify gaps in legislation and policies and to show how legislation and policies in these countries should be changed to enable long-term sustainable development. Practitioners from the local level (CPEAs and NPs) evaluated the current governance framework and gave recommendations for improvements. The working structure of the project included three steps: interviews with project partners of the CPEAs and with representatives of the National Parks in each BR; compilation of the results; and evaluation of the findings.

3. The general characteristics of the three biosphere reserves assessed are summarised in a brief description of the sites concerning their ecology, the general socio-economic setting, and some of their outstanding development challenges. Further information on size, year of designation, other protected area labels, the governance type, the coordinating body of the individual reserves, and the status of the management plans are tabulated.

4. The description of the policies and legal frameworks is organised according to the following vertical levels: national, regional and local.

At the national level, the Czech Republic has adopted a consistent legislative and administrative framework for ecosystem management. The Czech Ministry of the Environment is the responsible governmental institution for protected areas and implements the national policies concerning nature conservation. Biosphere reserves are legally not included in the Czech nature conservation law and its set of protected area categories.

Hungary has just as well built up a consistent national legislative and policy structure for integration of biodiversity conservation into regional development. And as well, the Hungarian Nature Conservation Act does not include biosphere reserves as protected area category; it defines the planning and organisation system of nature conservation and its relationship to regional planning.

In Poland, the Constitution together with particular national policies and strategies define the framework for nature conservation policy and extending the perspective of nature conservation and biodiversity policy beyond protected areas. The Polish Ministry of the Environment is responsible for the protected areas while the implementation of nature conservation policy is assigned to the Chief Nature Conservator and his staff within the Ministry. BRs are not a protected area category within the Polish legislation and no mechanism is foreseen for their management.

5. At the regional level, the implementation of Czech policies and legal frameworks in the Šumava region is facilitated by a number of projects, also with financial assistance of the European Union. The establishment of the EUROREGION Šumava substantially facilitates transboundary cooperation and supports an ecologically and economically integrated perspective on the region. The level of integration achieved for sustainable use and conservation is considerable. Regional Development Agencies play a central role in supporting and enhancing the cooperation between the different interest groups in the region.

In the region around the Hungarian Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve, the Regional Development Council of Northern Hungary is responsible for the planning, preparation and implementation of different EU and national programmes and projects, the coordination of partnerships and expert networks, and the support of local project ideas. The level of sub-regions has received stronger political support during the past period. Various development plans exist at the regional level.

In Poland, Nature conservation responsibilities at the regional level are linked to the *voivodships*, which can designate landscape parks and nature reserves; these functions are supported by regional nature conservators. At the *voivodship* level the relevant legal framework for the implementation of sustainable tourism development: is the tourism development plan by the marshal office, which is to be adopted by the *sejmik* (a self-governmental body).

7. At the local level, the implementation of policies and legal frameworks in the Czech Šumava Biosphere Reserve is characterised by two parallel developments: first, local people are increasingly involved in and financially benefiting from the tourism development. However, the considerable pressure from tourism development is a specific challenge, in particular to the management of the Šumava NP. Second, significant problems have emerged in the interaction between the NP administration and neighbouring communities. The Management Plan of the Šumava NP is still not fully accepted by the communities; the controversial subject of the plan is the NP zonation, which is rejected by some neighbouring communities. The present zonation of the BR is outdated and the re-design is stalled.

The Hungarian Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve is not perceived as a significant actor in the local governance context from local stakeholders' point of view. As a major barrier to development, neither local initiatives nor local authorities have sufficient resources for initiating persistent development, thus the impact of their activities remains modest. The Hungarian nature conservation policy widely neglects the interests of small local communities inside or in the vicinity of protected areas. Albeit the Aggtelek National Park management is fully aware of the relevance of local populations for nature conservation, it does not have the appropriate legal, material and financial means to meet the demands of the Seville Strategy.

In the Polish Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve, successes at the local level are limited due to administrative capacity deficits in nature conservation as well as in land-use planning and implementation at the communal level. The NP administration disposes of a series of instruments to implement and communicate its objectives. Command-and-control instruments are based on the Polish Nature Conservation Act. Market-related and information-related instruments are also employed.

8. The following gaps and lacks of legislation and policies could be identified:

- The concept of sustainable tourism is missing or unclear.
- A strategy for (sustainable) tourism development is missing.

- There is a competition of big investments vs. traditional and small scale businesses.
- Regional Development misses an integrated approach.
- Economic development and policy implementation at the sub-regional and local level respectively is lagging behind the national dynamic.
- BRs are not capable of acting in the sub-regional development context in the sense of the Seville Strategy.

The different topics are motivated and illustrated by examples from the interviews and questionnaires considering the three case studies.

9. Concerning sustainable tourism development, the following conclusions should be considered in the case studies' home countries:

- The concept of sustainable tourism development deserves additional support in terms of diffusion; the concept is hardly introduced into national programming and planning.
- Sustainable tourism development needs cross-sector collaboration and an integrative approach; an integrative effort of all relevant sectors is missing.
- Sustainable tourism development needs political support from the national level, which is generally lacking in the case study countries.

10. With regards to an improved functioning of biosphere reserves in the light of the policies and institutional frameworks established in the home countries of the BRs assessed, we draw the following conclusions:

- The various bodies involved in the management of the WNBR (MAB governing and advisory body, MAB regional networks, as well as MAB-NCs) are not able to assure a national implementation process coherent to the objectives of the Programme.
- Similar to sustainable tourism, the biosphere reserve concept deserves an integrative approach, cross-sector by nature, a joint effort of all sectors affected.
- Moreover, MAB institutions turn out to be negligible as lobby organisations for BR management objectives. The MAB logo is misinterpreted as a label, although, through the participation in the MAB Programme, the participating countries utter their intention to comply with the objectives of the Seville Strategy.

In sum, the governance gap between the national and regional level on the one side and the local level on the other side is aggravated by the fact that it is replicated by the structure of the MAB-WNBR. The biosphere reserves in this study are still predominantly isolated entities only insufficiently linked to the different spatial (regional to national to international) and temporal (short to long-term) policies, socio-economic processes and cultural traditions.

11. Further conclusions concerning the implementation of the biosphere reserve concept of the MAB Programme are:

- Professional expertise for integrative protected area management seems to be a highly volatile phenomenon at the local level. A number of reasons are considered to be responsible for the lack of professional expertise at the local level.
- Following the participation typology of PRETTY (1995), the case studies from the CEECs indicate only weak active participation. The BRs assessed are characterised by routine management or social and environmental engineering, i.e. participation does not play a central role in BR management independently from the degree of cross-sector collaboration.

12. The way forward for the MAB institutions lies in understanding communication and information sharing as well as the support of the individual BRs as their most prominent tasks. Supportively, relevant bodies of the UNESCO-MAB Programme (i.e. the International Co-ordinating Council and the Advisory Committee on Biosphere Reserves) ought to be more rigorous in the procedures of designation and periodic review of biosphere reserves. They should offer support to BRs that are in danger of being removed from the network list. A comprehensive monitoring system based on the provisions laid out in the Statutory Framework and Seville Strategy should be established.

1. Aspects of Biodiversity Governance – An Introduction

According to Article 2 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), biological diversity or biodiversity means “the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.” (CBD 1992) Biodiversity thus not only includes all forms of living organisms but encompasses also all natural processes and conditions that sustain their being.

