



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Stakeholder Management in the Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-
Danube

Approaches for a Sustainable Stakeholder Management to
Create Awareness and Acceptance for the Reserve

verfasst von | submitted by

Katrin Fasch BSc

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science (MSc)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 879

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Naturschutz und
Biodiversitätsmanagement

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Ass.-Prof. i. R. Dr. Thomas Wrška

Acknowledgements

As I look back on the last three years, which were probably the most exciting, exhausting but also the most instructive moments of my studies, I can only thank everyone who has been by my side during this intense time, providing me with information and giving me encouragement.

First of all, I would like to thank my family, without whom I would never have made it this far. Through their encouragement, energy and support, I have been always encouraged along the way, but also motivated and reminded, when necessary, of what I have already achieved. My partner and my friends, both those I have met through my studies and all the others, have also made a significant contribution to my studies. Their open ears, their support or inspiring conversations have always helped me to get through difficult phases or lows.

Furthermore, this thesis would not have been possible without the support of Kerstin Böck from the WWF Austria. It was through her that the idea for this work was born, and her numerous contacts and knowledge gave me the feeling that I was in the best of hands. I am also truly grateful to Lisa Wolf from the E.C.O. Institute of Ecology in Klagenfurt and Monika Podgorelec from the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation, because they also actively supported me in the practical part of my work with information and their knowledge.

Finally, I would like to thank my supervisor Ass.-Prof. i. R. Dr. Thomas Wrba. Thank you very much for finding a supervisor who was interested in this topic and encouraged me. Without your experience and advice, I would have despaired more than once. Thank you for believing in me and my work!

Abstract

Stakeholder management is an essential part of nature conservation work because, without the appropriate involvement of the directly or indirectly affected stakeholder groups, much of nature conservation work cannot be done or can only be done to a limited extent. This hurdle must also be overcome in the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, which extends across the five countries of Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia. Due to its size, a large number of different stakeholders are affected, and different interests, objectives and concerns come to light, which should be taken into account.

In the course of this master's thesis, the most important stakeholders of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve were identified through qualitative interviews, their needs were presented and appropriate measures for stakeholder involvement were highlighted.

It was found that the relevant stakeholders are largely representatives of the various state governments, the ministries for nature conservation, water management, forestry, agriculture, and transportation, as well as the municipalities and cities in the protected area, UNESCO and the federal forests, but that they have the most diverse demands on the protected area. Each of these demands and stakeholders also requires a different level of involvement in the biosphere reserve.

The results of this work should present the key stakeholders of the biosphere reserve and produce measures for their inclusion. Different strategic approaches are presented to promote acceptance and awareness, as well as to involve stakeholders in what is happening in the protected area. However, the results should not only serve as an aid for the TBR MDD, but also inspire other protected areas, NGOs, projects or similar, to address stakeholders at different levels and with different means to be successful.

Kurzfassung

Das Management der Stakeholder stellt für den Naturschutz einen essenziellen Bestandteil seiner Arbeit dar, denn ohne die entsprechende Einbindung der direkt oder indirekt beeinflussten Anspruchsgruppen ist vieles im Naturschutz nicht oder nur unzureichend möglich. Diese Hürde gilt es auch im Biosphärenreservat Mur-Drau-Donau zu bewältigen, welches sich über die fünf Länder Kroatien, Österreich, Serbien, Slowenien und Ungarn erstreckt. Durch seine Größe wird eine Vielzahl unterschiedlicher Stakeholder beeinflusst und es treten verschiedene Interessen, Ziele und Bedenken zu Tage, denen Beachtung geschenkt werden sollte.

Im Zuge dieser Masterarbeit wurden die Schlüsselstakeholder des Biosphärenreservates Mur-Drau-Donau identifiziert, deren Bedürfnisse dargestellt und mittels qualitativer Interviews geeignete Maßnahmen für die Einbindung der Anspruchsgruppen beleuchtet.

Es zeigt sich, dass es sich bei den relevanten Stakeholdern größtenteils um Vertreterinnen und Vertreter der unterschiedlichen Regierungen der Länder, der Ministerien für Naturschutz, Wassermanagement, Forstwirtschaft, Landwirtschaft und Transport sowie der Gemeinden und Städte im Schutzgebiet, der UNESCO und der Bundesforste handelt, die jedoch die verschiedensten Ansprüche an das Schutzgebiet stellen. Jeder dieser Ansprüche und Stakeholder bedarf auch einer unterschiedlichen Involvierung in das Schutzgebiet.

Die Ergebnisse dieser Arbeit sollen die Schlüsselstakeholder des Biosphärenreservates darstellen und Maßnahmen für die Inklusion derer hervorbringen. Es werden verschiedene Strategieansätze dargestellt, um Akzeptanz und Bewusstsein zu fördern, sowie Anspruchsgruppen in das Geschehen im Schutzgebiet zu involvieren. Jedoch sollen die Ergebnisse nicht nur dem Biosphärenreservat Mur-Drau-Donau als Hilfestellung dienen, sondern auch andere Schutzgebiete, NGOs, Projekte oder Ähnliches dazu inspirieren, Stakeholder auf diversen Ebenen und mit den unterschiedlichsten Mitteln anzusprechen, um erfolgreich zu sein.

Table of Content

Acknowledgements	1
Abstract	2
Kurzfassung.....	3
Table of Content.....	4
List of Figures.....	6
List of Tables	6
List of Abbreviations	6
1. Introduction.....	7
1.1. Initial Situation.....	7
1.2. Problem Statement.....	7
1.3. Research Question and Hypothesis	8
2. Theoretical Foundations.....	9
2.1. Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube.....	9
2.2. Stakeholder Management	11
3. Methods	16
3.1. Overview	16
3.2. Empirical Approach	16
3.3. Sampling	16
3.4. Survey Method	17
3.5. Data Evaluation.....	17
3.6. Measures of Selected Large Protected Areas.....	18
3.6.1. Biosphere Reserve Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen	18
3.6.2. Carpathian Biosphere Reserve	19
3.6.3. Biosphere Reserve River Landscape Elbe	20
4. Results.....	21
4.1. Stakeholder Engagement in Selected Protected Areas.....	21
4.2. General Analysis.....	21
4.3. Identification of Key Stakeholders.....	23
4.3.1. Relevant Stakeholders.....	23
4.3.2. Stakeholder Set	23
4.3.3. Stakeholder Assessment.....	25
4.3.4. Actor Profiles of the Key Stakeholders.....	26
4.3.5. Assessment of the Closing Positions	27
4.3.6. Development of Strategic Approaches.....	28
4.4. Content Analysis of the Conducted Interviews.....	30
4.4.1. Role of the Biosphere Reserve	30
4.4.2. Strengths of the Protected Area	31

4.4.3. Weaknesses of the Protected Area	32
4.4.4. Potential for Resistance.....	33
4.4.5. Challenges for the Future.....	33
4.4.6. Stakeholder Involvement.....	34
<i>4.5. Approaches for Sustainable Cooperation</i>	<i>35</i>
4.5.1. Establishing a General Proper Management	36
4.5.2. Open and Clear Communication.....	36
4.5.3. Establishing the Protected Area as a Brand.....	36
4.5.4. Information Events	37
4.5.5. Media Activity	37
4.5.6. Integration in Schools	37
5. Discussion	39
5.1. <i>Stakeholder Inclusion as the Basis for Acceptance and Support of the TBR MDD.....</i>	<i>40</i>
5.2. <i>Necessity of Individual Consideration of Needs and Concerns.....</i>	<i>41</i>
5.3. <i>Restrictions Lead to a Decrease in Understanding and Awareness.....</i>	<i>41</i>
6. Outlook	43
References	44
Appendices	49
A – <i>Interview Guide for Expert Interviews.....</i>	<i>49</i>
B – <i>Overview of Criteria Used in the Content Analysis.....</i>	<i>50</i>
C - <i>Anonymized Transcripts of the Interviews Conducted</i>	<i>52</i>

List of Figures

Figure 1: 4-Phase model (Kasper, 2020).....	12
Figure 2: Dimensions (Mitchell et al., 1997)	15
Figure 3: Allocation of stakeholders to the different countries	22
Figure 4: Overview of the various stakeholder groups of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve	23
Figure 5: Final positions of the stakeholders of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve	27

List of Tables

Table 1: Identification of key stakeholders – stakeholder set	24
Table 2: Key stakeholders and their interests and goals.....	26
Table 3: Strategic approaches for key stakeholders	28

List of Abbreviations

IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NPO	Nonprofit Organization
PO	Profit Organization
TBR MDD	Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube

1. Introduction

1.1. Initial Situation

As a transboundary large-scale conservation project, the UNESCO 5-Country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube aims to ensure sustainable development and to preserve the unique biodiversity of the floodplain and river landscape. It is the world's first protected area involving five countries and, with over 800,000 hectares, the largest river protection area in Europe. The Mura, Drava and Danube rivers connect Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia, thus uniting the most biodiverse river landscapes on our continent.

In order to create an integrative protected area, the reserve is dependent on the consent and support of the local citizens and the diverse stakeholders, because without them it is not possible to achieve set goals in terms of nature conservation but also in terms of regional economy (Fischer, 2009). However, in many large protected areas, including the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, this management represents a major challenge, which is addressed in this paper. The interaction and involvement of all stakeholders is essential for sustainable management and requires a great deal of knowledge and sensitivity to promote the corresponding acceptance and to focus on a common goal. This is because the diversity and contradictory nature of the interest groups repeatedly leads to conflicts, which can hinder the implementation of projects and measures and cause dissatisfaction. In order to meet the different demands, it is therefore necessary to develop a suitable concept to reconcile the diverse demands and to generate a weighting of the stakeholders' interests.

The goal of this work is to conduct a stakeholder analysis to uncover the various interests and concerns of priority stakeholders, and then to provide approaches for adapted management. The study should highlight the acceptance and awareness of the biosphere reserve and offer possible approaches for sustainable cooperation with stakeholders.

1.2. Problem Statement

The initial situation described above makes it clear that the size and cross-border nature of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve create a demanding environment that poses a major challenge in terms of dealing with stakeholders. It is clear that the management here must be very well thought out and designed to create successful relationships between the protected area and stakeholder groups and thus generate acceptance.

Consequently, the question arises as to what difficulties can arise for management and how the stakeholders of the biosphere reserve can be properly addressed. This question is the main research issue of this thesis and will be explored through the following objectives.

1.3. Research Question and Hypothesis

As already mentioned, it is a great challenge for protected areas to perceive all stakeholders and to involve them in projects. With regard to this difficulty, the aim of this thesis is to identify the key stakeholders of the TBR MDD, to document their expectations and thus to define possible approaches regarding the expectations and attitudes of the stakeholders.

The following research question will therefore be addressed in the context of this master's thesis:

Who are the key stakeholders of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve and how can they be addressed in order to create awareness and acceptance for the park and its goals?

This leads to the following hypotheses:

1. If stakeholders are not sufficiently involved in projects and measures, the acceptance and support for the biosphere reserve will dwindle.
2. The more different stakeholders are involved, the more important it is to respond individually to their needs and concerns.
3. The more individual interest groups (landowners, hunters, etc.) feel restricted, the lower is the understanding and awareness of the biosphere reserve.

To answer the research question and analyze the hypotheses, the main objective described above is divided into several points:

- Identification of key stakeholders
- Development of stakeholder profiles
- Expectations and measures that should be taken from the perspective of the key stakeholders
- Development of strategic approaches in order to involve the individual interest groups in the work of the biosphere reserve

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube

The Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve encompasses the largest river system in Europe and was officially recognized by UNESCO in 2021. By bringing together the countries of Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia, it is the world's first biosphere reserve that encompasses five countries and offers the possibility of joint management of cross-border natural areas (UNESCO, 2013).

The Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve includes the following biosphere reserves in the participating countries (UNESCO, 2013):

- Republic of Croatia and Hungary: Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve
- Republic of Serbia: Bačko Podunavlje Biosphere Reserve
- Republic of Slovenia: The Mura River Biosphere Reserve
- Republic of Austria: Biosphere Reserve Lower Mura Valley

The so-called "Amazon of Europe" is one of the most ecologically significant and species-rich river landscapes and is home to a large number of endangered species. Floodplain forests, river islands, gravel and sand banks as well as side and oxbow lakes are an excellent habitat for the common sandpiper, the common curlew, the little tern, the sterlet and many other species. However, this river system is not only important for many animal and plant species, but also serves as a drinking water reservoir, for flood protection and for human recreation (Köck et al., 2022).

Along the former Iron Curtain, which connected the countries, a unique and near-natural river system developed, which was protected from the influence of humans and was not intensively used by them. After the fall of the curtain and the opening of the borders, however, this protection began to crumble, and humans began to exert more and more influence on this special natural jewel. Areas that had hardly been entered by anyone for over 40 years were suddenly freely usable, which often had a negative impact on nature. River engineering and regulation to improve navigation or hydropower projects posed an even greater threat to the riparian forests, wetlands and river habitats, making it increasingly important to protect this special landscape (Mohl et al., 2009).

5-Länder Biosphärenpark Mur-Drau-Donau*

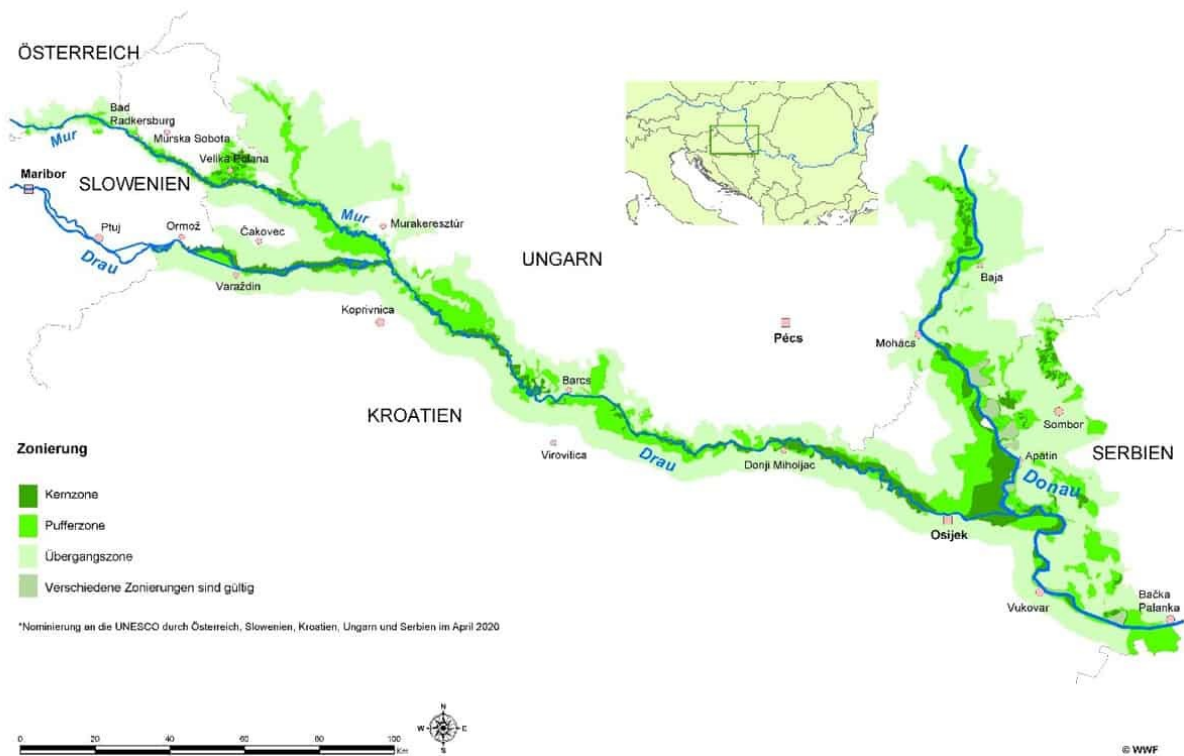


Figure 1: TBR MDD (Umweltverband WWF Österreich, n.d.)

The TBR MDD has a total size of about one million hectares and consists of five independent biosphere reserves and 13 local protected areas with different protection categories along the rivers (UNESCO, 2013). The approximately 700,000-hectare transition zone surrounding the core and buffer zone has enormous potential for sustainable forestry and agriculture, as well as nature tourism (Umweltverband WWF Österreich, n.d.).

The goal of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve is to prevent the further destruction (dredging, straightening) of natural river sections in Croatia, Hungary and Serbia, to avert the implementation of planned power plants in the biosphere reserve and to revitalize already damaged river sections through renaturation and reconnection of side arms to the rivers (Umweltverband WWF Österreich, n.d.).

Furthermore, the aim is to create a large European model region in which nature conservation and sustainable regional development go hand in hand and the local population is involved to enable a sustainable form of coexistence between people and nature (Österreichische UNESCO-Kommission, n.d.).

2.2. Stakeholder Management

However, the realization of a protected area requires not only planning and designation, but also the cooperation and support of local stakeholders (Fischer, 2009).

This area poses a particular challenge for the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, as not only five different languages come together here, but also different legislation, administration and political systems. In addition, the cultural and ecological aspects are also diverse, which makes broad-based but structured management important (Dolinar et al., 2022).

Freeman (2015) defines the term stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives". They are therefore stakeholder groups that influence the objectives of the protected area, are affected by its projects and measures and generate claims themselves. They can exert a more or less active influence on organizational decisions and provide resources in return. For example, employees, shareholders, associations and the state are typical stakeholders whose interests often do not coincide with those of the organization's management, resulting in areas of tension (Stötzer, 2009).

Dealing with these stakeholder groups is a major challenge, as the diversity of stakeholders and the resulting different interests require well-thought-out management. This stakeholder structure is far more complex for non-profit organizations (NPO) than for profit organizations (PO), as the number of stakeholders is usually higher, the ties to them more specific, and it is typically more difficult to prioritize these groups and their concerns and demands (Stötzer, 2009).

The relevance of stakeholder-oriented communication and information policy in NPOs is explained in the dissertation *Stakeholder Performance Reporting of Nonprofit Organizations* by Stötzer (2009), among others. In particular, transparency-building measures are described here to increase and maintain trust and credibility to secure the long-term existence of the NPO and to promote voluntary commitment.

Since trust is a central resource for stakeholder participation, agreements on fair participation, the recognition of different prior motivations, interests and basic attitudes, ensuring equal access to information and possibly necessary agreements on confidentiality and anonymity are important success factors (Hentze & Thies, 2014).

Relationship management between NPOs and stakeholders is highlighted as an essential and central aspect. Ignoring information and stakeholders is an error in thought and action that too often and predictably leads to poor performance, complete failure or even disaster (Bryson, 2004).

The work by Stötzer (2009) describes these relationship networks as having a "fragile stability", as this cannot simply be created, but may or may not arise in the course of cooperation. Trust in particular is ascribed great importance here. This is because, according to Stötzer (2009) it has to be constantly re-established.

It is also clear that not every single stakeholder group can be given the same level of attention, but that prioritization must take place to focus on the most important stakeholders. Here it is of great importance to make a strategic selection to concentrate on the most relevant stakeholders (Stötzer, 2009).

The analysis of the relevant interest groups requires great care here, as deciding which stakeholders to focus on can have far-reaching consequences.

A 4-phase model of stakeholder engagement (Figure 2) was developed to identify and define the most important points for a company (Ungericht, 2012).

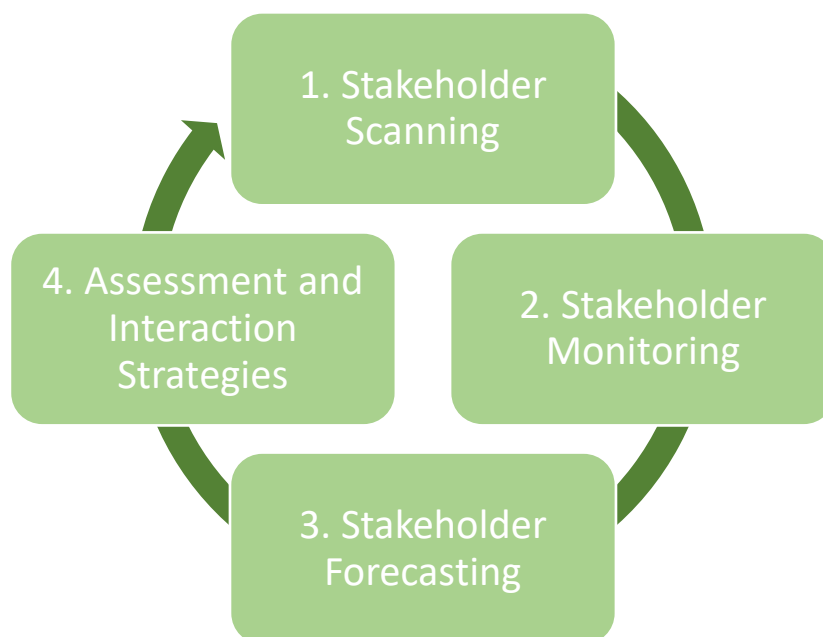


Figure 1: 4-Phase model (Kasper, 2020)

2.2.1. „Stakeholder Scanning“

Stakeholder scanning involves defining who belongs to an organization's stakeholder groups. Various approaches can be used to identify different stakeholders. For example, the narrow, extended or broad definition can be used (Freeman & Reed, 1983). In these definitions, stakeholders are selected according to their influence on the company. For example, the narrow definition selects only those stakeholders who have an active influence on decisions or resources, while the extended definition also includes "those on whose support the company depends but who do not make a direct contribution to value creation" (Freeman & Reed, 1983) and the broad definition includes everyone who could be affected by the company in some way (Freeman, 2015).

However, stakeholders can also be divided into numerous other groups (e.g. according to perspectives) (Kasper, 2020).

2.2.2. „Stakeholder Monitoring“

Once the relevant stakeholders have been categorized, it is necessary to take a closer look at them and describe the characteristics of specific stakeholders (Ungericht, 2012). To this end, the objectives of the selected stakeholders are first examined in more detail.

This is because many of the objectives of different stakeholders and within the individual stakeholder groups are contradictory and therefore often cannot be fulfilled and harbor a high potential for conflict. For this reason alone, it is important to separate important from less important stakeholders and to choose the right approach (Kasper, 2020).

These goals and interests can be roughly divided into five categories (Ungericht, 2012):

- Material interests
- Political interests
- Social interests
- Informational interests
- Spiritual interests

Furthermore, the division of enforcement power into formal, economic, and political power also plays a role (Freeman & Reed, 1983).

2.2.3. „Stakeholder Forecasting“

This involves trying to predict the intentions of individual stakeholders to develop strategic planning.

Mitchell et al. (1997) developed a model that combines the three dimensions of power, legitimacy, and urgency and thus defines seven stakeholder types, making it possible to better assess the importance of the stakeholder groups.

The attributes are defined as follows:

- **Power:** «(...) the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance» (Weber, 1947).
- **Legitimacy:** «A generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions» (Suchman, 1995).
- **Urgency:** «The degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate attention» (Mitchell et al., 1997).

The attribute *Power* can be further subdivided into the following three power bases (Würz, 2012):

- Physical resources such as strength or violence («Coercive Power»)
- Financial or material resources («Utilitarian Power»)
- Symbols, such as prestige or the ability to attract media or public attention («Normative Power»)

The attribute *Urgency* is also defined more precisely and is based on the following criteria (Würz, 2012):

- Whether and to what extent a delayed response by the company's management is unacceptable to the stakeholder («Time sensitivity»)
- Importance and relevance of the stakeholder claim or stakeholder relationship for the company («Critically»)

The most important stakeholders here are those who fulfill all three dimensions. These stakeholders have a legitimate and urgent concern and at the same time have great power (Mitchell et al., 1997).

But it should be noted that all three attributes are gained by the stakeholders but can also be lost again, which means that they should not be regarded as static. In addition, they do not represent

an objective reality and depend heavily on the perceptions of the stakeholders involved (Gasser et al., 2017).

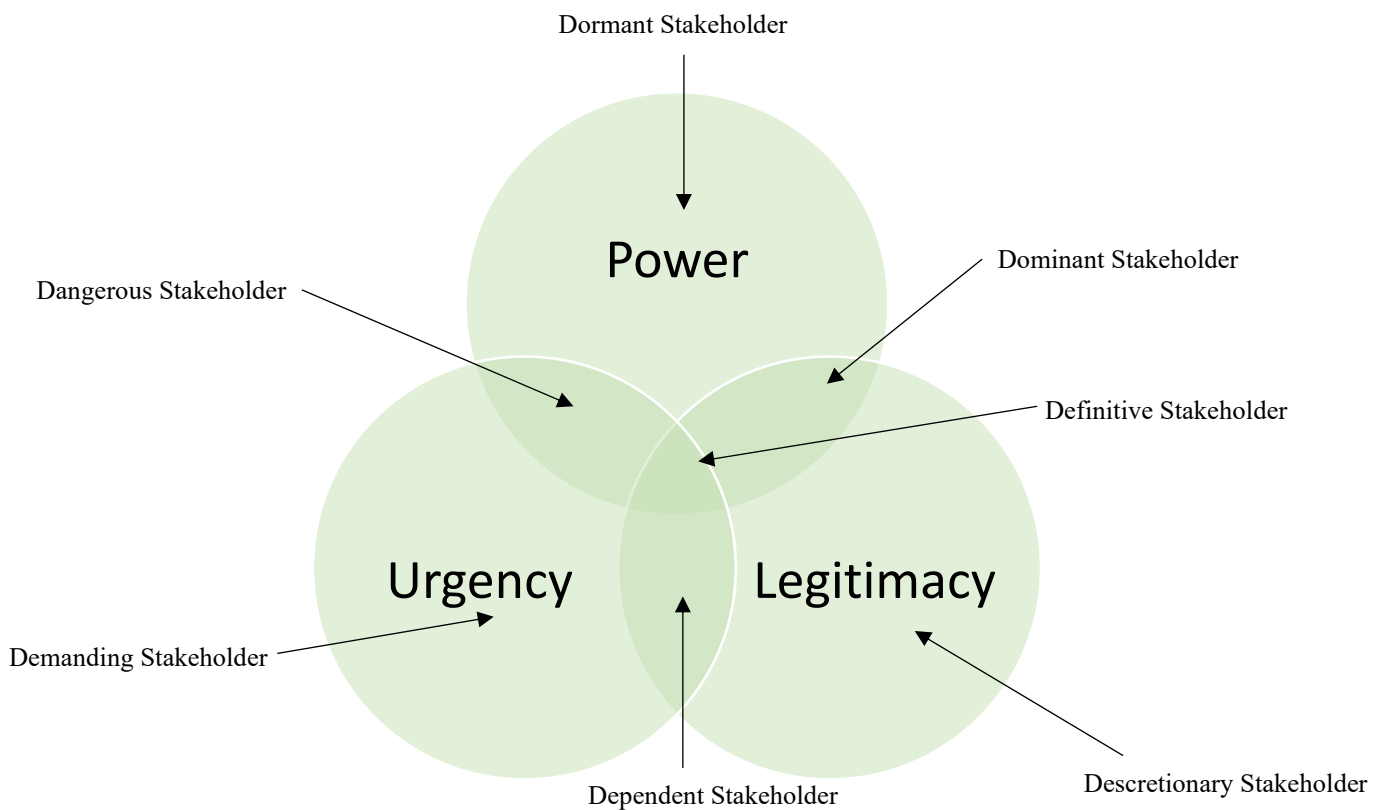


Figure 2: Dimensions (Mitchell et al., 1997)

2.2.4. „Assessment and Interaction Strategies“

By dividing the stakeholder groups into the various dimensions, it is possible to select the appropriate interaction strategy. As dealing with different stakeholder groups always requires capacities and financial resources, it is crucial that the right strategy is chosen (Kasper, 2020).

3. Methods

3.1. Overview

Based on relevant literature and the use of a stakeholder mapping of the TBR MDD, the state of knowledge regarding the stakeholders of the protected area is first reviewed as part of desk research. The inductive approach was chosen as the research approach, in which hypotheses and theories are derived on the basis of empirical observations (Helferich, 2016). The relevant field is sampled using qualitative interviews in order to gain an understanding of the goals, needs, scope for action and concerns about the biosphere reserve. As a result, a causal hypothesis is created that reveals the final position of the stakeholders towards the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve to subsequently find a suitable strategy concept for the management of the biosphere reserve's key stakeholders.

3.2. Empirical Approach

To have greater flexibility in answering the research question, it was researched qualitatively. Qualitative research is interactive and reflexive, which means that the personal background and impressions of the researchers are included in the evaluation. The inductive approach was chosen here, in which conclusions are only drawn from the collected data, which require interpretation (Hussy et al., 2013). This results in a theoretical generalization with the aim of understanding and describing the needs of the stakeholders and making possible strategies for management visible.

3.3. Sampling

The selection of interview partners was based on the recommendations of the E.C.O. Institute for Ecology and the stakeholder mapping already carried out in advance by ISKRIVA, the Institute for Development of Local Potentials.

From this, interview partners were deliberately selected according to specific criteria and the interviews were then conducted orally via Zoom.

When selecting the cases, care was taken to ensure the analytical generalizability of the sample to the theory. The criteria for the selection of the sample were determined in advance using the top-down method (Hussy et al., 2013). A total of five interviews were conducted in this way.

3.4. Survey Method

Qualitative verbal expert interviews were used as the survey method. The focus here is not on the interviewee themselves, but on their status as an expert on a selected topic. The interviewee is also regarded as a representative of a group (Flick, 2012, cited in Gasser et al., 2017).

The interviews conducted were structured on the basis of a guideline, which should allow the interviewee to have as much freedom as possible to answer questions, but also to focus on relevant topics. Care was therefore taken to ask the individual stakeholders similar questions in the respective interviews to ensure comparability for the evaluation of the data obtained. However, the focus of each stakeholder was also addressed individually. In these semi-structured interviews, the order of the questions is adapted to the course of the conversation and the questions asked are formulated based on the participants' terminology (Hussy et al., 2013).

Three types of questions were addressed to the participants (Hussy et al., 2013):

- Introductory questions: Start the interview and help the interviewer and interviewee get to know each other.
- Guiding questions: These are the core of the interview and are determined in advance based on prior knowledge.
- Ad hoc questions: Unplanned questions that arise spontaneously during the interview. They are used to explore unexpected aspects.

The estimated interview time per expert is 30 – 40 minutes. Annex A provides basic guidelines.

3.5. Data Evaluation

To evaluate the data generated by the guideline-based interviews, a complete transcription of the verbally collected data was first carried out. This involved transferring the data material from an auditory to a written form, in which only the content of the statements was reproduced (Hussy et al., 2013).

A content analysis of the transcribed interviews was then carried out. This is a systematic, data-reducing procedure that aims to capture aspects of the actual meaning of the text from selected perspectives (Hussy et al., 2013). The core of the analysis is a content-analytical category system, which was created using a deductive-inductive approach. The main categories were deductively derived, and the subcategories were developed from the available material (Hussy, et al., 2013).

The data was divided into the following categories:

- Role of the biosphere reserve
- Strengths of the protected area
- Weaknesses of the protected area
- Potential for resistance
- Challenges for the future
- Stakeholder involvement

The statements of the interviewees were categorized on the basis of these upper categories defined by existing theories and then divided into subcategories generated from the material (deductive-inductive procedure).

3.6. Measures of Selected Large Protected Areas

To shed light on the difficulties and approaches to stakeholder management in other biosphere reserves, representatives of the Biosphere Reserves Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen, Carpathians and River Landscape Elbe were interviewed.

3.6.1. Biosphere Reserve Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen

The Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen Biosphere Reserve is a cross-border biosphere reserve and is located on the French-German border. It has a total size of 3,018 km² and contains the largest contiguous forest area in Western Europe. Additionally, significant are the imposing sandstone cliffs, which as well as the numerous castles and castle ruins are significant for tourism in the region.

Nature conservation measures and the restoration of areas for open land management, where trees have to be removed for example, always lead to conflicts here. It is often the small things that create more resistance and fuel conflicts. But also, the increasing number of mountain bikers and hikers cause more and more conflicts which have to be managed.

For the Biosphere Reserve Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen, a cooperation with the local actors is very important, because only in this way it is possible to get projects well into the area, since it is not possible for the office to realize all projects itself due to limited personnel resources. In addition, it is important to involve the actors to create an identification for the biosphere reserve and its projects. These are mainly measures in the field of nature conservation, education and landscape management, but also projects and measures with local actors, such as the preparation

of sustainability strategies. These measures, as long as the interest of the stakeholders can be aroused and they discover added value for themselves, are well accepted.

3.6.2. Carpathian Biosphere Reserve

The Carpathian Biosphere Reserve has an area of 58,035.8 hectares and is situated in the southern macroslope of the main watershed of the Ukrainian Carpathians. The reserve's territory encompasses various landscapes, ranging from lowlands to highlands, and includes large areas of protected forests and primeval forests.

Restrictions on the management of nature and the use of natural resources usually provide the greatest potential for resistance here. Especially the prohibition of cultivation and activities in the core zone is often not accepted by the population, because the historically local population has always lived in a traditional way and is used to have free access to the forest resources. Here, special emphasis is placed on educating the population but also on negotiating so that compromises can be found to satisfy both sides. In addition to this, there are also other interest groups and businesspeople who would like to get more resources and areas. Recently, however, more and more new challenges have arisen in terms of tourism and recreation. Thus, motorcycling, jeeping and ATVs (quadrocycling) are becoming more and more popular, and are not allowed in the protected area. But it is not only here that conflict potential arises again and again. Also, the prohibited construction of large hotels, resorts and ski lifts, which are very attractive for entrepreneurs, but can cause enormous ecological problems, causes increasing resistance that must be overcome.

In the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve the main instrument of cooperation with stakeholders is a coordinating board, which main aim is to find consensus decisions and ways to avoid conflict situations. It is a collegial body, which has advisory and consultation functions on management of the transition area and provides possibility for communities to participate in the work of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve. Members of the coordinating board are representatives of the administration of the biosphere reserve, local authorities and self-administration bodies, leaders of the local communities and public and other key stakeholders. Meetings are held not less than two times per year, or when needed according to situation.