The term ‘governance’ describes “the interactions among institutions, processes, and traditions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are taken on issues of public and often private concern, and how citizens or other stakeholders have their say. Fundamentally, governance is about power, relationships, and accountability: who has influence, who decides, and how decision makers are held accountable. Governance may be used in different contexts – global, national and local, and social and institutional. Governance occurs wherever people organise themselves – formally and informally – to develop rules and relationships with each other in pursuing their objectives and goals.” (INSTITUTE ON GOVERNANCE 2002) Thus ‘governance’ refers to both the institutionalisation of governmental responsibility on the one hand, and the distribution of power among the involved societal actors on the other.

In synopsis, biodiversity governance is a global concern affecting the biosphere and putting one of its species in the center: the human being. Biodiversity governance is essentially dealing with what we are trying to capture when talking about sustaining the basis for human living on Earth. One of the most important arenas where different concepts for biodiversity governance are exercised and field tested is *in-situ* nature conservation. Protected areas as our main vehicle for nature conservation may take different forms, however, they stay in first consequence an attempt to safeguard biodiversity for the needs of humankind: food, energy, aesthetical percepts and ethical motives.

However, as the above given definitions on biodiversity and governance suggest, the issue of ‘biodiversity governance’ is a complex one. Thus, successful biodiversity governance in protected areas depends not only on its management’s capacity to achieve conservation objectives but rather on the ability of management bodies to navigate in “an often tangled web of external threats and pressures, supportive policies and practices at all levels of government, and locally specific opportunities for action.” (STOLL-KLEEMANN 2005: 26).

Biosphere reserve management bodies face numerous challenges according to the specific local conditions at site but also referring to higher scale influences, such as governmental decisions and global change consequences. Different governance types are in place in the biosphere reserves of the WNBR through which varying opportunities to face these challenges are offered. BORRINI-FEYERABEND (2003) differs between four governance types in the context of protected areas: government managed protected areas, co-managed protected areas, private protected areas, and community conserved areas.

This differentiation is in consequence also applicable to biosphere reserves. However, combinations of governance types may also occur in this context, e.g. in biosphere reserves where core areas are declared as national parks and thus government managed, whereas parts of buffer zone and transition area are community or co-managed.

In a 2005 international scientific conference on biodiversity, science and governance (Paris Conference), participants distilled a number of factors affecting biodiversity governance, which they suggest to be adapted to local conditions but aligned with international, national and regional frameworks. As an enabling environment, successful biodiversity governance requires *inter alia* vertical linkages between the different frameworks that are adapted to local conditions. Successful biodiversity governance further requires responsibility and accountability at all levels and mutual supportiveness between different levels with minimal transaction costs. Last but not least, it needs horizontal supportiveness and further synergies between conservation and other sector strategies. Successful biodiversity governance is possible only if biodiversity is mainstreamed within the different sectors of society according to sustainability principles (BAI *et al.* 2005).

More than this, a common vision among all actors and stakeholders involved beyond the limits of the Biosphere Reserves is sought as a basis for effective biodiversity governance (RIVERA *et al.* 2002). However, this collaborative spirit needs to be backed up at the different governance levels and by the various sectors affected by and making use of biological diversity. Today and against the background of an ever increasing human population on Earth, in most places of the world nature is intricately linked to and enmeshed in human activity, even though these interlinkages might not be obvious at first sight. However, more obviously regions such as Central and Eastern Europe are in majority composed of cultural landscapes; agricultural activities have been present here for centuries, and urbanisation – an issue that urges for increased attention in the near future – is a one of the major drivers for landscape transformation affecting biodiversity *inter alia* through the construction of infrastructure, the intensification of agricultural production and recreational activities, or increased water consumption.

In this review, we focus on human policies and legal frameworks tackling the issue of biodiversity governance. As our introductory thematic outline suggests, this is only a single aspect of biodiversity governance; to be successful, it needs much more.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The overall objective of the review of policies and legal frameworks of the three biosphere reserves in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland was to identify gaps in legislation and policies and to show how legislation and policies in these countries should be changed to enable long-term sustainable development. Practitioners from the local level (CPEAs and NPs) evaluated the current governance framework and gave recommendations for improvements.

The following interview partners were foreseen to take part in the review:

	Czech Republic (Šumava NP/PLA/BR)	Hungary (Aggtelek NP/BR)	Poland (Babia Góra NP/ BR)
CPEAs	Jan Těšitel, Ph.D.	Judit Sándor	Wojciech Mróz
NPs	Vladimír Silovský, Josef Stemberk	Zsuzsa Tolnay	Tomasz Lamorski

The working structure of the project was designed as follows:

1. Interviews with or questionnaire of at least one project partner of the CPEA and one of the National Park in each BR (see above) concerning gaps and obstacles in legislation and policies at the local and national level that hinder the implementation of sound use practices and sustainable development; topics: domestic biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism development policies and legal frameworks (see interview guidance below).
2. Compilation of the results of the interviews and questionnaires (gaps and obstacles, recommendations).
3. Evaluation of the findings and elaboration of a final report, consisting of a core set of
 - a. identified gaps and lacks of legislation and policies at the local and national level that hinder the implementation of sound use practices and sustainable development regarding tourism development and nature protection;
 - b. recommendations targeted on the three project countries, showing how legislation and policies should be changed to enable long-term sustainable development regarding tourism development and nature protection.

Questionnaire and interview guidance for the telephone interviews

Albeit the general result of the background study was that there is remarkable implementation gap between the national and regional level and the local level in all three case studies (SCHLIEP *et al.* 2007), the specific national and particular local settings, however, are rather different. For a thorough consideration of the national differences in administration and in the interplay between NP/BR and local authorities, the questionnaire (see Annex) and the

interviews were focused at the local level experts' perspective on the governance context for the biosphere reserves.

More specifically, issues discussed were:

- reflection of biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism development issues in national strategies, programmes and legislation
- implementation of these policies and regulations at the national, regional and local level
- employed instruments for implementation (command-and-control, market-related, information-related)
- implementation gaps and obstacles
- interplay between NP/BR and local, regional and national authorities
- administrative and management capacities at the local level (NP/BR, local authorities)

Furthermore, the following topics already assessed in the frame of the background study were updated and evaluated during the interviews:

- legal categories of protected areas in national law
- legal conditions for BR management and their influence on BR management
- governmental frameworks from the national level down to the local level
- responsible government entities at the different administrative levels (in hierarchical order)
- legal competences of national, regional and local authorities in the biosphere reserve
- conflicts in competence among the different administrative authorities
- key persons
- experience with the local/national administration (regarding e.g. level of support from local/national governments)

3. General Characteristics of the BRs

Czech Republic: Šumava Biosphere Reserve

The Šumava Biosphere Reserve is located at the western border of the Czech Republic, a high income OECD member country (WORLD BANK 2007). Due to the peripheral location of the region, the population density is low. The main ecosystem type is forest that covers two thirds of the mountains and highlands that are dominated by spruce. Pressures on the biodiversity within the borders of the Šumava Biosphere Reserve originate mainly from tourism development that generates on the one hand income in an economically weak region, while on the other hand the accelerated growth of the tourism industry is destroying the values it exploits (URBAN 2006).

Šumava Biosphere Reserve: Key characteristics	
Size	167,400 ha
Year of designation	1990
Other Labels	National: NP, PLA EU: Natura 2000 (SPA) International: Ramsar, IUCN Red List of Ecosystems
Governance type	Government management
Coordinating body	Non-existent; BR is administrated by the Šumava NP and PLA administration
Management plan	Non-existent, only NP management plan

Hungary: Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve

The Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve and National Park at the Hungarian-Slovak border represents one of the smallest territories among the Hungarian biosphere reserves and national parks. The major ecosystem type is the temperate broad-leaf forest. The Aggtelek NP has acquired the UNESCO World Heritage title together with Slovak Karst National Park due to its unique cave system and karst landscape (KOVÁČZ 2006).