Furthermore, there are various departments in the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve that communicate with individual municipalities and deal with cooperation. For example, there are separate departments for ecological education and public relations, as well as a separate department dealing with sustainable development in the reserve. Social networks are used to disseminate information about the biosphere reserve.

3.6.3. Biosphere Reserve River Landscape Elbe

The Elbe River Landscape Biosphere Reserve is a cross-state protected area that represents one of the last near-natural river landscapes in Central Europe. It comprises the federal states of Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Brandenburg, Lower Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt. As the third largest river in Germany, the Elbe offers a wide variety of different habitats in which numerous plants and animals, including many endangered species, find a habitat.

To involve the various stakeholders in the district of Brandenburg in the work and tasks of the biosphere reserve, the first step is to set up a committee. This gives both regional and supra-regional representatives of individual stakeholder groups, ministries and individuals the opportunity to be informed about current projects and future programs of the protected area and to enter into an open discourse with the representatives of the biosphere reserve. These meetings, which take place several times a year, are intended to give stakeholder groups the opportunity to gain an insight into strategic planning and to express their uncertainties and fears.

In addition, the biosphere reserve reaches out to groups of people through workshops on a wide range of topics such as flora, fauna and water, which are held for both specialists and the general public. By means of their own events, biotope maintenance campaigns and so-called "Floodplain Workshops", the target groups are given an additional incentive to integrate themselves into the work of the protected area. Besides to informing adults, the biosphere reserve also tries to reach children and young people. Alongside the designation as a "Biosphere Reserve School", extracurricular activities are also offered as junior rangers to make young people aware of important aspects of nature conservation and to show them how they can become active in the protected area themselves.

Despite the numerous efforts it is often a problem here too that constructive discourse arises. Many do not realize that they themselves could contribute to solving many problems if they would only address them in the events that are made possible. These are mostly groups of people who are directly affected by measures and feel restricted in their way of life or deprived of it. In Brandenburg, conflicts often arise with farmers or fishermen due to the very rural nature of the area. Finding acceptance here is a major challenge for the protected area, as it requires a great deal of human and financial resources to achieve the necessary response. However, it has been shown that with the necessary resources, it is very easy to achieve public participation.

4. Results

4.1. Stakeholder Engagement in Selected Protected Areas

The interviews with the protected areas Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen Biosphere Reserve, Carpathians and River Landscape Elbe clearly show that similar problems occur in stakeholder management everywhere, although the approaches to solving them are somewhat different. Especially when dealing with farmers, hunters, fishermen, or tourism, there is always potential for conflict, which makes suitable management strategies and capacities essential.

The discussions revealed that great importance is attached everywhere to dealing with the various stakeholder groups, as otherwise it is difficult to realize projects, find a common consensus and achieve stakeholder identification with the protected area. Open communication and transparency are at the forefront everywhere. Although the strategies for achieving this are similar in the protected areas interviewed, they always differ somewhat in their scope. Both the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve and the River Landscape Elbe use a coordination board or committee to inform representatives of a wide range of stakeholder groups about the activities in the biosphere reserve and to facilitate exchange and networking. The meetings take place throughout the year and give stakeholders the opportunity to talk about their expectations and fears regarding planned measures.

Workshops, cooperation with local communities, and social media are also used to disseminate information and integrate the population and involve them in the activities of the protected area to create acceptance. In the River Landscape Elbe Biosphere Reserve, particular emphasis is placed on involving children, who are seen as having great potential for the future.

4.2. General Analysis

The stakeholder analysis carried out by the Slovenian institute ISKRIVA (Dolinar et al., 2022) shows that the stakeholder groups of the biosphere reserve are diverse, cover a wide range of sectors and are distributed very heterogeneously across the participating countries. It also shows that stakeholders from other countries are also involved, although these are neglected in the following.

Figure 4 shows that the largest proportion of stakeholders can be found in Hungary, which can be explained by the large area covered by the biosphere reserve here. Both here and in Croatia, the TBR MDD covers far more land area than in the other countries, which means that more stakeholders are included. In Austria, Serbia and Slovenia, on the other hand, the proportion of stakeholders involved is extremely balanced.

In addition to the different scope of stakeholders, it should also be noted that the involvement of the various countries also brings different circumstances to light. In some cases, there are different structures and hierarchies in the countries involved, which means that some goals can be achieved in different ways and in different timeframes. This is because financial, political, legal, social and other factors sometimes differ greatly, which makes it even more difficult to ensure suitable and standardized management.

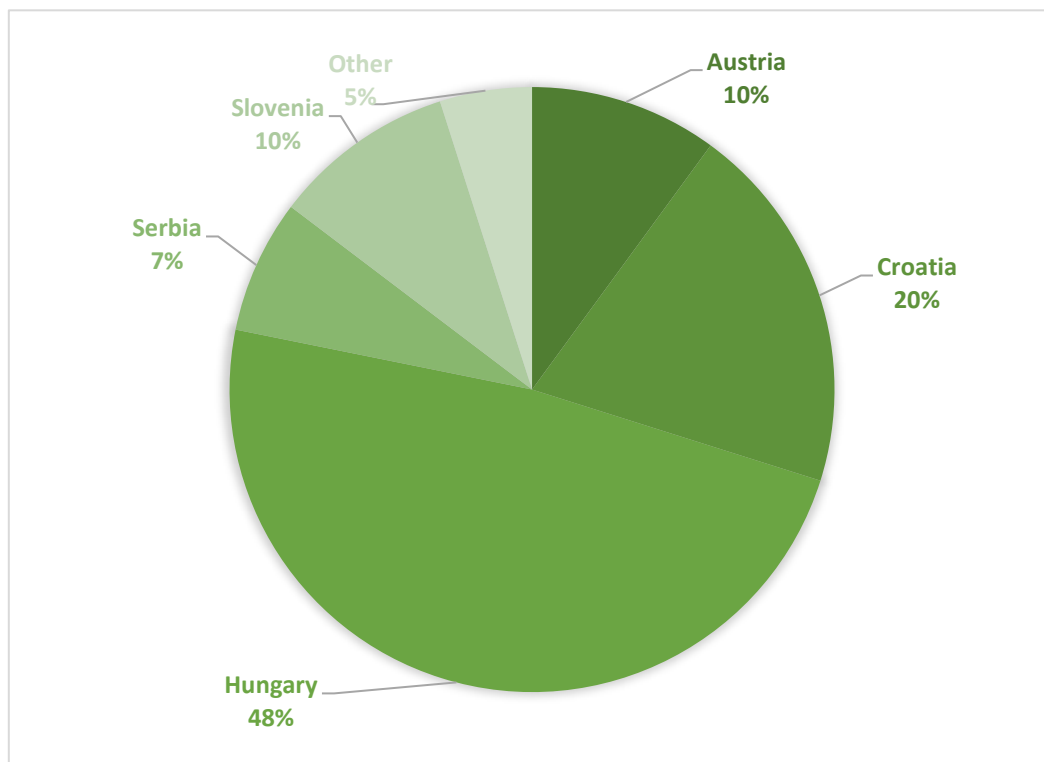


Figure 3: Allocation of stakeholders to the different countries

Figure 5 shows the mass of different stakeholder groups, and it is already clear that suitable management to include all these stakeholder groups is extremely demanding and requires significant effort. The diversity of different stakeholders is favored both by the size of the TBR MDD and by its transnational design. Due to the large size of the protected area, many stakeholder groups are directly and indirectly influenced. It is extremely important to gain an overview of these as it is only through knowledge of the stakeholders involved that strategies can be developed to address each group correctly and meaningfully.

The individual stakeholder groups are represented here to varying degrees. As a result, their influence on the protected area can also vary. But it is important to avoid the mistake of focusing on the largest groups, as even weakly represented groups should not be ignored. Under certain circumstances, these can also have a considerable influence on the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, whether positive or negative.

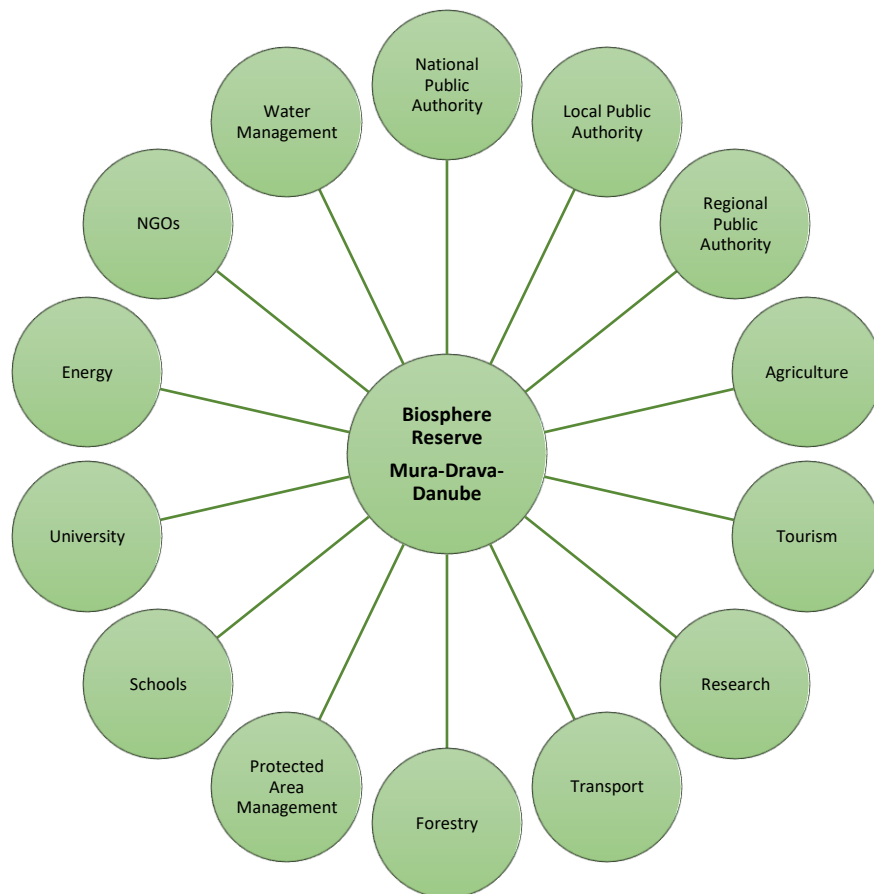


Figure 4: Overview of the various stakeholder groups of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve

4.3. Identification of Key Stakeholders

4.3.1. Relevant Stakeholders

Based on the stakeholder analysis carried out in advance by ISKRIVA, the stakeholder groups of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve were identified and then first classified according to their interest in and influence on the biosphere reserve and then categorized according to three attributes based on Würz (2012).

4.3.2. Stakeholder Set

As already mentioned, all stakeholder groups of the protected area were identified based on the analyses carried out in advance. Key stakeholders are those groups that are most relevant to the success of the biosphere reserve. In order to identify these, they were first categorized in terms of their interest in and influence on the biosphere reserve and then classified according to the three attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997), which have already been described in more detail in the "Stakeholder Management" chapter.

Table 1: Identification of key stakeholders – stakeholder set

Stakeholder		Core functions		
		Power	Legitimacy	Urgency
National Public Authority	governments, ministries, general directorates	✓	✓	✓
	associations, national organizations	✓	✓	
	agencies	✓	✓	
Local Public Authority	municipalities, cities	✓	✓	✓
Regional Public Authority	district offices	✓	✓	✓
	associations, tourist boards	✓	✓	
Protected Area Management	ministries	✓	✓	✓
	UNESCO	✓	✓	✓
	protected areas, nature conservation organizations	✓	✓	
Research	science centers, research institutes, scientific academies	✓	✓	
NGOs	International Union for Conservation of Nature, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River	✓	✓	
	associations, environmental protection organizations, nature conservation organizations	✓	✓	
	foundations, institutes	✓	✓	
Tourism	accommodation facilities (apartments, inns, hotels, campsites, ...), pubs	✓	✓	
	centers for active and ecotourism development	✓	✓	
Energy	electric utility companies		✓	
Water Management	ministries, magistrates, water management offices, water management directorates	✓	✓	✓
	shipping		✓	
	water supply companies, waste disposal companies		✓	
	institutes for water		✓	✓
Forestry	ministries, directorate of forestry, offices of the provincial governments	✓	✓	✓
	national associations of private forest owners and farmers, local groups		✓	✓
	state forests	✓	✓	✓
	forestry companies and service providers		✓	
	hunting associations		✓	
Agriculture	ministries	✓	✓	✓
	farmers, agricultural cooperatives	✓	✓	
	agricultural organizations, feed manufacturers, agricultural services, agricultural machinery dealers, grocery stores, logistics services	✓	✓	
Transport	Directorate for Transport in the Ministry of Infrastructure	✓	✓	✓
	transport companies (Viadonau, ÖBB, ports...), freeway companies	✓	✓	
University	universities, faculties, doctoral programs		✓	
Schools	elementary schools, middle schools, vocational schools, high schools		✓	

Once the stakeholders have been identified on the basis of the three attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency, they can be divided into different stakeholder categories (Mitchell et al., 1997). It is possible for stakeholders to fulfill one, two, or all three attributes. The most relevant stakeholders are those who are assigned all three attributes.

The stakeholder set listed in Table 1 provides an overview of all stakeholders and their classification.

4.3.3. Stakeholder Assessment

By classifying the stakeholders according to the three attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency, the key stakeholders of the TBR MDD can be identified in a final assessment. Definitive stakeholders are those to whom all three attributes apply, expectant stakeholders have two of the attributes, and latent stakeholders have only one of the three attributes. Definitive stakeholders have the highest priority (Mitchell et al., 1997).

The stakeholder categories latent stakeholders and expectant stakeholders can also be divided into subcategories depending on which attributes apply (Würz, 2012):

- Latent stakeholders
 - Dormant stakeholders: These only have power and should be kept in mind despite their low relevance, as this can change quickly with the addition of another attribute.
 - Discretionary stakeholders: Possess only the legitimacy attribute. This group primarily lacks the power base to assert their legitimate claim.
 - Demanding stakeholders: Only have the urgency attribute.
- Expectant stakeholders
 - Dominant stakeholders: Are assigned to the attributes power and legitimacy. These are very relevant and require constant attention.
 - Dependent stakeholders: They have the attributes of legitimacy and urgency. They are dependent on other stakeholders to assert their claims, as they lack the power to do so.
 - Dangerous stakeholders: Possess the attributes power and urgency, and should therefore be considered dangerous, as they have the power and willingness to assert their claims despite not having a legitimate claim.

Based on the above identification and categorization of stakeholders of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, the individual state governments, the ministries for nature conservation, water management, forestry, agriculture, and transport as well as the municipalities and cities in the protected area, UNESCO and the federal forests are primarily suitable as definitive stakeholders.

In addition to the relevant stakeholders, stakeholder groups from the category expectant stakeholders, subcategory dominant stakeholders, were included, as according to Würz (2012) they are highly relevant and therefore require constant engagement.

4.3.4. Actor Profiles of the Key Stakeholders

Once the key stakeholders of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve have been defined in more detail, stakeholder profiles are drawn up with information on the interests and objectives of the stakeholders. The following table shows the interests and objectives pursued by the individual stakeholder groups in the protected area.

Based on: Stakeholders of the company and their interests (Thommen, 2015)

Table 2: Key stakeholders and their interests and goals

Key Stakeholder	Interests and goals
National Public Authority	compliance with legal regulations and standards; achieving the specified protection targets
Regional Public Authority	promotion of economic development
Local Public Authority	involvement of the population in measures; political interests (votes, etc.); economy to be promoted
Protected Area Management	ensuring the flow of information between the individual protected areas; a certain degree of decision-making autonomy
NGOs	compliance with and achievement of the conservation objectives; conservation of the protected assets
Tourism	promotion of local tourism; integration of the protected area into local tourism
Agriculture	ensure farmers freedom of action (e.g. building activities); promoting economic development and regional products; economic and independent management of farms; financial compensation for yield losses due to nature conservation measures
Forestry	promoting the regional value creation of wood products; sustainable forest use and the forest as a recreational area

Key Stakeholder	Interests and goals
Water Management	conservation of rivers in terms of nature, but also as a transportation route
Transport	enabling infrastructure projects; maintaining and promoting transportation routes
Research	promotion of research in the biosphere reserve; protected area as a research object

The table above shows that the interests of the key stakeholders of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve are diverse and sometimes differ greatly. But it also indicates that there are overlapping interests and objectives in certain areas.

4.3.5. Assessment of the Closing Positions

To create an addressee-oriented approach to the key stakeholders, it is important to know their final positions (Marty, 2014, cited in Gasser et al., 2017). Based on the data obtained in the stakeholder set, as well as our own estimation, their final positions in relation to the influence and approval of the protected area were classified and graphically depicted in Figure 6.

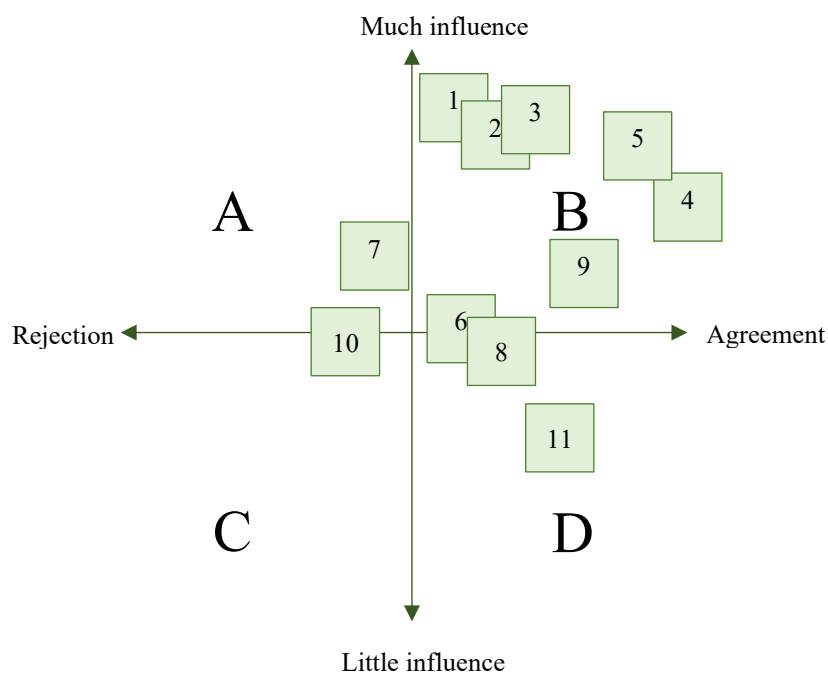


Figure 5: Final positions of the stakeholders of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve

1 National Public Authority	5 NGOs	9 Water Management
2 Regional Public Authority	6 Tourism	10 Transport
3 Local Public Authority	7 Agriculture	11 Research
4 Protected Area Management	8 Forestry	

The previous matrix makes it possible to read the final positions of the stakeholders using the four quadrants.

It can be seen that many key stakeholders can be found in quadrant B, but this does not mean uniform approval of the protected area. Stakeholders from the national (1), regional (2) and local authority (3) have a lot of influence on the biosphere reserve, but their approval is only slightly positive to neutral. Although these groups have a lot of power in relation to the protected area, there is often a lack of reference to the activities that are carried out there. Protected area management (4) as well as various NGOs (5) and water management (9), on the other hand, have a higher level of approval towards the protected area, but their influence is only in the middle range. Here there is an understanding of the measures implemented, but the means of exerting influence are limited.

Although tourism (6) and forestry (8) favor the biosphere reserve, they have less influence on what happens in the protected area. These groups can quickly feel marginalized, which can diminish their support for the protected area. A lack of integration of tourism into the biosphere reserve in the form of advertising, awards etc. as well as inappropriate cooperation with representatives from the forestry sector can lead to dissatisfaction.

Particular attention should also be paid to agriculture (7), as this is a major influence, but many people are not very supportive of the protected area. Fear of crop losses due to nature conservation measures, major restrictions, and economic consequences gives rise to great uncertainty and resistance.

This is also the case for transport stakeholders (10). Preventing infrastructure projects and restrictions on the Danube as a waterway can lead to conflicts.

4.3.6. Development of Strategic Approaches

Based on the previous classifications of the key stakeholders, the following management strategies for dealing with the various stakeholder groups of the protected area in a manner appropriate to the target group can be derived, according to Marty (2014, cited in Gasser et al., 2017).

Table 3: Strategic approaches for key stakeholders

Quadrant	Strategy	Key Stakeholders
A	Win	Agriculture, Transport
B	Involve	National Authority, Regional Authority, Local Authority, Protected Area Management, NGOs, Water Management, Tourism
C	Inform --	no Stakeholder
D	Inform ++	Tourism, Forestry, Research

Depending on their influence, approval, or rejection of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, stakeholders should either be won over, involved, or better informed with the appropriate strategic approaches.

- **Win:**

Stakeholders who should be won over because of their rejection of or indifference to the protected area are those from the agriculture and transportation sectors. Here it is important to recognize the needs of both groups and to react accordingly. Creating mutual understanding is just as important here as showing a willingness to compromise. The aim was to demonstrate the extent to which the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve can positively influence their concerns and wishes and to show how these stakeholder groups can also be integrated into the protected area. The interviews revealed that there is often a great deal of skepticism, that money is a major driver and that it makes sense to focus on these groups and their needs to reach a common denominator. Networking with stakeholders from the same groups in different countries should be promoted to enable experiences to be exchanged. It also makes sense to hold public hearings in which everyone can express their opinion on projects or measures to identify potential problems in advance and respond to them accordingly.

- **Involve:**

Stakeholder groups that have a relatively high influence on the TBR MDD and have a favorable attitude towards it should (continue to) be involved in the measures, activities and plans of the protected area. The involvement of stakeholders from the national authority, regional authority, local authority, protected area management, NGOs, water management and tourism helps to raise awareness of the protected area, to better understand its measures and to be able to identify better with them. The exchange of information during meetings, stakeholder councils, permanent working groups or other events enables a joint discourse in which solutions can be found and ideas can be introduced.

- **Inform:**

Stakeholders from this quadrant should be regularly and transparently informed about the activities and events of the biosphere reserve. These stakeholder groups include representatives from the forestry and research sectors. Although these two groups have little influence on the protected area, their approval and thus also their interest in it is

high. When presenting the information, it is critical that each stakeholder is constantly reinvented. The aim should be to maintain the approval of these stakeholders, as they are often very well networked with other key stakeholders, and their approval or rejection can be passed on to other groups very easily through this networking.

4.4. Content Analysis of the Conducted Interviews

As already mentioned in the methodology section, a deductive-inductive approach was used to create a content analysis category system of the transcribed interviews, and the statements of the interviewees were categorized according to defined superordinate categories. This revealed the current view of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, as well as ideas and possibilities that could support the success and existence of the protected area in the future.

4.4.1. Role of the Biosphere Reserve

The results of the interviews conducted showed that UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status is not only crucial in general, but that it should also be increasingly used as a brand to market products from the biosphere reserve and thus emphasize the positive aspects of the protected area for the people living in it. It was noted that recognition as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve should not be the ultimate goal, it should be used as a tool to ensure the long-term success of the protected area.

Interview B: "I think it's, äh, basically is a tool. It's not a goal for. So basically, you can do something great with that and you can do nothing with that. So just the label doesn't help you much."

Interview D: "I would like to see it more in the news, and I would like to see it used more as a brand of the area of this value in nature protection, and also as a tool to get projects, and so on and especially on the local level, and on the national level too."

The connection between people and nature, which is made possible by the biosphere reserve, should also bring many benefits for all those involved, but also for nature, and has a significant influence on the region. In addition, the protected area provides a framework for designing a holistic management of the entire area, which can create a uniform approach for measures.

4.4.2. Strengths of the Protected Area

In particular, the opportunity for sustainable development, as well as to constantly rethink the approach and use of the landscape and nature in the protected area, was emphasized in the interviews.

It is possible for everyone involved to get involved, connecting nature and people and thus leading in the long term to sustainable nature conservation, but also to economic development.

Interview A: "It's the only status that connects people and nature. So probably in the long term if you want to succeed with protecting areas like the Mura-Drava-Danube region, sustainable development, which is the main point of biosphere reserve, it is maybe the best way in nature conservation in the long term. Better than some prohibitions, and some rules, and, uh, like you have in some nature reserves."

The title of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is particularly good for tourism, as it allows different tourism projects to be developed in the biosphere reserve and increases the level of awareness.

Interview A: "But for the region, uh, this title of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is a big opportunity, because this is a very important title, that also in tourism means a lot, and other fields of economic development let's say."

Not only the area of tourism was mentioned, but also the possibility of attracting more researchers to the diversity of the 5-Country Biosphere Reserve and thus advancing science in this area.

Interview B: "Äh, it's bringing more researchers and science. When I say science, I don't mean about, äh, just botany or zoology or geography, not natural science, but also social science, economical science. And I think those things are more becoming important in in this region TBR, and you need to understand that it's not protected area but it's potential opportunity for a new kind of development."

Interview D: "Well, it has a big potential and how it influences the region, basically, the TBR gives framework for collaboration, maybe can support, like a brand, some tourist activities, and makes emphasis on the nature protection more sort of it's an argument why should we protect it in this area more, why something is important and so on."

4.4.3. Weaknesses of the Protected Area

Despite the large number of strengths that were several times mentioned, weaknesses in connection with the protected area were also repeatedly highlighted. In particular, the lack of appropriate administration was mentioned, which is difficult to set up due to the size of the TBR MDD, as the involvement of five countries and a large number of people means that many decisions and organizational activities take considerably longer.

Interview A: "The problem in Slovenia for instance is like I said, uh, lack of proper management. So, we don't have a separate manager with a separate budget also to be managing the biosphere reserve."

Interview E: „Das einzige, der einzige, ähm, Nachteil ist, dass vielleicht die Dinge etwas länger dauern, weil man eben natürlich viele Personen hat, die da mitsprechen, viele Ideen, die da mit einfließen sollen und viele Ideen wo der andere auch einmal darüber nachdenken muss, äh, „aber was für Auswirkungen hat das dann auf meinem Bereich“ und dergleichen.“

It was also mentioned that the label alone is useless if many things are only on paper and not implemented.

The term "reserve" was also alluded as a weakness of the protected area, as many people believe that everything is very strict and that there are only restrictions as a result. This is one of the reasons why some stakeholders repeatedly feel hopeless or even lost and misunderstood.

Interview B: "I know in in Austria there are "parks" and things like that, and I think it's a good idea, because when you say "reserve" people have idea that something is strict. So, we were thinking like, äh, making another type of like "biosphere oasis" or something like that."

However, the assertiveness of strong stakeholders also leads to them pushing their interests forward more often and not involving others, which results in dissatisfaction.

Interview B: "If you want to go far, you move in a group. I still personally think that's advantage if you have so many stakeholders and you agree but sometimes, let's say the stronger stakeholders are pushing their agenda without consulting others, and I think

that could be disadvantage because other stakeholders are feeling hopeless and losing interest in, if things they are suggesting something coming with a new idea and nothing is happening, and that could be kind of disadvantage basically.”

4.4.4. Potential for Resistance

Stakeholders from agriculture and hydro energy were particularly addressed here. They are often very skeptical about the protected area, feel misunderstood and therefore often show resistance. As money usually plays the most important role for these groups, they often have little interest in the measures of the protected area or are even against them, which must be taken into account when dealing with and including these groups.

***Interview A:** “The farmers are as usual very skeptical. And when we established the biosphere reserve, the Mura Biosphere Reserve, we had big difficulties with the farmers and with the Chamber of Agriculture.”*

***Interview C:** “Yes, hydro energy stakeholders are aware. Like I could tell you from my experience and my side because my Drava LIFE project we have some meeting with them and, äh, their director is aware of it but as you told the lack of interest, I think it's most correlated with their, äh, ... the situation right now is good for them, and I think the same situation is in Austria, for them it's firstly and most important part of their business is money. And this is the problem, because of their lack of interest.”*

4.4.5. Challenges for the Future

According to the interviewees, the different views, languages, and political, financial, and legal circumstances of the five countries involved pose a major challenge for the future of the protected area. Some countries do not have much experience with this kind of approach and management, which makes the establishment of a uniform management system a great necessity. In addition, projects need a formal umbrella, they should be realized more quickly, and efforts should be made to create holistic data collection.

***Interview A:** “Yeah, in our case that's the establishment of proper management in next year's definitely. Which inevitably means, äh, bringing in also stakeholders in one way or another. So, this is the biggest challenge that we have for the next years.”*

Interview C: “And the rest of problems are correlated with, we don't have some strategies or, yeah, strategy for complete basin, especially in Croatia. I think this is some kind of important part of tasks for future to get involved on all the stakeholders, especially hydro energy.”

Interview D: “And what the other challenge here is, that you have last more natural elements of biosphere reserve, and the less the development, then you have rich countries, and poor countries in the same biosphere reserve. So, you have to be reasonable actually that standards, in Austria you have less biodiversity, but be you have more resources, and standards in in Croatia, Hungary or – I don't know – Serbia you have bigger part of biosphere reserve, in Croatia and Hungary is the biggest part, you have more nature protection, and you have less resources. So, idea let's have strict protection in the core zone it's different in Austria, when you have a small core zone in the forest then in Croatia where the core zone is the whole river Drava. So, you have to always think about how to, what's happening where. So, this international coordination is also a challenge.”

Interview E: „Energiewirtschaft ist bestimmt ein Thema. Nicht nur auf österreichischer Seite, sondern sicher auch auf slowenischer und weitergehend.“

To create inclusion and thus promote and maintain acceptance and identification with the activities in the biosphere reserve in the long term, communication and compromise are required. Only through openness on the part of all those involved can the reserve be successful and deliver the best for people and nature.

4.4.6. Stakeholder Involvement

All interviewees considered open communication to be the most important tool for stakeholder inclusion. Only in this way is it possible to generate understanding for the protected area and to survive in the long term.

Interview B: “I really believe that they want to be informed and heard, because sometimes some of them don't they just want to have information, and others they have ideas, they want to express.”

Through communication in the form of public hearings, meetings, or stakeholder councils for international exchange, the advantages of the TBR MDD can be actively demonstrated, and the stakeholder groups can be given the opportunity to be involved and to express their fears and concerns. The organization of special stakeholder events in the form of joint activities, projects, or permanent working groups was also mentioned as a means for comprehensive inclusion of all stakeholders. Particular attention was paid to builders, hunters, heads of local communities, and hydro energy stakeholders, as there is a particular potential for resistance here.

The use of digital media was also repeatedly mentioned in the interviews. Social media, websites, and newsletters make it easy to reach and inform a large number of people. Interested parties can thus be kept up to date, which generates more attention for the activities in the protected area.

To emphasize the awareness and importance of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve among the general population, the distribution of material for schools and tourist offices was also addressed. In this way, even children are made aware of the relevance and activities in the protected area.

Interview B: "I think that there should be some website, or some social network for that superficial information that's basic information there. That meetings are organized, events or whatever it's there and something, it's basic. But that's for really that informative and then to get as much as possible to have really, let's say faces of TBR, to have ambassadors, that people, who are working for biosphere reserve or are active in stakeholder groups are there and that's as much as possible to have that in person engagement. It could be high-level with the corporate or whatever, it could be with the provincial administration, it could be the local level, but I believe in personal contact that things could be changed there if you establish a trust."

4.5. Approaches for Sustainable Cooperation

In the course of the qualitative interviews conducted, questions were asked not only about attitudes towards the protected area but also about suitable measures for comprehensive stakeholder management in the biosphere reserve. The results of this survey provide a broad spectrum of possible measures that could be taken to address and involve the various stakeholder groups in different ways.

4.5.1. Establishing a General Proper Management

The introduction of centralized management is essential for the management and integration of stakeholders in the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve. Although this is one of the biggest hurdles due to the size of the protected area and the unification of the five countries, it is crucial for the inclusion of all stakeholder groups. Centralized management provides a certain stability and orientation for the numerous stakeholders of the biosphere reserve. It also facilitates the coordination of various events, platforms, projects, etc.

4.5.2. Open and Clear Communication

Open communication was particularly emphasized in all interviews conducted and is therefore one of the core aspects of good stakeholder management. This is because the lack of communication on both sides often leads to deep rifts, which become increasingly difficult to overcome. Both feel that they are not being understood or even taken seriously.

Interview B: “So I like that flexibility because I think that nature conservation is about communication, cooperation, and, äh, compromise. Because without people living there, without people with different land uses, we cannot have something intact in the bubble, because everything in nature also is dynamic, so if we get people on board to find some agreement.”

Communication on an equal footing is a top priority here in particular. An open discussion in which everyone can have their say, express their concerns and contribute possible ideas provides many advantages for all sides. This creates understanding on both sides, allows viewpoints to be presented in advance and on a neutral level, and perhaps even creates new ideas and approaches. Stakeholders are made aware that their problems, interests and wishes are being taken seriously, which leads to greater acceptance of and identification with the protected area. Such communication can take place at different levels.

4.5.3. Establishing the Protected Area as a Brand

It is also important to emphasize the advantages of the protected area for the individual stakeholders. Since many groups only see the disadvantages and the rules that this protected status entails, it is important to emphasize the positive aspects here. Using the protected area as a kind of brand is an option for this, where tourism in particular, but also farmers, for example, can benefit by marketing products from the biosphere reserve. Advertising sustainable and organic products from the protected area or even awards for particularly sustainable businesses can

create advantages for the businesses, which in turn increases the popularity of the protected area.

4.5.4. Information Events

Various information events are suitable for promoting communication between stakeholders, but also with representatives of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve. These can be carried out at different levels (community, science, etc.) to prepare the content for each group accordingly. This makes it possible to reach a large number of individuals as well as representatives of different stakeholder groups and give them a say. It is possible to speak openly and on a neutral level, plan projects and provide information.

Possible types of events:

- Permanent working bodies and working groups
- Meetings
- Organized events

Interview A: "I think, okay, means of spreading information this is, that's fine, yeah, some web page and some groups, yeah, uh, within some information circle. But I think that more important would be to establish some permanent working bodies you know. Some working groups that meet regularly."