Hungary is an upper-middle income country according to WORLD BANK (2007) classification. Main pressures on the BR territory are closely linked to demographic dynamics in the region as well as to economic aspects. The region around Aggtelek BR is suffering constant demographic erosion; its unemployment rate is high and especially young people leave the area because of lacking job opportunities. The abandonment of traditional farmland is threatening biodiversity; poverty among local people can be considered the reason for unlicensed extraction of wood from the NP forests. There are only two small villages included in the territory of the BR with a population of less than 950 people (2005) who are engaged in forestry, agriculture and livestock breeding but are at the same time miners and commuters to industrial areas (KOVÁCS 2006).

Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve: Key characteristics	
Size	20,187 ha
Year of designation	1979
Other Labels	National: NP EU: Natura 2000 (SPA, EC Birds Directive) International: WHC (natural: caves of Aggtelek)
Governance type	Government management
Coordinating body	Non-existent; BR is administrated by the Aggtelek NP administration
Management plan	Non-existent, only NP management plan

Poland: Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve

The Babia Góra mountain ridge forms the natural border between Poland and the Slovak Republic. Poland is an upper-middle income country according to the classification of the WORLD BANK (2007). The mixed mountain and highland ecosystems of the Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve include four habitats, changing with altitude: the lower and upper forests (up to 1,390 meters), the dwarf pine belt (up to 1,650 meters) and the alpine habitat (up to 1,725 meters). Tourism development plays a growing role and increasingly challenges the BR management. Furthermore, pressure from the “urbanisation of the countryside” is increasing. Yet, the social structure in the region is comparably stable and the main economic activities are agriculture, cattle breeding, forestry, carpentry, and agro-tourism. The BR has some 6,000 inhabitants, with around 25,000 people living in its vicinity (DABROWSKI 2006, UNESCO-MAB 2007).

Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve: Key characteristics	
Size	11,829 ha
Year of designation	1977
Other Labels	National: NP EU: Natura 2000
Governance type	Government management
Coordinating body	Non-existent; BR is administrated by the Babia Góra NP administration
Management plan	Non-existent, only NP management plan

4. Policies and Legal Framework

4.1 National Level

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has adopted a consistent legislative and administrative framework for ecosystem management defined in the Czech State Environmental Policy and the State Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection Programme (SCHLIEP et al. 2007). The Czech State Environmental Policy 2004 (SEP), the principal document for Czech environmental policy, includes nature and biodiversity protection among its top priorities. A National Biodiversity Strategy has been finished in 2005. The 1998 State Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection Programme is the Czech Republic's main programme for protecting biodiversity. A new State Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection Programme is under preparation (OECD 2005).

The Czech Ministry of the Environment is the responsible governmental institution for protected areas and implements the national policies concerning nature conservation. BRs are legally not included in the national nature conservation law and its set of protected area categories; they are also institutionally not implemented, as there is no coordinative body (with the exception of the Lower Morava Biosphere Reserve) with staff and budget established.

At the national level, BR collaboration is organised by the Czech National MAB committee via annual meetings with representatives from organisations responsible for the management of the biosphere reserves.

Collaboration with national parks does not exist, as there are no separate coordinative bodies for biosphere reserves again with the exception of the Lower Morava Biosphere Reserve. The management tasks of the Šumava Biosphere Reserve are performed by the staff in the facilities of the Šumava National Park, which is included in the territory of the BR. There was no information available about the relevance of the regional network EuroMAB for Czech biosphere reserves.

Hungary

Hungary has built up a consistent national legislative and policy structure for integration of biodiversity conservation into regional development. With the second National Environmental Programme for the period of 2003-2008, Hungary is trying to further strengthen regional integration of environmental policy.

The Hungarian Nature Conservation Act does not include biosphere reserves as protected area category. However, the Act defines the planning and organisation system of nature conservation and its relationship to regional planning (KOVÁCS 2006).

With respect to tourism development, the New Hungary Development Plan sets out a comprehensive list of priority objectives for the Northern Hungarian region in the field of industry and services. To strengthen the competitiveness of the region, it heads for the development of national and international tourist attractions and the establishment of a regional tourist network. In order to realise the comprehensive objectives of the Development Plan concerning economic growth and increased employment, the region should pay particular attention to infrastructure development. This approach is supported by a National Tourism Development Strategy issued by the National Tourism Office (NTO) under

the Hungarian Ministry for Municipalities and Rural Development (SÁNDOR, questionnaire). A Tourism Law is under elaboration since ten years without producing a draft version yet (TOLNAY, interview).

The members of the Hungarian National MAB Committee (MAB-NC) are representatives of scientific institutions, environmental and UNESCO administration, or directors of national parks. The interests of local residents from the BRs are not represented. In general, the MAB-NC has become less active due to increasingly restricted resources.

The BR Aggtelek is represented by the Aggtelek National Park Directorate, an independent legal entity under the supervision of the Hungarian Ministry of Environment and Water. The NP budget is defined by the Ministry of Environment and Water in dependency of the general situation of the state budget. The Hungarian law does not designate any of the tasks foreseen in the Seville Strategy to the NP.

Poland

The Constitution namely together with particular national policies and strategies elaborated under the roof of the "Sustainable Development Strategy for Poland up to 2025" (*Polska 2025*) define the framework for nature conservation policy and extending the perspective of nature conservation and biodiversity policy beyond protected areas. The Second National Environmental Policy (NEP-2) clearly indicates that biodiversity should not only be conserved in specific protected areas but also be fully integrated into activities concerning other economic sectors (OECD 2003).

The National Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity and its accompanying Action Plan is the main vehicle for implementing the CBD in Poland (Polish Ministry of the Environment 2003). The Polish Environmental Protection Act defines the principles of environmental protection and the conditions under which the natural resources can be utilised, following sustainable development requirements. The Polish Nature Conservation Act of 2004 is the basic regulation defining the state organisation of nature conservation and the system of protected areas including *inter alia* national parks and Natura 2000 sites. The Polish Ministry of the Environment is responsible for the protected areas while the implementation of nature conservation policy is assigned to the Chief Nature Conservator and his staff within the Ministry (DABROWSKI 2006).

At present, BRs are not a protected area category within the Polish legislation and no mechanism is foreseen for their management. Most important for the management of BRs are regulations concerning protected areas, including "plans of protection" (management plans) provided that each part of the BR is protected as national park, landscape park or nature reserve (DABROWSKI 2006). National parks are created by the decree of the Council of Ministers and thus at the national level (DABROWSKI 2006); the *voivodships* (provincial authorities) as well as *poviats* (county authorities) and *gminas* (communal authorities) are not involved in this process.

The National Strategy for Tourism Development for the period 2007-2013 is implemented at the regional level by the Tourism Development Strategies of the *voivodships*. All tourism matters are coordinated by the Tourism Department within the Polish Ministry of the Economy being thus responsible for national tourism development and regulatory mechanisms for tourism marketing (MROZ 2005).

Due to its voluntary character, the work of the Polish UNESCO-MAB Committee is limited to consultations and facilitation of co-operation with other partners. It is in general based on voluntary work with the Polish Academy of Sciences providing some administrative support. In case of the Babia Góra National Park, the National Park administration represents the BR in meetings and conferences organised by the Polish UNESCO-MAB Committee.

4.2 Policies and Legal Framework – Implementation at the Regional Level

Czech Republic

The area of the BR Šumava is part of the EUROREGION Šumava including communities, cities and administrative districts along the borderline of Bavaria, the Czech Republic and Austria. Considering regional coordination, the administrative structures are in place and a number of projects are currently implemented, also with financial assistance of the European Union (PHARE, bilateral assistance). The establishment of the EUROREGION Šumava substantially facilitates transboundary cooperation and supports an ecologically and economically integrated perspective on the region. The level of integration achieved for sustainable use and conservation is considerable.