4.5.5. Media Activity

To make the TBR MDD known beyond its borders, to emphasize its importance, to generate awareness, and to include people, it also makes sense to use media presentations. A protected area newspaper in the language of the country, an information newsletter, or a homepage with the latest news are just some of the approaches mentioned in the interviews. It is also clear that the use of social media can be a suitable strategy in today's world, as it particularly appeals to young people. The use of these media should also be integrated more in the nature conservation sector to "move with the times" and reach a broad spectrum of groups of people.

4.5.6. Integration in Schools

It also makes sense to raise awareness of the protected area at an early age. After all, children are the adults of the future and often have a great influence on their parents and other family members. Through children, adults can also be introduced to the goals and positive characteristics of the protected area, even if they were previously rather neutral or hostile toward it.

To involve children in the activities of the biosphere reserve, it makes sense to seek cooperation with schools. They often look for teaching materials or organize excursions, etc. In this way, awareness and empathy for nature and the activities in the biosphere reserve can be created at a young age.

***Interview D:** “And then I think if something like this would be organized for school, it would be interesting, because the teacher always need material. So, it should be done really nice, really you know in a general journalistic style, but, uh, adjusted for children, so that it's really something that you can give to them. That there should be some like five country editorial that's a little bit, yeah, little bit creative editor.”*

5. Discussion

The stakeholder set offers perspectives on the different relevance of the various stakeholder groups, which, in conjunction with the stakeholder profiles created and the interviews conducted, was used to develop strategic approaches for suitable stakeholder management.

As a result, the research question stated at the beginning can be answered below:

Who are the key stakeholders of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve and how can they be addressed in order to create awareness and acceptance for the park and its goals?

The processing of the relevant stakeholders shows that these are largely representatives of the various state governments, the ministries for nature conservation, water management, forestry, agriculture and transportation as well as the municipalities and cities in the protected area, UNESCO and the federal forests. These groups have a strong influence on the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, both now and in the future, which means that special attention must be paid to them in terms of stakeholder management. But inclusion must not only be pursued at the level of ministries and authorities, but also at the level of the groups of people who are often directly affected. Farmers, forest owners and representatives from the transport industry are often very unsettled by protective measures, as was confirmed by the interviews conducted. These groups often fear severe restrictions as a result of the planned measures, which is why resistance often arises in advance. It is argued that many things can no longer be carried out in the same way as before, losses will be incurred, or businesses will even be robbed of their existence. There is a fear of "no longer being seen" and that the implementation of protective measures is above all else. These fears and anxieties repeatedly lead to potential conflicts, which means that projects and measures often take a long time to implement.

According to Hammer et al. (2018), cooperation is also essential for achieving the objectives of protected areas. Ecological networking of protected areas, the production and marketing of regional quality products and the anchoring of protected area objectives in regional planning and development require cooperation both within and outside protected areas (Hammer et al., 2018).

In addition, the added value that the individual stakeholders see for themselves also plays an important role in terms of awareness of the protected area. However, as this is interpreted differently by each individual, this is the major challenge for management.

The results of the interviews conducted with the protected areas Biosphere Reserves Pfälzerwald-Nordvogesen, Carpathians and River Landscape Elbe also show that similar problems arise time and time again and that everyone is looking for the "optimal" solution for themselves. Attempts are made to find compromises, to educate and to involve, so that acceptance and identification with the protected area and the activities carried out in it are created. However, as different approaches are also repeatedly adopted here, it is advisable to seek and promote exchange with other protected areas to be able to react more flexibly and comprehensively to situations and conflicts and to benefit from the experience of others.

5.1. Stakeholder Inclusion as the Basis for Acceptance and Support of the TBR MDD

The inclusion of the various stakeholder groups is an essential component of stakeholder management and contributes significantly to the success of measures in the protected area, but also to the success of the biosphere reserve itself. Without the appropriate involvement of stakeholders, projects may be difficult or impossible to implement, acceptance of the protected area may wane, or the necessity of the conservation measures may be called into question.

Both in the interviews conducted and in various literature sources, the inclusion of stakeholder groups is mentioned as a necessary component for the success of protected areas and their measures. In particular, the importance of communication with stakeholders, as well as among them, was emphasized to inform, exchange information, and avoid and manage conflicts.

The Bureau of Land Management (2009) describes honest and open communication as the first step towards effective communication, which can lead to agreement on controversial issues. But it is mentioned that it is also important to be aware of cultural sensitivities when communicating, as different cultures and therefore different social interaction styles and values can clash when different stakeholders meet.

In his work, Thommen (2015) also mentions the need for a clear communication concept in which the communication of fundamental values but also the perception of the concerns of the stakeholder groups are harmonized. The resulting exchange of information to present the different positions is the basic prerequisite for harmonizing mutual ideas and achieving mutual acceptance.

This is also considered in the work of Jurczak & Cent (2011), which states that the lack of information is a major factor in the low acceptance of nature conservation projects, as information is essential as a basis for understanding other points of view and approaches.

Involvement in projects and respectful interaction with each other was also mentioned in the work of Brandstetter (2023), as a much greater impact and better results can be achieved with voluntarily implemented and actively supported projects.

5.2. Necessity of Individual Consideration of Needs and Concerns

During the interviews conducted and discussions with other protected areas, it became clear that it is essential to respond individually to the needs of the various stakeholders. Due to the great heterogeneity of the stakeholder groups in the TBR MDD, a large number of very different needs and expectations come together, which require an individual approach.

Brandstetter (2023) writes that communication should be very personal and that only if all stakeholders are taken seriously, knowledge is exchanged, needs are discussed, and management measures are jointly developed together can beneficial solutions be found that take many interests into account at once.

Freeman et al. (2004) mentions in his work that for the implementation of actions it is necessary to understand the needs of other affected parties and to know how they are actually affected by the action.

By taking interests and needs into account, organizations are also able to prove themselves worthy of the trust of their stakeholders, which makes it easier to carry out actions and measures (Greenwood & Van Buren III, 2010).

It is precisely because of this great diversity of stakeholders and their interests that it is necessary to focus primarily on the relevant stakeholders when considering and accepting their needs, as it is not possible to give each stakeholder the same level of attention due to a lack of resources. Stötzer (2009) also describes this in his work. But he also mentions that, according to the stakeholder approach, an NPO is successful if it manages to fulfill the prioritized expectations and needs of all stakeholders effectively (goal-oriented) and efficiently (economically).

5.3. Restrictions Lead to a Decrease in Understanding and Awareness

In the discussions held, it became clear time and time again that uncertainty and a certain defensive attitude can arise as a result of measures and restrictions being implemented, which also reduces awareness and understanding of the activities in the protected area. Especially in the case of measures that affect the energy industry, farmers or foresters, there is always greater potential for conflict, which means that these stakeholder groups often have little or no understanding of nature conservation measures. Many studies carried out in Europe show that top-

down nature conservation is accompanied by a lack of acceptance on the part of the population (Hiedanpää, 2002; Enengel et al., 2011; Schenk et al., 2007; Grodzińska-Jurczak et al., 2012). Restrictions make some representatives feel overrun, mistreated, afraid of losing their livelihood or suffering economic losses. The resulting mistrust harms any further interaction with these stakeholder groups, which in the worst case can also lead to protests.

Hiedanpää (2002) provides an extreme example of this:

There was one exceptionally strong protest: in the municipality of Karvia. In the early autumn of 1997, four landowners from Karvia went on hunger strike in protest against the proposed Natura 2000 Network. There was also growing discontent and resistance elsewhere. [...] The hunger strike got much public attention. A week-long strike ended after both the minister of agriculture and forestry and the minister of the environment visited the scene and nearly a half of the areas were withdrawn from the Natura proposal.

Stoll (1999) also notes that the acceptance of nature conservation measures is strongly hindered by the fact that such measures are often perceived as a restriction. He points out that participation is a relevant means of generating such acceptance and that a lack of it during the entire planning process and the implementation of nature conservation measures is a significant factor for rejection.

However, reference is also repeatedly made to the importance of added value for the respective stakeholders. For example, Gasser et al. (2017) describes that stakeholders who do not perceive any added value for themselves are more likely to question projects, making it necessary to clearly demonstrate this to them to gain support and approval.

6. Outlook

For the future, it is clear that the area of stakeholder management in the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve still requires a great deal of work and that energy must be invested here on an ongoing basis to involve the stakeholder groups accordingly. Due to the diverse interests and the large number of stakeholder groups, this represents a major challenge for the future, which must be mastered if the protected area is to be successful. It is necessary to take appropriate measures, particularly with regard to the key stakeholders of the TBR MDD.

Involvement should take place in a transparent manner, whereby an attempt should be made to avoid bias as far as possible (Haddaway et al., 2017).

Particular attention should be paid to communication, because without this, involvement is only possible to an insufficient extent, and many stakeholders feel excluded or neglected. In addition, cooperation with interest groups enriches the decision-making process and increases the legitimacy of organizational measures (Reed, 2008). A meeting at eye level, in which every positive and negative objection is heard, is essential here. To this end, generating a proper management system is crucial to coordinate events, disseminate information, and involve people. This is the only way to make the TBR fit for the future, because without the support of the various stakeholders, the protected area cannot be established or sustained.

However, it is also important to keep management flexible and not to focus on a rigid construct. Due to various changes at a political or socio-cultural level, for example, there will always be changes to the framework conditions, which means that it is necessary to constantly adapt management to be able to react appropriately to new situations.

References

- Brandstetter, F. (2023). Investigation of the stakeholder process for the management and restoration of peatlands in the Ennstal, identification of issues and development of potential tools and strategies to improve the process. Master's Thesis. University of Vienna. Faculty of Earth Sciences, Geography and Astronomy.
- Bryson, M. J. (2004). What to do when Stakeholders matter. *Public Management Review*, Vol. 6 (1), pp. 21-53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030410001675722>
- Bureau of Land Management (2009). Bureau of Land Management National Natural Resources Policy for Collaborative Stakeholder Engagement and Appropriate Dispute Resolution: What BLM, Communities, and the Public Need to Know for Preventing Conflict and Resolving Disputes Involving Public Lands and Resources. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Collaborative Stakeholder Engagement and Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program, Office of the Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning.
- Dolinar, U., Cerar, N., Wolf, L., Zollner, D., Schäfer, I., Podgorelec, M., Berden, K., Böck, K. & Györfi, E. (2022). Roadmap for proactive cooperation of stakeholders in the TBR MDD (Report developed in the frame of the project DTP3-308-2.3). IRSNC and WWF AT.
- Enengel, B., Penker, M., Muhar, A., Williams, R. (2011). Benefits, efforts and risks of participation in landscape co-management: An analytical framework and results from two case studies in Austria. *Journal of Environmental Management*, Vol. 92, pp. 1256-1267. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2010.12.005>
- Fischer, M. (2009). Einfluss gegenseitiger Wahrnehmung von Interessensgruppen auf die Akzeptanz von Regionalen Naturparks. Eine qualitative Untersuchung im Züricher Weinland. Lizentiatsarbeit. Universität Basel. Department Umweltwissenschaften. <https://www.yumpu.com/de/document/read/20630169/einfluss-gegenseitiger-wahrnehmung-von-interessengruppen-wsl>

- Freeman, R. E. (2015). *Strategic Management. A Stakeholder Approach*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139192675>
- Freeman, R. E., & Reed, D. L. (1983). Stockholders and Stakeholders: A New Perspective on Corporate Governance. *California Management Review*, Vol. 25, pp. 88-106.
DOI:10.2307/41165018
- Freeman, R. E., Wicks, A. C., & Parmar, B. (2004). Stakeholder Theory and “The Corporate Objective Revisited”. *Organization Science*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 364-369.
<https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1040.0066>
- Gasser, A., Novakovic, S., Ottiger, K. & Sorrentino, A. (2017). Stakeholder Management Jurapark Aargau – eine Standortbestimmung vor den Gemeindeabstimmungen 2019. Schlussbericht. Hochschule Luzern Wirtschaft.
- Greenwood, M., & Van Buren III, H. J. (2010). Trust and Stakeholder Theory: Trustworthiness in the Organisation-Stakeholder Relationship. *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 95 (3), pp. 425–438. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-010-0414-4>
- Grodzińska-Jurczak, M. & Cent, J. (2011). Expansion of Nature Conservation Areas: Problems with Natura 2000 Implementation in Poland?. *Environmental Management*, Vol. 47, pp. 11-27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-010-9583-2>
- Grodzińska-Jurczak, M., Strzelecka, M., Kamal, S., Gutowska, J. (2012). Effectiveness of Nature Conservation – A Case of Natura 2000 Sites in Poland. *InTech*, pp. 183-202.
DOI:10.5772/50664
- Haddaway, N. R., Kohl, C., Rebelo da Silva, N., Schiemann, J., Spök, A., Stewart, R., Sweet, J. B., & Wilhelm, R. (2017). A framework for stakeholder engagement during systematic reviews and maps in environmental management. *Environmental Evidence*, Vol. 6 (11). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13750-017-0089-8>

- Hammer, T., Mose, I., Siegrist, D., Weixlbaumer, N. (2018). Large-scale protected areas in Europe in transition – Challenges and perspectives for their development. *Natur und Landschaft*. DOI:10.17433/5.2018.50153579.224-231
- Helferich, H. (2016). *Wissenschaftstheorie für Betriebswirtschaftler* (2. Auflage). Springer Gabler Verlag, S. 30.
- Hentze, J. & Thies, B. (2014). *Stakeholder-Management und Nachhaltigkeits-Reporting*. Springer Gabler Verlag.
- Hiedanpää, J. (2002). European-wide conservation versus local well-being: the reception of the Natura 2000 Reserve Network in Karvia, SW-Finland. *Satakunta Environmental Research Institute, University of Turku*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-2046\(02\)00106-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-2046(02)00106-8)
- Hussy, W., Schreier, M., Echterhoff, G. (2013). *Forschungsmethoden in Psychologie und Sozialwissenschaften für Bachelor* (2., überarbeitete Auflage). Springer-Verlag.
- Kasper, M. (2020). *Die Stakeholder Theorie – Entwicklung und Modelle*. Masterarbeit. Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz. Fakultät der Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften.
- Köck, G., Schwach, G. & Mohl, A. (2022). Editorial Mura-Drava-Danube biosphere reserve: a long way from the original idea to the designation of the world's first 5-country biosphere reserve. *Int. J. Environment and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 253–269.
- Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Wood, D. J. (1997). Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience: Defining the Principle of Who and What Really Counts. *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 853–886. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259247>
- Mohl, A., Egger, G., & Schneider-Jacoby, M. (2009). Fließende Grenzen – Grenzflüsse im Spannungsfeld zwischen Schutz und Nutzung. *Natur und Landschaft*, Vol. 84, pp. 431–435.

- Österreichische UNESCO-Kommission (n.d.). Weltweit erster 5-Länder-Biosphärenpark in der Zielgeraden. UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.at/querschnittsthemen/article/22-mai-internationale-tag-der-biologischen-vielfalt>
- Reed, M. S. (2008). Stakeholder participation for environmental management: A literature review. *Biological Conservation*, Vol. 141, pp. 2417-2431. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2008.07.014>
- Schenk, A., Hunziker, M., Kienast, F. (2007). Factors influencing the acceptance of nature conservation measures – A qualitative study in Switzerland. *Journal of Environmental Management*, Vol. 83, pp. 66-79.
- Stoll, S. (1999). Akzeptanzprobleme bei der Ausweisung von Großschutzgebieten. Ursachenanalyse und Ansätze zu Handlungsansätzen. *Europäische Hochschulschriften*. Bd. 24, Reihe 42.
- Stötzer, S. (2009). Stakeholder Performance Reporting von Nonprofit-Organisationen. Grundlagen und Empfehlungen für die Leistungsberichterstattung als stakeholderorientiertes Steuerungs- und Rechenschaftslegungsinstrument (1. Auflage). Springer Gabler Verlag.
- Suchman, M. (1995). Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 571-610. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258788>
- Thommen, J.-P., (2015). Glaubwürdigkeit im Stakeholder-Management (3., vollständig überarbeitete Auflage). Versus Verlag AG.
- Umweltverband WWF Österreich (n.d.). Der Amazonas Europas. Letztes wildes Fluss-Paradies an Mur, Drau und Donau. WWF. <https://www.wwf.at/das-schuetzen-wir/fluesse/mur-drau-donau/>
- UNESCO (2013). Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme – TBR Nomination Form. UNESCO.

Ungericht, B. (2012). Strategiebewusstes Management. Konzepte und Instrumente für nachhaltiges Handeln. Pearson Studium.

Weber, M. (1947). The Theory of Social and Economic Organization. The Free Press & The Falcon's Wing Press.

Würz, T. (2012). Corporate Stakeholder Communications. Neoinstitutionalistische Perspektiven einer stakeholderorientierten Unternehmenskommunikation. Springer Gabler Verlag.

Appendices

A – Interview Guide for Expert Interviews

The following guideline is a general version of the interview conducted, but the individual questions were adapted slightly depending on the expert and important topics that arose during the interview were addressed.

Start - First a few questions about your intention and you personally

1. Which region do you come from?
2. To which stakeholder group do you feel you belong?
3. Why did you get involved in this interview?

Introduction, personal experiences with the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, communication

4. When, in which situations and how often do you come into contact with the MDD Biosphere Reserve in any way?
5. What is the importance of the TBR MDD for you as a stakeholder group? What is your general attitude towards the biosphere reserve? Why?
6. Where do you see advantages or disadvantages for yourself, but also for the region in general? To what extent do you think the TBR influences your region?
7. What are the points of contact between you and the TBR MDD? Are the points of contact right for you? Or would you like to be touched more, less, or not at all?

Networking, role, demands

8. As a stakeholder, are you networked with other stakeholders of the biosphere reserve?
9. What function/role do you ascribe to yourself within the TBR? How important are you as a stakeholder group? Why? To what extent can you as a stakeholder influence the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve?
10. What are your goals/needs as a biosphere reserve stakeholder? What scope for action do you have within the TBR MDD?
11. Are there things that explicitly bother you about the biosphere reserve? If yes, which ones? Are there points regarding the biosphere reserve that you like very much? If yes, which ones?
12. To what extent should stakeholders be more involved in the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve?

13. How would you like to be addressed by the biosphere reserve? What means do you think would be useful here?
14. What challenge does the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve have to overcome? Could the stakeholders be more involved in this?

B – Overview of Criteria Used in the Content Analysis

The following table shows the content analysis criteria developed using a deductive-inductive approach.

Category	Characteristic	Mentioned in the Interviews
Strengths:	- flexibility	B
	- possibility to rethink	B, E
	- more researchers and science	B
	- new kind of development	B
	- good for tourism and economic development	A, B
	- connects people and nature	A
	- sustainable development	A, B, D
	- best way in nature conservation	A
	- title of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve	A
	- everyone can bring their point of view	D
Weaknesses:	- label alone doesn't help much	B
	- by designation "reserve" people believe everything is strict	B
	- strong stakeholders pushing their agenda without consulting others	B
	- some stakeholders feeling hopeless	B
	- fear of restrictions	B
	- many things only exist on paper	A
	- lack of proper management	A, C
	- UNESCO is not strict enough	A
	- single people are lost	D
	- things take longer because many people are involved	B, E
	- danger of forgetting stakeholders	E
Challenges:	- communication and compromise	B
	- inclusion	B
	- studies or developing new products	B
	- five countries: situation is not the same in every country; different perspectives	B, D
	- establishment of proper management	A, C
	- language	B
	- formal umbrella for projects	A
	- some countries do not have much experience on this kind of approach and management	C
	- needs to be faster for projects	C
	- develop data collecting	C
	- sustainable development; involvement of people and nature protection	D

Category	Characteristic	Mentioned in the Interviews
Role:	- a tool, not a goal	B
	- the status of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is important	A, D
	- most ambitious biosphere reserve idea	A
	- framework for management in whole area	D
	- influences region basically	D
	- can be used like a brand	D
	- bringing people and nature in harmony	E
Resistances:	- farmers often very skeptical	A
	- hydro energy stakeholders	C, E
	- not interested because most important is money	C
	- settlement policy	E
Stakeholder Integration:	- communication	A, B, C, D, E
	- interdisciplinary approach	C
	- establish stakeholder councils for international exchange	B
	- listen and address the needs	B
	- website, social network, newsletters	A, B, C, E
	- meetings, information circle, and organized events	A, B
	- activities, projects	A, E
	- show the benefits and how they can influence the TBR MDD	A
	- permanent working bodies/working groups	A
	- more focus on farmers, hunters, heads of local communities, and hydro energy stakeholders needed	C, D
	- public hearings where everyone can talk about his kind of view	C
	- find representatives for each region	C
	- more publicity; in news	C, D
	- material for schools; tourist offices	D
	- importance to get awareness of single persons	D
	- newspaper for all five countries in all five languages	D
	- expert newsletter	D
	- promote exchange of stakeholders from different countries	E

C - Anonymized Transcripts of the Interviews Conducted

Interview A

Interviewer (00:05:49): Thank you for participating in my survey. First, I have a few questions about your intention. Which stakeholder group do you feel belong?

Interlocutor (00:05:51): Which stakeholder group in the biosphere reserve?

Interviewer (00:05:54): In the biosphere reserve, yes.

Interlocutor (00:05:57): Ähm, nature conservation expert or something like this. Maybe.

Interviewer (00:06:07): Please tell me what your intention was to get involved in this interview?

Interlocutor (00:06:12): Uh, well you invited me so, yes.

Interviewer (00:06:16): But you could also say no.

Interlocutor (00:06:19): No, I'm glad to help, ähm, because the topic is also important to me, to my work. A few weeks ago, I had a very similar interview also with one Slovenian student from the University of Maribor, who also practically makes the same research about stakeholder involvement, not just about the biosphere reserve but in nature conservation. For nature conservation it's important that such studies also contribute to the goals of our work, so I'm glad to participate.

Interviewer (00:07:13): Then a little bit of introduction, your personal experiences with the biosphere reserve, and communication. When, in which situation and how often do you come in contact with the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:07:27): Ah, yeah. Since I'm working for the Institute for Nature Conservation of the Republic of Slovenia and our regional unit, Maribor regional unit, is actually responsible for managing the Mura River Biosphere Reserve in Slovenia which is part of the TBR Mura-Drava-Danube. Ah, this is practically part of my regular work. And, ähm, not just the biosphere reserve topic, but also my position in the institute is practically for the last 12 years more or less I've been working on where you are. So, I'm involved daily practically.

Interviewer (00:08:15): Okay. And what is the importance of the biosphere reserve for you as a stakeholder group?

Interlocutor (00:08:22): For us as a stakeholder group, ähm, this is the status of a biosphere reserve in comparison to other statuses like nature parks or national parks. It's the only status that connects people and nature. So probably in the long term if you want to succeed with protecting areas like the Mura-Drava-Danube region, sustainable development, which is the main point of biosphere reserve, it is maybe the best way in nature conservation in the long term. Better than some prohibitions, and some rules, and, uh, like you have in some nature reserves. Ah, so yeah, it's an important, uh, vision for nature reservation definitely.

Interviewer (00:09:19): And what is your general attitude towards the biosphere reserve? And why?

Interlocutor (00:09:26): Yeah, this is, uh, a very similar question or I can answer very similarly. Ahm, like I said, these should be model areas of sustainable development. So, this is the key opportunity that biosphere reserves offer to nature conservation.

Interviewer (00:09:49): Where do you see advantages or disadvantages for yourself but also for the region in general?

Interlocutor (00:10:00): Uhm, I actually don't live within the Biosphere Reserve Mura River or Mura-Drava-Danube. So, for myself, ah, it's difficult to answer other than that this is my daily job, and this, ah, brings also some benefits also from me from the biosphere reserve. But for the region, uh, this title of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is a big opportunity, because this is a very important title, that also in tourism means a lot, and other fields of economic development let's say. So, I think that this is also for people that do live within the Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube it's an opportunity for sustainable development in the future.

Interviewer (00:10:58): What are the points of contact between you and the biosphere reserve? Are the points of contact right for you? Or would you like to be touched more, less or not at all?

Interlocutor (00:11:28): Well in our case in the Mura part of the TBR, uh, we are still in the development phase of certain structures; management structures let's say. Ähm, but still, we do have contacts with other biosphere reserves, with other managers of biosphere reserves. We are connected through the Slovenian UNESCO Commission for Biosphere Reserves, where we align some of our activities several times per year. We have certain common activities and some events that all biosphere reserves in Slovenia do. And so, yeah. We have some contacts, but not enough if you ask me, because not all the structures, uh, that would be needed, so the management authority for the Slovenian parties does not exist, so our institute is the manager, but we do a lot of other things also, not just managing the biosphere reserve, so we are very limited with what we can do in terms of communication with stakeholders and other biosphere reserves.

Interviewer (00:13:03): Then a little bit about networking. As a stakeholder, are you networked with other stakeholders too? And which ones?

Interlocutor (00:13:16): Yeah. We are so. I represent the central, uh, nature conservation governmental organization in Slovenia. One way or another, we are connected with several, with many other stakeholders. We work with local communities, we work with local NGOs, we work with regional NGOs, we work with national NGOs, and we work with regional national authorities also, ahm, because this is our work actually. So, we are very connected with, uh, all sorts of stakeholders. Also on the international level.

Interviewer (00:14:01): Does this include also stakeholders like farmers?

Interlocutor (00:14:08): Yeah, also. Maybe not so much directly but with farmers associations. You know they have also a Chamber of Agriculture where they are organized because it's difficult to talk to each farmer, but we come in contact also with many farmers in each area.

Interviewer (00:14:34): How is this contact with these associations?

Interlocutor (00:14:40): For instance, we were partners in several projects that were connected to the biosphere reserves. So, we did some common visions of the biosphere reserve action plans, ah, and some sort of things, but we are also, we come also into contact when they need

some permits, for instance to do something. For instance, some farmers want to do something in nature, build something or something like that. Many times, they work through this association, yeah, so they meet this way and vice versa. Also, when we need some, I don't know, when we do some restoration projects on the, on the river we need some permits from, uh, farmers or from, uh, from the Ministry for Agriculture and then we contact for instance the chamber to help us to connect us and so on.

Interviewer (00:15:42): And how is this in Slovenia with the farmers? Are they a lot against the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:15:51): Yeah. The farmers are as usual very skeptical. And when we established the biosphere reserve, the Mura Biosphere Reserve, we had big difficulties with the farmers and with the Chamber of Agriculture. But now that they see that this, uh, status of biosphere reserve didn't change a lot for them there's more acceptance and also each year or in recent 10 – 20 years many farms have changed from conventional to organic or something similar, so this pool of such farmers is growing, and they see the opportunity also in trademark of biosphere reserve. It's difficult to work with farmers, they are practically the most, uh, difficult stakeholder.

Interviewer (00:17:17): What functional role do you ascribe to yourself within the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:17:28): To myself, ähm, nature conservationists. Working, uh, with nature conservation, partly also with communication, with communicating, uh, communication activities, for instance but more or less working on different nature conservation projects within the biosphere reserve.

Interviewer (00:17:50): And how important are you as a stakeholder group for the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:17:56): Nature conservation is one of the most important probably. Even though this biosphere reserve status is about sustainable development, uh, the perception in public is still that this is a nature conservation story and issue more or less. At least this is my opinion.

Interviewer (00:18:18): Are there things that explicitly bother you about the TBR MDD? When yes, which ones? And are there are points regarding the biosphere reserve that you like very much?

Interlocutor (00:18:37): I think that the idea of biosphere reserve is very good but the implementation on field, also in Slovenia, is not the best. Ah, many things exist only on paper or are in some ideas. The problem in Slovenia for instance is like I said, uh, lack of proper management. So, we don't have a separate manager with a separate budget also to be managing the biosphere reserve. And I think this is also, not just the problem in Slovenia, but, ähm, for UNESCO if they want to see this network of biosphere reserves really working, they will have to become much stricter. That every biosphere reserve, every area that wants to become a biosphere reserve needs to establish, uh, manager structure and a solid financing structure at the beginning, otherwise, äh, it's difficult later to establish such things.

Interviewer (00:20:02): To what extent do you think stakeholders should be more involved in the biosphere reserve? Not only you, also other stakeholders. What's your opinion about this?

Interlocutor (00:20:12): Since the idea of sustainable development can only be realized if people accept it. If all the stakeholders accept it. So, they have to be involved. And not just nature conservation also all other stakeholders that, äh, live in or around the biosphere reserve and have some influence on the biosphere reserve or can have some benefits – they should be involved in some kind of forums or platforms, where they can discuss their part of, their role in the whole story.

Interviewer (00:21:22): And how would you as a stakeholder like to be addressed more by the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve? What means do you think would be useful there? Something like newspapers or newsletters or forums.

Interlocutor (00:22:00): My point of view is that in the moment this is difficult to answer because we are the ones that, uh, connecting other stakeholders. I think, okay, means of spreading information is, that's fine, yeah, some web page and some groups, yeah, uh, within some information circle. But I think that more important would be to establish some permanent working bodies you know. Some working groups that meet regularly. So, these stakeholders that you mentioned that these stakeholders form some formal groups and that they meet, I don't know, several times per year where they discuss, and they get the information. That's maybe the most efficient way would be this. But okay, yeah, definitely modern ways of, äh, connecting people also should be, äh, involved.

Interviewer (00:23:25): In the future, what challenge does the biosphere reserve have to overcome? And could stakeholders, uh, be more involved in this?

Interlocutor (00:23:40): Yeah, in our case that's the establishment of proper management in next year's definitely. Which inevitably means, äh, bringing in also stakeholders in one way or another. So, this is the biggest challenge that we have for the next years. Because we are very active in nature conservation, for instance on the Mura part of the biosphere reserve, we have several nature restoration projects, we have several communication projects and, ähm, similar activities, but, ähm, we don't have this formal umbrella of biosphere reserve, of all these activities. This is the problem that we have now, so it's difficult to show the people how much work we do in the biosphere reserve, if we don't have a some kind of central, even web page for instance where all these projects would be presented and everything that's being done, yeah, äh, and not just from nature conservation also from other types of activities, from tourism, from education and many other people are also working within the biosphere reserve but they do a separate story it's not connected to ours.

Interviewer (00:25:26): Yes, that brings us to the end of the interview. Do you have anything else you would like to say about the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve?

Interlocutor (00:25:38): Maybe we have big expectations from this, uh, project. It is probably one of the, or probably the most ambitious biosphere reserve idea in the world until now. Five countries in the middle of Europe with, äh, a lot of pressure on these rivers, and a lot depends on the success of this story. If you don't succeed then probably, we will lose these rivers to some other ideas. And, äh, this would not be also the best story for the rest of the world because if we don't succeed here in Europe then I don't know how some African countries could do something like this then. So, a lot depends on the success of our story, and, uh, we will do our best, of course that our part is realized.

Interviewer (00:26:55): Thank you very much for your time and the detailed answers. I was very pleased that you took part.

Interview B

Interviewer (00:07:50): Thank you for your time and participating in my survey. What was your intention to get involved in this interview?

Interlocutor (00:08:03): There are two things. One is I'm interested in topic as such. Because I really believe that reserves, at that time that concept was developed, is basically sustainable development goals what we're talking about. So, it's a little bit different functions, but also research development local people it's not protecting them as such and I think we should change that paradigm. And another thing, I really want to help young people because it's not nice if you say no, so I feel embarrassed because of my time constraints but finally we talk, so yeah.

Interviewer (00:08:49): I'm very pleased about that, because I never received a response from some people to my request for interviews. So, it has been quite challenging for me to get interview partners so far.

Interlocutor (00:09:04): Don't be discouraged, that's percentage. I always say if you can do 60 or 70 of what you plan it's usually okay. Basically, some people are busy or something like that.

Interviewer (00:09:30): That's true. Then let's start with a few questions to introduce the theme. Which stakeholder group do you feel belong to?

Interlocutor (00:09:49): Äh, it's nature conservation, it's obvious. But I have also understanding of, because I was working for almost a decade with other stakeholders and I'm really put some effort to understand their perspective and sometimes I was thinking that it was better for me to have a degree in psychology than in biology. But mainly my, let's say my really core business is nature protection.

Interviewer (00:10:25): It is very important for me to get to know the perspectives of different stakeholders. So, if you say that you also know the perspectives of other stakeholder groups because you have already had contact with them, it is very interesting for me to find out more here too.

What do you think is the importance of the biosphere reserve for your stakeholder group?

Interlocutor (00:11:44): I think it's, äh, basically is a tool. It's not a goal for. So basically, you can do something great with that, and you can do nothing with that. So just the label doesn't help you much. So, I like that flexibility because I think that nature conservation is about communication, cooperation, and, äh, compromise. Because without people living there, without people with different land uses, we cannot have something intact in the bubble, because everything in nature is also dynamic, so if we get people on board to find some agreement. I really had a tough time during the designation process, we had so many stakeholder discussions and in Serbia, it's a little bit, let's say, exceptional story that protected area managers are the forestry companies. So, at the same time they're managing the forest but they the managing the protected area, so there is between themselves they're organization there is a conflict of interest, because that the commercial forest is priority and then it will really afraid that they will lose the possibility to cut the forest and to do some things that they will be fired. And they were really like riots really protest among workers there because some of the bosses say, "oh if it's biosphere reserve, you will lose your job" and that was not the case, so we really spent hours and hours. And I think that's the only approach it takes time, but you need to really clearly communicate with different local groups.

Not just people living there but also the businesses. And I think that's a good thing to do because that's the only way forward and to be very honest and not promise that things will be great when

you have the UNESCO designation but really explain to them that that's just the possibility. And that you can belong to the network, you can have some education capacity building things share with others make products. But nothing will happen, and nothing will change because biosphere reserve because, uh, according to the nomination process you have to fulfill your national legislation, so you already have your protected area rules and regulations at the national level, so it will not change. Some countries maybe have something particular. I know in in Austria there are "parks" and things like that, and I think it's a good idea, because when you say "reserve" people have idea that something is strict. So, we were thinking like, äh, making another type of like "biosphere oasis" or something like that.