On the Czech side, two regional offices administer the region: the north-western part of the BR belongs to the Pilsen Region (Plzensky kraj), while the south-eastern part is administered by České Budejovice as part of the South-Bohemian Region (Jihocesky kraj). Each region disposes of a Regional Development Agency (RRA for Pilsen, RERA Inc. for South Bohemia), dedicated to support the socio-economic transformation of the region through the coordination of projects by e.g. providing information services or participating in the development of a regional policy. Financial resources to the regional offices are provided by the European Union's assistance funds, the national government as well as by districts, communities and private investors. The Regional Development Agencies play a central role in supporting and enhancing the cooperation between the different interest groups in the region. In this context, the Regional Development Agency Šumava Stachy is particularly worth mentioning as one of the key stakeholders for regional development in the area.

The communities within and adjacent to the BR Šumava recently formed so-called 'micro-regions', in order to coordinate development efforts and to foster cooperation on strategic planning (URBAN 2006).

Hungary

The country has seven planning and statistical regions controlled by regional development councils with their regional development agencies. The Regional Development Council of the region Northern Hungary is responsible for the planning, preparation and implementation of different EU and national programmes and projects, the coordination of partnerships and expert networks, and the support of local project ideas. The role of the counties is significantly diminishing although they are the only elected bodies that provide a link between local authorities and the national Parliament. The level of sub-regions has received stronger political support during the past period. The territory of the Aggtelek BR and National Park belongs to two sub-regions: Kazincbarcika and Edelény (SCHLIEP *et al.* 2007).

Various development plans exist at the regional level (SÁNDOR questionnaire):

- The Regional Operative Programme of North-Hungary focuses on the improvement of the income generation capacity of tourism as a specific objective for the region in the period 2007 - 2013.
- The Interregional Operative Programme (HU-SK, i.e. the Hungary- Slovakia Territorial Co-operation Programme 2007- 2013, draft) defines tourism as important factor/sector in the area, stating that "there is a good potential

for joint development of tourism. There is, however, very little co-operation to capitalise on this potential: the border area lacks joint tourism packages, marketing and promotion.”

- The Regional Tourism Development Strategy (valid for same period as the both above mentioned Programmes) formulates objectives with regards to eco-tourism, the environmental aspects of sustainability, and the co-operation with the neighbouring regions (Tisza-Lake, North-Hungarian Plain, Central Hungary and South-East Slovakia)

Poland

Nature conservation responsibilities at the regional level are linked to the *voivodships*, which can designate landscape parks and nature reserves; these functions are supported by regional nature conservators (OECD 2003).

In cooperation with Polish Tourist Organization (*Polska Organizacja Turystyczna* – POT) based in Warsaw, Regional Tourist Organizations (*Regionalne Organizacje Turystyczne* – ROT) have been created in each *voivodship*, with the participation of the regional administration and self-government. In the Babia Góra region, there is the Małopolska Organizacja Turystyczna operating since 2001 (MROZ 2005).

At the voivodship level the relevant legal framework for the implementation of sustainable tourism development: is the tourism development plan by the marshal office, which is to be adopted by the *sejmik* (a self-governmental body) (MROZ questionnaire).

4.3 Policies and Legal Framework – Implementation at the Local Level

Czech Republic: Šumava Biosphere Reserve

In the Šumava region, local people are increasingly involved in and financially benefiting from the tourism development. Compared to other Czech mountain marginal areas, it is a relatively advanced region in tourism development. Municipalities, their associations and the Regional Development Agency Šumava have learned to apply for financial sources, at regional, national as well as European levels. The international GEF project, within which this review is elaborated, has been welcomed by municipalities and tourism operators with the expectation to support the development of horizontal communication networks within the region (TĚŠITEL questionnaire). However, the considerable pressure from tourism development is a specific challenge, in particular to the management of the Šumava NP. This is a result of the parallel decline of agriculture and forestry in the region, which is narrowing the economic development options and has turned tourism into the potential major driver for regional development. Tourism and recreational use bring important money to the region, however, the share of sustainable tourism is still rather poor (5-10%). At present, two strategies are pursued: support of sustainable tourism and strict control of commercial mass tourism (SILOVSKÝ questionnaire).

Significant problems have emerged in the interaction between the NP administration and neighbouring communities. Although a series of round table discussions under the auspices of the GEF project enabled municipalities lying within the BR (but outside the National Park) to be involved, a congruent approach based on broad societal support from local stakeholders is lacking. However, the municipalities (park and non-park) have started to view themselves

as a unit, which can be seen as a major step towards a common vision for the region and the functioning of the biosphere reserve (TĚŠITEL questionnaire). Nevertheless, the Management Plan of the Šumava NP, which will expire in 2010, is still not fully accepted by the communities; the controversial subject of the plan is the NP zonation, which is rejected by some neighbouring communities. According to the NP's strategic planning, the core zone with limited human intervention should be extended from present ca. 13 per cent to 39 per cent of the total area of the park within the next five years. Another extension of the core zone is foreseen to take place later on. Repeatedly, the regional authorities in Plzeň and České Budějovice have expressed their objections against the extension of the core zone of the NP. Furthermore, and deviant from the proposed zonation, the NP administration recently introduced the proposal for a "non-intervention area" for forest stands. Due to ambiguities concerning the spatial distribution of "core zone" and the "non-intervention area", the new proposals are only hesitantly accepted by the communities and even rejected by the majority of the communities.

Within the GEF project, a new coordinator of the BR was established to facilitate its institutionalisation. The main focus of his work is on an improved collaboration with the regional development agency; a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the roles and tasks of the NP administration and the regional development agency has already been prepared but waits for approval by the national ministry. According to the MoU, the NP staff will be responsible for scientific expertise while support for e.g. LEADER, PHARE, INTEREG 3a project administration will be provided by regional development agency; this new structure is oriented towards the example of the Lower Morava BR, which is coordinated by a public benefit organisation. The director of the regional development agency is a key person in the regional development process and very motivated, however, his resources are limited. There is an administrative council representing the different districts in and around the BR (STEMBERK interview).

However, the present zonation of the BR is outdated and the re-design is stalled (pers. comm. BRAUN 2007).

Hungary: Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve

In the last twenty years, the Aggtelek NP Directorate has become a relatively large organisation fulfilling roles in nature conservation, research, education and acting as a tourism enterprise. In the latter role, the NP generates considerable revenues in a region that is otherwise characterised by social deterioration and economic depression. In contrast and due to the lack of BR staff and corresponding management activities, the BR is not perceived as a significant actor in the local governance context from local stakeholders' point of view.

Land tenure is problematic on the territory of the NP. About 80 per cent of the forest or 60 per cent of the NP territory is state-owned and managed by the North Forest Company, a governmental enterprise that pursues active forest management for profit purposes (KOVÁCS 2006).

Some local initiatives are trying to revive traditional land use and trade. The Cultural and Tourism Institute of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County explores the state of local communities and initiates a development programme involving local players who could act as the local community development agents in their communities.

However, and as a major barrier to development, neither the above-mentioned organisations nor the local authorities have sufficient resources for initiating persistent development, thus the impact of their activities remains modest. The Hungarian nature conservation policy widely neglects the interests of small local communities inside or in the vicinity of protected areas. Albeit the Aggtelek National Park management is fully aware of the relevance of local populations for nature conservation, it simply does not have the appropriate legal, material and financial means to meet the

demands of the Seville Strategy. No forums for participation and civic involvement were established, however, the NP Director regularly participates in sub-regional and local council meetings (KOVÁCS 2006).