Interviewer (00:15:45): And where do you see advantages or disadvantages for the stakeholders and for the region itself?

Interlocutor (00:15:57): The advantage is basically, äh, you have the possibility to rethink because you have to agree with other stakeholders. So, you really have to think about land use practices. Äh, it's bringing more researchers and science. When I say science, I don't mean about, äh, just botany or zoology or geography, not natural science, but also social science, economical science. And I think those things are more becoming important in in this region TBR, and you need to understand that it's not protected area but it's potential opportunity for a new kind of development. And for example, with WWF we did so, you know about that for sure, Amazon of Europe Bike Trail. And when they see the signs and the tourists, it's small the moment but it's growing and they started to realize, that because they are biosphere reserve the people are coming, but also the projects are coming. For example, we had, ähm, partnership with – äh, at that time I'm not working for WWF I'm in Bonn now, but at the time I was working there, we had a project with Coca-Cola Company. And they were interested to invest in, they have of course their CSR corporate responsible, äh, activities and they have a "3 R" they call it, reuse, reduce, basically it's again using less water, water treatment and replenish. And replenish is how to compensate the water they're using for their beverages and basically, they founded. Äh, it was like almost half a million euros or even more, I cannot remember by heart, for that on the restoration. Äh, so basically for us it was good as a stakeholder group working on biodiversity and ecosystems to establish habitats, for them it was about the water, and for local people, like ecotourism, like water purification, and things like that, äh, wetland ecosystem services. I could check but it was 2017 or something like that they won the world innovation beverage awards for that project, so it also could attract different kinds of not just grants and donors but also some investments in the future.

Maybe we will ask about disadvantages.

I think disadvantage is, äh, that you have, sometimes if you have to move quick that's African proverb you go alone. If you want to go far, you move in a group. I still personally think that's advantage if you have so many stakeholders and you agree but sometimes, let's say the stronger stakeholders are pushing their agenda without consulting others, and I think that could be disadvantage because other stakeholders are feeling hopeless and losing interest in, if things they are suggesting something coming with a new idea and nothing is happening, and that could be kind of disadvantage basically. And of course, the disadvantage is again psychology, that people are expecting something and if things are not happening like this then they're again losing interest and their discipline. So, it's about, I think more and more communication is needed because a lot of effort about TBR is focused on technical stuff, like studies and or developing new products but really I think more and more and more communication with stakeholders I don't mean just people living there.

Interviewer (00:20:39): Okay. To what extent do you think the stakeholders can influence the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:20:46): Äh, it's very up to national legislation. So, what are possibilities given to the different stakeholder groups. Because we are talking here about five countries biosphere reserve and the situation is not the same in all countries. But one thing is that national possibility and another thing is, for example, that there is an ongoing project pushing for establishing a stakeholder council to have an international exchange. And that exchange could somehow encourage, äh, locals. They need something to do together, I think that's the key point, it's gather them and if they achieve something jointly things are changing. I think that's a game changer, it couldn't be small but just, yeah.

Interviewer (00:21:50): And what do you think are the goals or needs as a stakeholder in the TBR MDD? So, for you, but also for the other stakeholders?

Interlocutor (00:22:05): Basically, whatever you do, you can have empathy and philanthropy and whatever, but there is a certain level, so you have to stick to your core business. If our core business is biodiversity, we need to see that biodiversity is in good condition, that we are protecting habitats, species are okay and we're doing some restoration, hopefully. But also, for us in nature conservation, it is important to get others on board, because we cannot do it ourselves. So, I think it's like, you know, that we find a common denominator, that we find something together and so it could be for beekeepers, it could be for the forester, it could be for cyclers or whoever, hunters. That they find something that is their core business. If everything is about nature conservation, they will be reported, so we have to give them space and time, like a puzzle basically. To find an opportunity for everyone. Because if not, you will at the end, you know, like your job, you need to fulfill your terms of reference if you need to have a salary or your teammates or whatever. So, I cannot see that we are pushing pressure on, ähm, just the ecosystem and biodiversity and that sometimes we as biologists and ecologists are blind and pushing that, and we get different feedback, so we have to listen to others.

Interviewer (00:24:04): What do you think does explicitly bother stakeholders about the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve?

Interlocutor (00:24:13): That's what we mentioned before. They think if it's not well communicated that they will have restrictions.

Interviewer (00:24:24): And how should these stakeholders be addressed? What's your opinion about this?

Interlocutor (00:24:34): I really believe that they want to be informed and heard, because sometimes some of them don't they just want to have information, and others they have ideas, they want to express. So, there are different of, let's say, levels of stakeholder in involvement. But I believe that first in information and then who is interested of course listen to them and try to address their needs, because without, listening is not enough, if you don't react. Sometimes we're pretending to listen to people, not pretending, but you're polite and you give opportunity to others and basically you are thinking your thoughts. But if we can really listen to them, I think they will notice that, and it will be changed I think so too, uhm and uh.

Interviewer (00:25:32): Yeah, I think so too. What do you think would be a good way to inform the stakeholders, to get information to the stakeholders?

Interlocutor (00:25:46): I think that there should be some website or some social network for that superficial information that's basic information there. That meetings are organized, events

or whatever it's there and something, it's basic. But that's for really that informative and then to get as much as possible to have really, let's say faces of TBR, to have ambassadors, that people, who are working for biosphere reserve or are active in stakeholder groups are there and that's as much as possible to have that in person engagement. It could be high-level with the corporate or whatever, it could be with the provincial administration, or it could be at the local level, but I believe in personal contact that things could be changed there if you establish trust. For example, we had the projects, I was working there for 15 years in total, and we had projects there sometimes we didn't have money at all, that was the project cycle. But we continue to, let's say, have a good relationship to some things you can do without money. There are a lot of things you can do without money. And I think that's the main thing. I think patience is to have really been persistent and be there for them if they have a problem. For example, once I just recall there was some pollution, they didn't know who polluted but the fish started to die there in the wetlands. And the local people alerted protected area managers and their foresters, and they didn't want to make a mess, they were silent. And then at that time I wrote a press release, and WWF sent a press release, and then the inspection reacted, and then journalists and people were really happy that somebody reacted, especially the fishermen. So, anglers were big group for us, because it's, äh, important place for spawning of fish and things like that. So, they were really grateful, because we did it and it's a small thing, it's like one working day, but have really to be in constant communication.

Interviewer (00:28:33): This brings us to the last question. What challenge does the biosphere reserve have to overcome. What do you think?

Interlocutor (00:28:40): Äh, because it's five countries there are a lot of layers of challenges there is, that let's say official political that different countries are pushing for different things. And also, four countries are in the European Union. The legislation in Serbia, a candidate country is still not updated. So that's one level. Or so available funds, for example, you can apply for LIFE project, but it's not easy for Serbia to, because they are not dissipating in LIFE projects. They could, but only if other partners are making it possible. So, it's that let's say different perspective at that. And of course, some countries are, let's say, have bigger area like Croatia and Hungary and then in some countries it's really small and tiny, but different interests. And also, ecologically Mura, Drava and Danube there's like three habitats, but it's one unit. I think that's, äh, also conservation is different, conservation measures, if you have gravel or extraction or if you have a big lowland river like Danube. So, let's say technical expertise is different, economic situation is different and the language, I think it's also. Because they're really different. With Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian it's, I think at the local level for people but of course. So, I would group them as a political, language barrier and that economical let's say. Different example in Austria you don't have to explain so many things, but you have in other countries.

Interviewer (00:30:50): I am very interested in the differences in the countries involved, as the population will often have different views. Especially in more rural areas, the acceptance and view of the protected area is certainly very different. Are there many farmers in Serbia?

Interlocutor (00:31:29): Not so. Basically, the part that these files you reserve not so many farmers but the State Agency for Forestry, they're protected area managers, yeah. But legislation, for example, in Serbia, everything is still centralized. So, if you, for example, want to do restoration, you agree with that public enterprise you can do that. But in Austria you have to negotiate with so many, so it's sometimes like every situation in life, some system has advantages and disadvantages. So, for example, sometimes in Serbia you can do something with the phone, really, and in Austria you will need three years to go through procedures. On the other hand, it's not ocracy, it's not, äh, respecting the rules, it's the momentum somehow. But I

think with continuity and transparency and communication or whatever you do, you have to really be honest with that and say, “OK this is the situation”. Because, for example, in Austria you have so many different legislations, not about TBR. So, if you're in the village and you have a household you can live that. In Serbia and Croatia could be your additional job because you will not have enough tourists for that because people are going to mountains or in Greece for a seaside or whatever. They don't, äh, still embrace nature tourism so much so there. But I think also exchange is good, because they could see like, ähm, different systems in five countries and use the best. So, I think it's also a good opportunity for them.

Interviewer (00:34:08): Thank you very much, then we have already reached the end of the interview. Thanks again for taking part!

Interview C

Interviewer (00:03:50): Thank you very much for taking part in my interview. It is an important part of my master's thesis, and I am very happy about everyone taking part. Then let's get started. First, with a few questions about you and your intention. Which region do you come from and to which stakeholder group do you feel you belong?

Interlocutor (00:05:02): OK. I'm working for Croatian Waters; this is the legal authority for water management in Croatia. I'm living and working in this small city in the north north-western part of Croatia. Äh, here is the directorate for, äh, Mura and Drava Rivers. So, I'm working in water management, but department for Mura and the upper Drava. At the moment I'm waiting for LIFE projects Drava LIFE and vice Drava LIFE there. They're still active, uh, the end of vice Drava LIFE will be, we will, äh, see, we will have some minor prolongation, because we have some restrictions when we can do the work and because of that we will maybe extend the project. But we will see. Äh, it will end in, I don't know, one year, I think. And Drava LIFE project is a little bit bigger project because it has six locations, six actions, äh, almost all stretches of the Drava in Croatia. Äh, it's all about restoration of all the side branches or on one location we have some initial channel, which will try to improve hydromorphological state and we will see how it will develop and we're also cooperating with Revital – you surely heard about that company – and also on Lifeline Project that we are working with your colleagues from both.

Interviewer (00:07:10): What was your intention to get involved in this interview?

Interlocutor (00:07:17): I'm, äh, a curious person and, uh, I also like to cooperate with the scientists and faculties. Also, in Croatia I have the relationship and cooperation with our faculty, the technical faculty, and this is the main reason. Because I like to get, äh, some networking in this space, and it will later be easier for me to get some information or to ask for some help. I'll give some help to anyone who is involved in, äh, whole basin of Drava River and I'm also at the moment a PhD student.

Interviewer (00:08:21): Then a little introduction, your personal experiences with the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, and communication. When, and in which situations - so you told a little bit about right now - and how often do you come in contact with the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:08:47): Äh, most of the time, uh, I'm in contact with different stakeholders. It's in the whole of these projects, we hold this duration of project we have many contacts with our partners as you know, there are very different partners from nature conservation, from public institutions, ministries. Also, it's for me really challenging and I think an important part of all to get into contact with stakeholders. So, as I have to say, humans which are not working for any company which is related with the fishermen for instance. All the people that are involved in some kind of base in all this river living and managed.

Interviewer (00:10:05): What is the importance of the biosphere reserve for you as a stakeholder group? For the Croatian Waters. What is your general attitude towards the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:10:21): As you heard, uh, a little bit a few minutes ago, I was talking that we are dealing with water management, but also, it's very important to get stick to the new kind of managing of rivers and to have some kind of interdisciplinary approach and cooperation with all the all the included stakeholders. And I think, äh, when we're dealing with some problems

with river regulations or river restoring of channels, side branches, it's very important to have one mind all these. You need to care about the species, about vegetation, about sediment, also hydrological parties are very important, but I think this is the main reason why I'm interested in all this process and especially Lifeline MDD. It was a great example of how you can cooperate and make some good steps toward the future.

Interviewer (00:11:53): And where do you see the advantages or disadvantages for yourself but also for the region in general?

Interlocutor (00:12:19): I think the negative part of all this is, that we all of this are some kind of actions and projects are the pioneer actions in Croatia, we don't have, äh, much experience on this kind of approach and this kind of management, so this is the hard task. And I think our publicity and our people are, from day to day, even more aware. They know what's going on. I think this part is very important to move on and, äh, to avoid and to solve some kinds of obstacles that we were dealing with in the past. And positive impacts are in many ways. Äh, you can, uh, you can get some money from EU funding, and you can make some projects that will have a great impact on full whole river ecosystem and the fact of hydromorphology and many more great examples. And I think it's a good way.

Interviewer (00:15:26): Let's talk briefly about management. What are the points of contact between you and the biosphere reserve, and are these points of contact right for you? Do you wish more contact or less?

Interlocutor (00:15:56): Äh, the moment I'm pleased with my contacts and relationship with the other stakeholders, because we're cooperating and we're dealing with some problems and we're even, äh, preparing the new starting projects, in which I'm associate partner and my institution and I think I'm at the moment very pleased.

Interviewer (00:16:32): And what function or role do you ascribe to yourself within the TBR MDD? How important are you as a stakeholder for the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:16:47): I think it's very important for, äh, some kind of institution like us to stick to the time. Because in the past 20 – 30 years, äh, it was mainly different approaches, mainly different kinds of managing for years. So, this is also a great impact from your Austrian and Slovenian colleagues, that they were in this process many years ago, 15 or 20, or maybe even more. So, this is the main reason why I think that we are some kind of example and indicator. When they start to act and start to set some good examples, then the other one will also follow it.

Interviewer (00:18:08): What are your goals or needs as a stakeholder? What scope of action do you have within the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:18:21): Äh, for me at the moment the goal could be, and I think it will be hard at the moment, but later I think it will naturally go also like it was with Croatian Waters, I think the hydro energy stakeholders also need to be a little bit more involved in all these projects, all these meetings, workshops, and so on. And then, when we reach it, it will be much easier to get some plans and strategies for the whole basin. At least in Croatia, and of course the main intention. And I think most the important, äh, part of all these projects, and especially this biosphere reserve is to connect and to act and manage with the whole basin. As you know, all five countries need to be in this process.

Interviewer (00:19:43): How do you think these stakeholders can be addressed so that they are more involved? I believe that they are often not so interested in nature conservation.

Interlocutor (00:20:06): Yes, hydro energy stakeholders are aware. Like I could tell you from my experience and my side because my Drava LIFE project we have some meeting with them and, äh, their director is aware of it but as you told the lack of interest, I think it's most correlated with their, äh, ... the situation right now is good for them, and I think the same situation is in Austria, for them it's firstly and most important part of their business is money. And this is the problem because of their lack of interest.

Interviewer (00:21:29): Consider the case of fishermen, for example. How do you think this group can be more involved? It often seems as if they are afraid that the protected area will mean that many things can no longer be done the way they used to be.

Interlocutor (00:22:09): It can also be on our side, but we have some problems with them when we had public hearings for the Drava LIFE project when we were in the environmental impact assessment procedure, and they were talking at these public hearings about their point of view and their problems, and they were thinking that we, äh, will take some good places for them, good points for fishing.

Interviewer (00:23:21): Do you think it is necessary to share more information in order to create awareness in this group?

Interlocutor (00:23:41): Yes, I think it's important, äh, to find some representative from their side or for each region, or for each stretch of river. And, äh, I think it can be an approachable and not so hard task, because all of us have some contacts and know some people who know some people.

Interviewer (00:24:47): How do you, as a stakeholder group, Croatian Waters, want to be addressed by the biosphere reserve? What would be useful there? Maybe something like newspapers, newsletters, meetings or other things.

Interlocutor (00:25:23): Media activity is very important and to have some, äh, good publicity, because they were in the past having some negative publicity for different reasons. And I think it's very important when you are dealing with this kind of project to communicate it to the publicity and public and also social media is very important. Even each of us, not only Croatian Waters, but in many companies, faculties, it's very important to act as an individual, to research some part of it, which is interesting to in which you can give some support or impact and this. This is a small step, but I think when you act, you can, with your action, give an example and goodwill for some other to call the same way of thinking and dealing.

Interviewer (00:27:22): And what challenges do you think the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve has to overcome? What do you think are the biggest challenges here?

Interlocutor (00:27:44): For us it was quite challenging when we were, äh, in the planning and designing part of the project. I'm right now talking from side of managing these projects, because, uh, it was very exhausting and long-term task to get all the necessary permits, also location permits, buildings, all the all the permits, especially from environmental side and nature. And that was in some kind of way a paradox, because we are trying to comment on some green solutions and green kinds of management, so it needs to be faster in other projects in the future. And I think we have addressed all these problems that we had with this project, and that was

the main problem for us, because we needed to extend the project two times. And right now, I think the project will end in 10 years and it's quite a long period. And the rest of problems are correlated with, we don't have some strategies or, yeah, strategy for complete basin, especially in Croatia. I think this is some kind of important part of tasks for the future to get involved with all the stakeholders, especially hydro energy.

Interviewer (00:31:49): Okay, thank you very much, then we've already reached the end of the interview. Thank you very much for your time!

Interview D

Interviewer (00:02:44): Thank you very much for taking part in my interview. First, I have a few general questions. To which stakeholder group do you feel you belong?

Interlocutor (00:02:57): Major protection, I would say.