Poland: Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve

Successes at the local level are limited due to the lack of capacity for nature conservation as well as land-use planning and implementation at the level of the *gminas*. This is of specific significance, as the spatial management plan of the *gmina* must be agreed with the NP authority as far as it concerns NP territory (e.g. in case of the BR buffer zone) offering the opportunity for an integrative approach to ecosystem management.

All state property within the NP boundaries is managed by the NP administration. Private land use is very traditional, extensive and nature-friendly and maintains a diverse landscape consisting of fields, meadows and forests. The average farm size is very small. There are about 900 farms between 1 and 2 ha and there is no farm bigger than 10 ha. However, the number of farmers decreases year by year (DABROWSKI 2006).

The strategy for tourism development in Malopolskie *voivodship* is just under preparation and will be ready to the end of 2006 (financed by the Tourism Department in the Ministry of Economy). The further development of the system of tourist organisations is planned and will focus on the creation of local tourist organizations (Lokalne Organizacje Turystyczne – LOT), operating at the level of the communes (MROZ 2005).

The NP administration disposes of a series of instruments to implement and communicate its objectives. Command-and-control instruments are based on the Polish Nature Conservation Act and the NP management plan with e.g. regulations for sheep herding on pastures and public access to roads. Market-related instruments are employed when giving out licenses for tourist guides etc.; information-related instruments are the participation of the NP administration in the NP scientific council and frequent meetings with representatives of the *gminas* and their departments for environment. It is obligatory that the spatial management plans of the *gminas* (10 years period) must be approved by the nature conservation officers of the *voivodships*. With respect to communication and public education, the NP administration provides services such as an education centre and exhibitions and PA staff works as guides in the BR (MROZ questionnaire).

5. Identified Gaps and Lacks of Legislation and Policies

The following topics can be synthesised out of the first round of questionnaires and interviews among representatives of CPEAs and NPs/BRs:

- The concept of sustainable tourism is missing or unclear.
- A strategy for (sustainable) tourism development is missing.
- There is a competition of big investments vs. traditional and small scale businesses.
- Regional Development misses an integrated approach.
- Economic development and policy implementation at the sub-regional and local level respectively is lagging behind the national dynamic.
- BRs are not capable of acting in the sub-regional development context in the sense of the Seville Strategy.

In the following, the different topics are motivated and illustrated by examples from the interviews and questionnaires considering the three case studies.

Concept of sustainable tourism missing or unclear

In the assessed policy and legislative frameworks, the term 'sustainable tourism' is lacking a concrete definition and is therefore widely interpreted by political stakeholders. This causes an implementation gap: sustainable tourism is considered important but not implemented because its concept is unclear.

Furthermore, sustainable tourism competes with other concepts for tourism development. Conventional tourism development often succeeds over sustainable forms of tourism business because it promises income and employment in a short-term period; the integrated approach of sustainable tourism development is mostly not recognised. Sustainable tourism is (still) seen as a type of tourism, not a general concept for all types of tourism.

- Example from Hungary (Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve)

“Despite numerous definitions given for sustainable tourism, indeed the term is interpreted in very different ways, which definitely is amongst the causes why policy makers treat it in a dubious way: it is considered important, on the other hand there is no sign to deal with it in a very practical way. There is a serious gap between theory and practice. (...) At the regional level of policies, sustainable tourism appears in a very limited way. The regional tourism strategy does not give priority to this topic. It initiates destination management regions (six in Northern Hungary), in which Aggtelek and its region is one. It is not contradictory though, to approach this area with high priority to sustainable tourism development. The presence of the NP and BR safeguards this attitude within the protected area, but in our case it means only about one third/ one fourth of this suggested destination management area.” (TOLNAY interview)

“Sustainable tourism as such is missing a legal, valid definition. The National Tourism Development Strategy issued by the National Tourism Office (NTO) under the Ministry for Municipalities and Rural Development states: “Presently, sustainable tourism is only a theoretical concept in Hungary. In spite of different initiatives the

indicator system suitable for the verification of the sustainable operation of the developments and the comprehensive regulation are missing.” (SANDOR questionnaire)

Missing strategy for (sustainable) tourism development

In the assessed case studies, there are no concepts, strategies, programmes or priorities tackling the issue of sustainable tourism development in particular. Moreover, even for tourism as such, development strategies are missing or unsatisfying. Sustainable tourism seems to be not a priority for state authorities, especially not in the field of environmental and nature protection policies.

Therefore, the role of the NP administration (appearing as state authorities) in sustainable tourism is unclear and complicated through bureaucratic processes. The CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development are not integrated into national policies.

The BRs are not recognised by national law in all three countries and represented by state authorities, i.e. NP administrations, in all cases.

- Example from the Czech Republic (Šumava Biosphere Reserve)

Although a consistent legislative and administrative framework for ecosystem management has been adopted in the Czech Republic, however, “direct destruction or gradual disappearance of valuable ecosystems continues. (...) The integration of biodiversity and nature protection concerns into sectoral policies is to be improved. (...) A strategy for sustainable tourism should be prepared. Scientific and technical capacities for protecting biodiversity and nature conservation are not commensurate to the pressures from development.” Thus, the 2005 OECD Environmental Performance Review identifies nature protection and the protection of landscapes and biodiversity as one of the priority environmental challenges. To meet these challenges, the Czech Republic will need “to strengthen its environmental efforts in the implementation of environmental policies and to further integrate environmental concerns into economic and social decisions.” (OECD 2005) SILOVSKÝ (questionnaire) states that there is an “unclear tourism strategy for the whole Sumava region, not only for soft tourism.” “Generally, political will to include the CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development into strategies and plans is lacking at all levels. Politics is short-term oriented while processes at the national level are out of the sphere of influence of the PA management.” (SILOVSKÝ questionnaire)

- Example from Hungary (Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve)

“Sustainable tourism is not reflected in the various programmes, strategies and action plans neither at national, nor at regional level. Currently, an eco-tourism strategy is under preparation by NTO, however, sustainable tourism is still tourism, so it has to stand on business grounds. In Hungary, sustainable tourism has very much to do with rural development and is really a hot topic in areas rich in natural assets but economically disadvantaged.” (TOLNAY interview)

Competition of big investments vs. traditional and small scale businesses

Sustainable tourism development is competing with mass tourism or big investments which predominantly aim at short-term benefits and economic growth (income and tax generation, employment). Concepts for sustainable tourism development are often small-scale and ideally adapted to local conditions and traditions. At all political and administrative levels, however, regional development concepts focus on particular development centers (mostly

agglomerations) and certain sectors (mainly infrastructure). Thus, private and state investments into regional development are often lopsided from the perspective of traditional land uses and sustainable regional development. Investments and incentives in small scale businesses are not a priority of development programmes or not even recognised as a political task.

Although financial resources for sustainable development projects are existing and accessible (municipalities are capable of applying for funds) as the Czech case study illustrates, in other cases, however, funds cannot be strategically placed due to the lack of resources for the necessary contribution.

Traditional agriculture and extensive forestry provide opportunities for linkages to sustainable tourism development, however, are not a priority of development policies.

Furthermore, (EU) legislation regarding products and services of traditional/small scale businesses is often too demanding and strict.

- Example from the Czech Republic (Šumava Biosphere Reserve)

“There are extreme pressures to use the buffer and transition zone of the BR for commercial use. The problem is in the way of use. There are threats first for landscape character of Sumava and second for biodiversity. In the Lipno region, several holiday centres are planned to be build soon with one of them already been build in the range of the BR (Lipno Marina). Although standing outside, the impact on the nature of the PLA and NP is obvious. Nowadays people call for new investment inside of the protected area. It is mostly advertised as necessary accompanying infrastructure (refreshment facilities, toilets, information boards...).” “For the majority of authorities it is much easier to discuss about big projects than about dozens smaller ones. Big investments are warmly welcomed among officers and local people. A long-term strategy is sourly needed. The investment into small-scale tourism is still at the very beginning (...)” (SILOVSKÝ questionnaire)

- Examples from Hungary (Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve)

“Regarding the funding of sustainable tourism initiatives and projects, these initiatives are not dealt with separately. It represents a special segment in tourism with usually low turn-over (if done with care). In today's funds such projects have to compete with highly profitable projects.” (TOLNAY interview)

“There are no direct regulations (existing or planned) dealing with sustainable tourism or even eco-tourism. These terms are usually used in connection with tourism targeting natural and/or protected areas. This is true also for the various development plans (see also chapter 4.1).

- The Regional Operative Programme of North-Hungary is incoherent in many ways, focuses on the development of the already existing centres instead of the peripheral rural areas, and prefers investments or actions targeting bigger businesses instead of the local, personal level developments essential in rural tourism.
- The Interregional Operative Programme (HU-SK, i.e. the Hungary- Slovakia Territorial Co-operation Programme 2007- 2013, draft) states a weak transboundary co-operation.
- The Regional Tourism Development Strategy (2007-2013) does not deal with sustainable tourism and mentions only the environmental aspects of sustainability, not the socio-economical ones.

To sum up, although there is a certain need for top-down planning as well, however, local implementation is suffering from a major gap and not linked to local procedures; bottom-up processes do not get sufficient back-up and support.” (SÁNDOR questionnaire)

“One of the main potential strengths in the Hungarian rural tourism services is the offer of agro-tourism services and products served locally. The EU and national legislative regulations are rather strict and too demanding against the administrative and infrastructure background.

- Poultry and hares are allowed to be processed locally, but need to be checked by official vets.
- Pigs, sheep and cattle must be taken to centralised slaughterhouses and certified by official vets.
- Vegetables, milk, dairy products and meat are allowed to be sold in local shops or in the local market only.
- Accommodation owners might serve/sell locally produced food to their guests, but there is an annual limit.”

(SÁNDOR questionnaire)

“With respect to fund raising, the difficulty is the own contribution requested with applications. Private persons, small and medium businesses usually have a lack in capital to invest, in many cases even the 10% own contribution is not bearable by them, so they are not able to apply. New OP tenders require 30-60% own contribution.” (SÁNDOR questionnaire)

Regional Development misses an integrated approach

Sustainable tourism (and tourism as such) is very closely related to regional development. Sustainable tourism development needs to be based on an integrated approach to create high standard sustainable tourism products, but regional development concepts linked to sustainable tourism development are lacking. This flaw concerns the sustainable production of energy, sustainable concepts for public transportation (road and rail), and the sector of public services (communication, health, etc.). In Hungary, most development programmes / strategies target infrastructure development and the establishment of e.g. centralised wastewater treatment plants, gas pipelines and other expensive facilities, instead of preferring the individual solutions which are cheaper, adapted to local conditions and more effective on the long run (SÁNDOR questionnaire). Local policies basically do not exist, sometimes village rehabilitation plans (in Hungary) include some elements that are relevant. In general there is the feeling that national programmes, strategies and plans are not sufficiently translated into legislation.

- Example from Hungary (Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve)

“Regional development programmes in Hungary usually address these interlinked problems and tasks separately, which automatically results in lopsided (usually infrastructure) developments. There would be a need for a holistic approach and major interdisciplinary programmes. (...) The use and issuing permits for alternative technologies (such as renewable energy, sewage treatment, recycling) is still very complicated. This is a major disadvantage because in many areas where sustainable tourism development is an issue, the application of such technologies would be cheaper and would suit the special concept of this kind of tourism. (...) Inter-sectoral questions do not always have enough time or procedure to be discussed and to give proper feedback on various problems (strategies, action plans, etc.).” (TOLNAY interview)

- Examples from Poland (Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve and Carpathian region in general):

“Obstacles to sustainable tourism (development; RS):

- the poor state of roads and transport infrastructure in general; especially outside the best-known tourist resorts
- the decreasing number of public transportation connections – regional rail connections in less visited areas are being closed, the quality of the public bus services is very low, and there is no integration between the

different means of transport. All of this prompts people to use their own cars; it also means that most tourists stay in the crowded tourist resorts

- (...)
- poor financial support for sustainable tourism activities
- the tendency among local communities to favour short-term economic benefits over the long-term effects of sustainable development options.” (MROZ 2005)

Economic development and policy implementation at the sub-regional and local level respectively is lagging behind the national dynamic

Despite the fact that the governments of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland dispose of a comprehensive system of environmental legislation underpinned by a broad and mostly coherent system of strategies, programmes and action plans for sustainable development integrating biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources (OECD 2000, 2003, 2005), the assessed regions face a decrease in infrastructure and related services (e. g. public transportation, public services). Albeit the strategic and legislative framework and even most of the necessary institutions have been established, the regional planning process of Spatial Management Plans (Poland), Regional Development Plans (Hungary), or territorial plans (Czech Republic) seems to work without proper connection to its sub-regional socio-economic environment. This causes disadvantages regarding the opportunities for sustainable tourism development and is amplified by rather low participation of stakeholders in communal decision making; only poorly developed civic engagement; lack of skilled administrative personnel and partly of funds; weak law enforcement; and low environmental awareness of the local population.

- Example from the Czech Republic (Šumava Biosphere Reserve)
 SILOVSKÝ states in his questionnaire that the main persistent problems since the NP/BR have been established are the low acceptance of agreements reached in the past (even towards legal regulations) and a lack of political will to find consensus.
- Example from Hungary (Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve)
 Despite undeniable legislative and institutional achievements in the 1990s, the enforcement of environmental laws and regulations at all administrative levels as well as the capacity of the respective administrative bodies and authorities need to be strengthened. “The challenge is (...) to implement environmental policies and to strengthen environmental infrastructure (...)”. (OECD 2000: 19)
- Example from Poland (Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve)
 In 2001, ECOTEC drew the following conclusions with respect to the sub-regional administrative capacity to implement and enforce the EU environmental *acquis* in Poland: “According to the new administration structure *gminas* and *poviats* have a lot of duties and in most cases treat environment protection as a less significant problem. (...) The radical administrative reform, the decentralisation of responsibility to institutions that did not previously undertake these functions and the lack of resources and training to undertake them, means that the *voivodships*, *poviats* and *gminas* do not yet have sufficient capacity to implement the environmental *acquis*. (...) A major programme of staff recruitment and training at *voivodship*, *poviat* and *gmina* levels is needed and this requires extensive funding.” (ECOTEC 2001: 81 ff)

Current experiences from experts underline the urgency of the problem: “At the poviát and gmina (district and local; RS) level, there are no nature conservation departments established; furthermore, there is no professional capacity with regards to nature conservation at this administrative level.” (MROZ interview)

Moreover, ecological awareness and education at the local level is weak. The idea of sustainable development as a beneficial option for regional development is not anchored in rural communities (SCHLIEP et al. 2007). The recognition of the BR in the local government context is very low.

BRs are not capable of acting in the sub-regional development context in the sense of the Seville Strategy

The following structural problems concerning the implementation of the Seville Strategy at the local level add to the above challenges: lacking coordinative body in all biosphere reserves, missing communication strategies of the BRs, low recognition of the principles of the Seville Strategy in the NPs’ administration, and lacking support from the MAB National Committees due to lack of funds and personnel.

- Example from the Czech Republic (Šumava Biosphere Reserve)

Despite the overall acceptance of the Šumava NP as a valuable tourism destination and despite the fact that the major part of the NP is in state ownership, the majority of the inhabitants of the communities in and around the park still seem to be hostile to the NP and PLA authorities. Especially the BR has, up to now, failed to communicate the concept of the Seville Strategy to local stakeholders (URBAN 2006) and is still underestimated in its potential of being a platform for finding regional consensus “acceptable for the majority of interests in the region” (SILOVSKÝ questionnaire). STEMBERK (interview) resumes: “Taking a look back, it would have been better to enforce the diffusion of the project and to enhance communication.” TĚŠITEL (interview) somewhat clarifies the underlying causes: “At the beginning, the National Park proved to be a problematic actor in the process of implementing sustainable development activities. The reason seemed to be that the NP administration focused on the territory of the NP only, not considering the BR. At least two more obstacles hindered the involvement of the NP into regional sustainable development: routine redtivism in the NP administration and a defensive and to some extent fundamentalist conservation strategy.” Nevertheless, during the course of the project, the NP administration started to change its behavioural patterns in favour of a more open and pro-active policy. But still, an institutional separation of management activities of the biosphere reserve from the NP administration is recommended by TĚŠITEL (interview).

- Example from Hungary (Aggtelek Biosphere Reserve)

“There are three overlapping micro-regions in the Aggtelek NP, however, the regional development agencies are not efficiently working and the Aggtelek NP is not dealing with rural development: it cannot coordinate micro-regions due to missing legal mandate and lacking economic and personnel capacity.” (TOLNAY interview)

- Example from Poland (Babia Góra Biosphere Reserve)

“With respect to the effectiveness of the National MAB Committee, the lack of funds is one of the main obstacles in fulfilling the tasks provided by the Seville Strategy.” (DABROWSKI 2006)

In summary, the experiences from the case studies show that the principles of sustainable tourism development are not sufficiently reflected in national policies and legislation. Furthermore, several mutually reinforcing factors can be observed:

- Generally, expertise and understanding concerning concepts built on the concept of sustainability (MAB Programme, sustainable tourism) decrease from the national down to the local level in public authorities.
- The same vertical trend holds true for the system of MAB institutions: from the international down to the level of the individual biosphere reserves, resources and expertise concerning the MAB Programme decrease.
- At the local level, these two trends meet an only poorly developed general public awareness towards the environment and the concept of sustainability in the case study regions.
- Finally and due to lacking economic dynamic and demographic losses, (peripheral) rural areas are characterised by an ongoing thinning of public services and infrastructure while at the same time national regional development assistance mainly seem to concentrate on promising pilot projects and regions. This especially concerns the Czech and Hungarian example.

Two other aspect, which were not directly or just cursory addressed by the participants or which are not taken into consideration by the design of this review, should not be forgotten: the role of factors such as behavioural patterns and trust for the success of cross-sector sustainable development efforts. “Besides policies and legislation, socio-economic milieu and patterns of behaviour of individual actors can play a very important role in the problem at hand. Empirical studies (for the Czech Republic see e.g. Kusova et al. 2007; RS) have shown that people do not oppose nature protection itself but the way the law is practically implemented (they sometimes use the term “abused”) by NP representatives. Even with a perfect legislative system, it is not guaranteed that we achieve what we want.” (TĚŠITEL interview)

Furthermore, participants observed lack of mutual trust among stakeholders and actors that undermines efforts for collaborative action: “The proposed structure for Sumava BR is without example in the Czech Republic and all involved actors act very carefully; mutual trust is still missing. A common vision of all regional actors for regional development is already at the gate.” (STEMBERK interview)

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

When trying to synthesise the above compiled topics in order to enable an operationalisation of the experiences and perspectives on sustainable tourism development in the three case study regions, the following conclusions should be considered:

1. Generally, the concept of sustainable tourism development deserves additional support in terms of diffusion of the concept into the political arena of policy makers and decision makers as well as into the concerned broader public. There is no sense in applying a concept that nobody knows or understands. Sustainability as such is a complex issue and hard to communicate, the more effort, however, is necessary for its communication. This is exemplified by the observation that the concept is hardly introduced into national programming and planning.
2. A tourism development concept that is based on the concept of sustainability needs cross-sector collaboration and an integrative approach. There is no sense in applying a concept that is not embedded into an integrative effort of all relevant sectors. The flower of sustainable tourism will not blossom if you cut down water (public services), and if you take away soil (technical and administrative infrastructure), nutrients (income) and fertilizers (regional funding, subsidies, etc.). Here, the particular value of the biosphere reserve concept becomes obvious: a biosphere reserve could and should moderate and coordinate this process by safeguarding the application of the sustainability concept and by offering the necessary expertise in project management.
3. Sustainable tourism development needs political support from the national level, which is generally lacking in the case study countries. This support should *inter alia* precipitate in an appropriate national legislation supporting and prioritising sustainable development and in rigid law enforcement for relieving precious natural resources from external threats and pressures.

However, a congruent and coherent concept for sustainable tourism development is just one side of the coin when discussing conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity through sound tourism development in biosphere reserves in Central and Eastern Europe. According to the Seville Strategy, biosphere reserves should be laboratories for the field testing of approaches to regional sustainable development reconciling biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. In order to operationalise the experiences given above with regards to an improved functioning of biosphere reserves in the light of the policies and institutional frameworks established in the home countries of the BRs assessed, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. The case studies' BRs are government managed which is characteristic for most of the BRs in the CEECs. However, many reserves in the WNBR are represented by management bodies of other protected area types (e.g. National Parks, World Heritage and Ramsar sites) existing on the same territory as the BR. This reveals a decisive institutional shortcoming of the MAB Programme: until today the various bodies involved in the

management of the WNBR (MAB governing and advisory body, MAB regional networks, as well as MAB-NCs) are not able to assure a national implementation process coherent to the objectives of the Programme. The impact of the MAB-NCs seems to be very limited as they are mostly reduced to a more-or-less representative function due to a lack of funds for programmatic work and because of the missing representation of local interest groups.

2. Similar to sustainable tourism, the biosphere reserve concept deserves in integrative approach, cross-sector by nature, a joint effort of all sectors affected. Infrastructure, public services, media access and communication facilities are important aspects for the success of sustainable development efforts. They are highly relevant for the management of the reserves as they influence aspects such as educational level and environmental awareness of the general public, information access and exchange between the different actors, public participation, or the capacity of the staff.
3. In addition, we have to consider the governance matrix that enables the refinement of national programmes, strategies and plans and the enforcement of agreed regulations down to the local level. In this respect, we found a substantial gap between the national and local level. This is a well-known phenomenon for practitioners in regional sustainable development in many parts of the world and has obvious implications with regards to the understanding of the BR concept at the local level. Although it concerns regional sustainable development efforts in general, this flaw particularly affects the MAB Programme as an international approach in national multi-level governance systems. The MAB Programme understands nature conservation areas as embedded in a wider regional ecological, cultural and socio-economic context. The stimulation of efforts towards sustainable rural development and improved community participation is a central element of its concept (UNESCO 1996). However, compliance with the objectives of the Seville Strategy is perceived to be solely in the hands of MAB institutions (i. e. the MAB-Secretariat and regional UNESCO offices, the regional BR networks, the MAB National Committees and the BRs often represented by other protected area types) while BRs as such gain little to no support from governmental bodies in that. Moreover, even MAB institutions turn out to be negligible as lobby organisations for BR management objectives. This is *inter alia* expressed through a lack of concepts for the communication of the Strategy as the assessed countries failed to set up and implement a national strategy for the diffusion of the Seville Strategy. Underhand, protected area managers in Poland confess that the MAB label is just a nice add-on without contents in most national parks. This points towards a deeper misunderstanding: the MAB logo is misinterpreted as a label, although, through the participation in the MAB Programme, the participating countries utter their intention to comply with the objectives of the Seville Strategy.

In sum, the governance gap between the national and regional level on the one side and the local level on the other side is aggravated by the fact that it is replicated by the structure of the MAB-WNBR. The biosphere reserves in this study are still predominantly isolated entities only insufficiently linked to the different spatial (regional to national to international) and temporal (short to long-term) policies, socio-economic processes and cultural traditions. An illustrative example for this isolation is the management of the Hungarian Aggtelek BR that is not able to link the

economic momentum generated by the large-scale tourism business inside the NP with the economic development of the communities in the wider vicinity.

4. Another aspect adds complexity to BR governance: professional expertise for integrative protected area management seems to be a highly volatile phenomenon at the local level. Governmental administrative capacities are generally lowest at the sub-regional level while success and failure of the collaborative biosphere reserve management approach depends heavily on strong and skilled 'key actors' and partners. In the Polish case study, the necessary counterpart responsible for nature conservation in the communal administration of the *gminas* is missing while in the Czech Republic the collaboration between BR management (i.e. NP management) and local communal administrations is characterised by mutual communication problems. However, BRs themselves are severely affected by the problem as they are in majority represented by other protected area management bodies, i.e. institutions that are perceived to represent nature conservation interests and that are not targeted towards the design and implementation of regional development strategies. In a nutshell, underlying reasons for the lack of professional expertise at the local level are, *inter alia*:
 - Often beggarly remuneration of experts in communal administrations and honorary work of local NGO members lead to high staff fluctuations;
 - Short life-span of international development projects thwarts efforts towards achieving long-term objectives in sustainable development;
 - In transition economies local administrations have been target of frequent institutional reforms and do not offer the stability needed for trustful long-term cooperation;
 - Missing funds and staff for BR management.

5. PRETTY (1995) offers a systematisation of participatory efforts ranging from type 1 with participation only a pretence, to type 7 characterised by self-mobilisation of stakeholders independently of external institutions. Following this typology of participation, the case studies from the CEECs indicate only weak active participation: stakeholders do not have control over structures nor processes; the management of the BR territory is mostly in the hand of government-led bodies (NP management, forest service etc.). An early recognition of the positions of interest groups and individual landowners was not the rule. STOLL-KLEEMANN & WELP (in prep.) propose a scheme for management types that reflects the degree and emphasis given to participation and cross-sector cooperation in BRs. Following this approach, the BRs assessed are characterised by routine management or social and environmental engineering, i.e. participation does not play a central role in BR management independently from the degree of cross-sector collaboration. The case studies reveal that participation is often understood as a formal process of bare, downward vertical information transfer. The participatory process gives the impression that it is not really accepted, for negotiation and stakeholder interests are not taken into account. Communication deficits pose a severe problem in the Czech and Hungarian cases. In the case of the Aggtelek BR, the design of the BR zonation even excluded settlements of residents from the protected area territory with a view to gate out local interests. Low environmental awareness and weak civic engagement aggravate the problem.

Despite a regularly impressive annual increase in participating countries and reserves, the biosphere reserve concept of the MAB Programme seems to be in a jam. On the one hand, the international acceptance of the Programme strongly depends on the flexibility that is given to the participating countries in establishing biosphere reserves on their territory. On the other hand, the various implementation failures, economic pressure, a widespread governance gap between national and local level, lack of professional expertise and missing active participation of local stakeholders compromise the Programme and its goals per se: a Programme with a Strategy that cannot be successfully implemented due to its own provisions (even the term 'implementation' is critical for UNESCO-MAB staff) seem to be an oxymoron.

A way forward

However, the cure is in the realms of possibility, as the implementation of the World Heritage Convention (WHC) proves. Firstly, it is not the idea of the Programme that is wrong, but the way it is implemented and how implementation is monitored. Quite the contrary, the idea of 'laboratories' for sustainable solutions in regional development is of high topicality and deserves much more support from the governments of the participating countries. But how can this be? The WHC sets an example by outsourcing the monitoring procedure for the full implementation of the Convention to IUCN that works as an independent certification institution checking the achievement of targets at the individual WHC sites in regular intervals. This independent monitoring system, connected with a rigid sanctioning mechanism, has a number of advantages, *inter alia* the breaking of self-referencing bureaucratic mechanisms in the MAB institutional set-up and the exoneration of the MAB-NCs from monitoring tasks.

Against the background of the governance gap between national and local level, the MAB institutions should understand communication and information sharing as well as the support of the individual BRs with respect to:

- their coordinative function,
- fund raising activities,
- their efforts to participate in the development of regional development strategies and programmes,
- participatory management approaches and
- transboundary cooperation and international exchange

as their most prominent tasks. If BRs are to be laboratories for a better regional development following the principles of sustainability, then the MAB institutions should provide a best practice example for an improved vertical cooperation in biosphere reserve governance.

There is no objection against the obvious intention of some participating countries to use the biosphere reserve concept as an additional label for already existing protected areas and for fund raising purposes; however, the medal should be awarded to members who actively strive for the achievement of the objectives laid down in the Seville Strategy. Today, the BR label is something that is given away after a rather bureaucratic process of application, and

given back by some honourable countries that have to concede that the designation of the reserve is not perceived as a chance by the local population but as an additional obstacle for regional development. In future, the BR label should be awarded to protected areas that provide excellent solutions for sustainable regional development. Supportively, relevant bodies of the UNESCO-MAB Programme (i.e. the International Co-ordinating Council and the Advisory Committee on Biosphere Reserves) ought to be more rigorous in the procedures of designation and periodic review of biosphere reserves. They should offer support to BRs that are in danger of being removed from the network list. A comprehensive monitoring system based on the provisions laid out in the Statutory Framework and Seville Strategy should be established.

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Questionnaires

Judit Sándor (2007)

Vladimír Silovský (2007)

Jan Těšitel (2007)

Interviews

Tomasz Lamorski (2007)

Wojciech Mróz (2007)

Zsuzsa Tolnay (2007)

Josef Stemberk (2007)

Personal communication

Vaclav Braun (2007)

Annex

Questionnaire employed in the frame of the study:

DEAR PROJECT TEAM,

Preparing the policy review, we need your comments and suggestions regarding policies and legislation that hinder or foster sustainable tourism development in your BRs. We therefore would like to ask you to answer the following question.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS AND OBSTACLES THAT YOU ARE FACING IN YOUR DAILY WORK ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN YOUR BIOSPHERE RESERVE REGARDING LEGISLATION AND POLICIES?

- Please, describe each of the problems as concretely as possible.

- Think of legislation (single acts/different fields of laws), programmes, strategies, action plans and other policies.

- Consider the following fields of policies:
 - Environment
 - Tourism
 - Regional development
 - Spatial planning and infrastructure
 - Others that affect your work (e. g. agriculture, forestry)

- Consider the different levels of policies and legislation:
 - Local
 - District/Region
 - National

THREE MORE QUESTIONS (IF NOT ALREADY ANSWERED UNDER THE FIRST ONE)

- Which problems are you facing when working with different authorities and state institutions?
⇒ Describe the problems and your suggestions how to improve cooperation.

- Which problems are you facing regarding the funding of sustainable tourism initiatives and projects?

- Where do you think the CBD guidelines should be integrated into national, regional or local legislation or policies and how?