Interviewer (00:03:01): What was your intention to get involved in this interview?

Interlocutor (00:03:09): Well, 10 years ago I was coordinating this expert study for a biosphere reserve. And we tried to do some stakeholder involvement at that time. It was not maybe as strong as it is now, so I thought just to give you some information.

Interviewer (00:03:35): This is very kind of you. Now I have a few questions for introduction. Your personal experience with the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve. When, in which situations, and how often do you come in contact with the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:03:59): Oh, well, this is, like, not the right question for me. I mean, I'm not working on this topic anymore. But I'm in the world, like last year that we had this and I was in the board meeting, so I was in the board so at least four times a year. And whenever I see something in newspapers I read and so on so maybe I don't know 10 times a year.

Interviewer (00:04:35): What is the importance of the biosphere reserve for you as a stakeholder group? What is your general attitude towards the biosphere reserve and why?

Interlocutor (00:04:42): Well, my general attitude is positive. For nature protection it's important. It gives a framework for management in the whole area. I mean it overlaps with Nature 2000 now and regional parks, but still, it's the only transboundary protected area and it has a name, so I think it's important for coordinated management in five countries.

Interviewer (00:05:27): Where do you see the advantages and disadvantages for yourself but also for the region in general? To what extent do you think the TBR MDD influences the region?

Interlocutor (00:05:40): Well, it has a big potential and how it influences the region, basically, the TBR gives framework for collaboration, maybe can support, like a brand, some tourist activities, and makes emphasis on the nature protection more sort of it's an argument why should we protect it in this area more, why something is important and so on.

Interviewer (00:06:45): Are the points of contact between you and the biosphere reserve right for you or would you like to be touched more, less, or not at all?

Interlocutor (00:07:34): I would like to be – as a private citizen, not maybe as an expert in major protection – I would like to be touched more. I think it should be more in the news.

Interviewer (00:07:52): Now a bit about networking. As a stakeholder are you networked with other stakeholders?

Interlocutor (00:08:02): Yes, I am. I'm in contact with people that I know for the area with the NGO's, and with the public institution for nature protection, and through the board I'm in touch actually with colleagues from other countries. So, I am in a network. I would say we try even now, even outside work, to support nature protection on the Drava River.

Interviewer (00:08:42): What function or role do you ascribe to yourself within the biosphere reserve?

Interlocutor (00:08:50): I would be a national stakeholder, I would say. Like on the national level I'm a stakeholder or citizen I mean interesting citizens or something like that.

Interviewer (00:09:04): And how important do you think you are as a stakeholder group for the protected area?

Interlocutor (00:09:12): How do we measure it? Like, I mean the center of the institution where I work is quite important, maybe not so important as public institutions that are really on the ground, so we are not safe, but we are quite important. So, I would say, I don't know, 8 of 10.

But I, as a person not really important, I'm interested though so I may be 2 or 3. I'm one of the three million stakeholders.

Interviewer (00:10:04): And why do you think your institution is important?

Interlocutor (00:10:13): We are the national nature protection institute, and we coordinate management and so on, so we are involved in a way. More on the, I would say more on this little bit, uh, I would say remote level, we make guidelines, so we are not as involved as the local stakeholders on the ground.

Interviewer (00:10:42): To what extent can you, as a stakeholder, influence the TBR MDD?

Interlocutor (00:10:49): We generally can, yes. Through the management guidelines, through procedures that we give opinion because we are expert institution, we are Institute for Environmental Nature Protection, we are like expert being, we don't issue decisions, but we make expert opinions. So, through our opinion, we can quite effectively influence the biosphere reserve for better or worse through the impact of assessment, the impact of some projects, evaluation of management plans, and evaluation of yearly programs of institutions. So, yeah, they can. But it's more, I would say top down like more abstract involvement or on this a little bit more general level.

Interviewer (00:11:52): What are your goals or your needs as a stakeholder?

Interlocutor (00:11:58): Well, my goal is to have a function in the biosphere reserve, to have protective nature and some sort of sustainable development at the same time.

Interviewer (00:12:25): Are there things that explicitly bother you about the TBR MDD?

Interlocutor (00:12:35): No, I would like it to be more prominent, I would say. I would like to see it more in the news, and I would like to see it used more as a brand of the area of this value in nature protection, and as a tool to get projects, and so on. Especially on the local level, and on the national level too.

Interviewer (00:13:09): Are there points regarding the biosphere reserve that you like very much?

Interlocutor (00:13:15): Well, I like the whole concept. I like that it is a part of the international network, so it is a UNESCO category, so it gives the higher, I would say, higher position to the area that is protecting it as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. And I like its potential because you can involve stakeholders and give people on the ground a sense of pride, so I like the whole concept.

Interviewer (00:13:49): To what extent do you think stakeholders should be more involved?

Interlocutor (00:13:58): Well, actually now we are making management plans. So, in that sense I think it's really done through the – how do you say – process of involvement this management plan for Natura 2000. But maybe just on the level of schools, ähm, then tourist offices, these are really not nature protection. I would say not outside the sector of nature protection, just more local institutions should use this biosphere reserve as something that takes their pride and maybe more on the positive level. Not just when something happens “oh this shouldn't happen here”, because it's a biosphere reserve but maybe there's some positive to all this is a biosphere reserve. I don't know. Come and visit it, we are proud of our nature and so on.

Interviewer (00:16:08): How would you as a stakeholder like to be addressed by the biosphere reserve? Like newspapers, newsletters, information boards, etc. What do you think would be useful here?

Interlocutor (00:16:27): Newspapers, TV, but also newsletters for schoolchildren, and materials for schoolchildren. Like, I don't know, news from the biosphere reserve, that would be sent through the schools, where they could see what's happening. Maybe it would be nice if we could have it in all five countries in five languages. And then I think if something like this were to be organized for school, it would be interesting, because the teacher always need material. So, it should be done really nice, really you know in a general journalistic style, but, uh, adjusted for children, so that it's really something that you can give to them. That there should be some like five country editorial that's a little bit, yeah, little bit creative editor.

Interviewer (00:17:37): And for you in general? For you as a stakeholder group, so your institution? How do you want to be addressed?

Interlocutor (00:17:52): I mean, it would be nice but it's a very theoretical possibility, if there was really some bulletin or some expert newsletter or something that would come maybe half a year or one year. That would have some submissions from the whole five countries. It's better than a website, it's better than Facebook, but for website you have to go for Facebook and there are not so many of these newsletters so it's something that, I don't know, that maybe would keep people informed.

Interviewer (00:19:15): That brings us to my last question. What challenge does the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve have to overcome?

Interlocutor (00:19:29): There are major protection challenges, and there are public relations, I would say. To implement this idea of biosphere reserve, that is, the biggest challenge for biosphere reserve where you have sustainable development, involvement of people and nature protection. That is a challenge of every biosphere reserve. And the other challenge here is that you have last more natural elements of biosphere reserve, and the less the development, then you have rich countries, and poor countries in the same biosphere reserve. So, you have to be reasonable actually that standards, in Austria you have less biodiversity, but be you have more resources, and standards in Croatia, Hungary or – I don't know – Serbia you have bigger part

of biosphere reserve, in Croatia and Hungary is the biggest part, you have more nature protection, and you have less resources. So, idea let's have strict protection in the core zone it's different in in Austria, when you have a small core zone in the forest then in Croatia where the core zone is the whole river Drava. So, you have to always think about how to, what's happening where. So, this international coordination is also a challenge.

Interviewer (00:21:25): And can the stakeholder be more involved in this?

Interlocutor (00:21:30): Yes. The second challenge is this public relation. We have to get to the stakeholders to – I don't know – to involve them in this biosphere reserve a daily basis. I mean I think the main stakeholders are actually the heads of these municipalities, not counties but these heads of local communities. There are not so many of them, but if you involve them, they find something positive in this nature protection, not just restrictions, something to show off. Then it's a big thing. I mean hunters, all these in they should be on board somehow. In spite of all the problems in spite that you'll always have somebody who does something wrong and none of these are ideal people, you know, it's like you have to just forget you take nature protection to the accept there is a hit, but that you still have to communicate with all the stakeholders you can get offended or I would say or the grudge.

Interviewer (00:22:57): I also believe that it is necessary to involve farmers more, as they cover a large proportion of the stakeholders and there is often a lot of potential for conflict here. If there is no good involvement here, it is certainly very difficult to reach a common consensus.

Interlocutor (00:23:24): It is because biosphere reserves have the potential that you can tell something positive to these farmers, but nobody goes to them. I mean, in Croatia it is the problem that these farmers, there are lots of very small farmers and elderly farmers, so, but still, yes, we have to. My idea was to go through these heads of municipalities and then down to farmers, to really local people.

Interviewer (00:25:58): I also think this idea makes sense. Well, that brings us to the end of the interview. Thank you very much for your time and the comprehensive information.

Interview E

Interviewer (00:04:02): Vielen Dank für die Teilnahme an meinem Interview. Es freut mich sehr, dass Sie sich dafür Zeit nehmen. Zuerst eine kurze Einleitung. Zu welcher Anspruchsgruppe würden Sie sich in Bezug auf den Biosphärenpark zählen?

Interlocutor (00:04:45): Auf alle Fälle Anspruchsgruppe Gewässer. Also das auf alle Fälle ja. Gewässer, Gewässerökologie, Naturschutz – im Prinzip alles, was mit einer wasserwirtschaftlichen Planung zu tun hat in dem Bereich. Und, ähm, nachdem der Biosphärenpark ja so aufgebaut ist in dem Bereich, zumindest in Österreich, das untere Murtal, ist das Gewässer die Mur, die Grenzmur, ja eigentlich eine Kernzone des gesamten Biosphärenparks und dann halt ein bisschen ausgeweitet die zwei anderen Zonen, die es noch gibt.

Interviewer (00:05:19): Was war Ihre Intention im Interview teilzunehmen? Also klar, ich habe angefragt, aber mir haben auch viele abgesagt. Deswegen interessiert mich die Intention zur Teilnahme am Interview sehr.

Interlocutor (00:05:33): Wenn mich jemand etwas fragt und ich dazu etwas sagen kann und irgendwie behilflich sein kann, tue ich das auf alle Fälle sehr gerne. Gerade junge Leute wie Sie, die eigentlich noch vor dem Beginn ihres Arbeitslebens stehen, gehören auf alle Fälle unterstützt und ja da bin ich immer gerne dabei.

Interviewer (00:05:59): Das ist sehr schön und freut mich. Gut, dann steigen wir mal ein bisschen in die Thematik ein.

Wann und in welchen Situationen kommen Sie in Kontakt mit dem Biosphärenpark?

Interlocutor (00:06:12): Mit dem Biosphärenpark komm ich dann in Kontakt, äh, wenn - spätestens dann immer - einmal im Jahr die Sitzung der Mur-Kommission stattfindet. Denn ich bin Mitglied dieser Kommission. Da ist auf alle Fälle immer Kontakt gefragt, weil ich dann auch immer alles zusammentragen muss. Informationen, ähm, wie der Stand ist, was gerade in dem Bereich gemacht wird. Bisher hatte ich hier im Rahmen von Hochwasserschutzprojekten zu tun. Ich war nämlich bis Ende letzten Jahres, also 2022 in der Schutzwasserwirtschaft tätig, wo ich dann eigentlich auch im Rahmen dessen zur Kommission dazugekommen bin und eben auch zu den EU-Projekten, die dort in diesem Gebiet durchgeführt wurden. Ja, äh, das sind so die Berührungspunkte und ich bin aufgrund dessen, dass wir eben bei diesem EU-Projekt mit dabei waren, auch in der Steuerungsgruppe für den Biosphärenpark mitgelandet. Obwohl es auch aus jedem Land, ich, ähm, glaube drei oder vier Vertreter gibt, die da immer mit dabei sind. Im Moment hat den Vorsitz das Land Ungarn. Das ist eine Steuerungsgruppe, die so auch versucht, sich einmal im Jahr zu treffen, beziehungsweise auch, wenn es neue Informationen gibt. Also jetzt, wo die Möglichkeit bestanden hat, dass man Projekte bei der UNESCO für einen Preis einreicht, da haben wir natürlich diese EU-Projekte, die da in diesem Gebiet waren, auch versucht einzureichen. Äh, wir sind aber, ich glaub Zweiter geworden, nicht Erster.

Interviewer (00:08:11): Immerhin, knapp dran. Okay, und was ist Ihre generelle Haltung beziehungsweise Einstellung gegenüber dem Biosphärenpark?

Interlocutor (00:08:22): Ich sehe das als eine großartige Idee, weil der Biosphärenpark die Möglichkeit schafft, so wie Sie es sagen, verschiedene Stakeholder zusammenzubringen und zu einem gemeinsamen Nenner zu führen. Gerade Flusssysteme oder Gewässerökologien sind sehr sensibel und reagieren auf alles sehr sensibel, aber natürlich soll so ein Biosphärenpark auch den Leuten dienen, und daher ist es natürlich wichtig, die zwei in Einklang miteinander zu bringen. Denn man muss natürlich Platz für die Tiere schaffen, für die für die Pflanzen, für

das Gewässer, also für die gesamte ökologische Vielfalt, und natürlich auch Platz für die Menschen, und es soll jeder seinen Bereich haben.

Interviewer (00:09:26): Gibt es spezielle Vor- beziehungsweise Nachteile? Wo denken Sie, dass es spezielle Vor- beziehungsweise Nachteile sowohl für die Region als auch für einzelne Stakeholdergruppen gibt?

Interlocutor (00:09:40): Also ich hoffe, dass es für alle nur Vorteile bringen kann. Das wäre natürlich das absolut Schönste. Ja, ich glaube auch, dass es möglich ist, für jeden einen Vorteil zu bringen, ja, genauso für die Ökologie wie auch für die Menschen. Das einzige, der einzige, ähm, Nachteil ist, dass vielleicht die Dinge etwas länger dauern, weil man eben natürlich viele Personen hat, die da mitsprechen, viele Ideen, die da mit einfließen sollen und viele Ideen, wo der andere auch einmal darüber nachdenken muss, äh, „aber was für Auswirkungen hat das dann auf meinem Bereich“ und dergleichen. Ja, also das auf alle Fälle, aber ich denk mal, dass es grundsätzlich sicher etwas Positives bringt für alle Beteiligten mit dem Bereich.

Interviewer (00:10:27): Am Anfang haben wir schon über den Kontakt gesprochen, also darüber, wann Sie in Berührung mit dem Biosphärenpark kommen. Ist dieser derzeitige Kontakt für Sie ausreichend oder würden Sie sich mehr Kontakt und Austausch wünschen?

Interlocutor (00:10:45): Ähm, ich denk mal, im Moment passt das gerade so, und ob das dann mehr wird oder nicht, das werden wir dann sehen. In Österreich ist es ja so, dass im Moment gerade der Geschäftsführer für den Biosphärenpark hier gefunden wurde, das war natürlich ein bisschen Prozess. Bis der sich jetzt eingelebt hat und einmal weiß, wo er steht und wo seine Dinge sind und seine Netzwerkpartner alle, das wird natürlich auch etwas Zeit in Anspruch nehmen, keine Frage. Man wird dann sehen, wie es dann weitergeht, mit verschiedenen Kontakten und dann eben auch zu den anderen vier Ländern, die noch mit an Bord sind.

Interviewer (00:11:29): Stehen Sie als Stakeholder im Austausch mit anderen Stakeholdern, beziehungsweise anderen Stakeholdergruppen?

Interlocutor (00:11:40): Ähm, im Moment nicht. Na also, wir sind im Moment vom Gewässer her natürlich immer wieder in Kontakt mit Naturschutz und mit Hochwasserschutzprojekten. Auch jetzt in der wasserwirtschaftlichen Planung, welche ich nach wie vor über die, äh. Mur-Kommission, die Grenzmur mitbetreue. Ich bin informiert über alle Projekte, die dort in dem Sinn laufen, und von daher hat man natürlich immer wieder inzwischen Kontakt, wo man dann auch wieder schauen muss, was im Biosphärenpark sozusagen alles einfließen kann. Also, wir haben einen Managementplan für die Grenzmur 2030, den haben wir auch über ein EU-Projekt erstellt, und da schauen wir immer, dass natürlich diese Unterlage oder diese Grundlage dann mit dem übereinstimmt, was auch andere Stakeholder dann in dem Bereich umsetzen möchten, und machen möchten, ja.

Interviewer (00:12:47): Was glauben Sie wie sehr Sie als Stakeholder den Biosphärenpark direkt beeinflussen können?

Interlocutor (00:12:57): Direkt beeinflussen auf alle Fälle über EU-Projekte, wobei ich da jetzt im Prinzip durch meinen Wechsel des Referates jetzt nicht mehr so eingebunden bin. Also der Antrag läuft gerade für ein anderes, fürs nächste große LIFE-Projekt, da bin ich für den Antrag sozusagen noch dabei gewesen, bei dieser Antragsphase. Ich werde natürlich, äh, sicher schauen, dass ich über die Steuerungsgruppe und über die Mur-Kommission sozusagen noch mit dabei bin bei diesem Projekt. Wo ich natürlich sicher draufschauen werde, dass ich, wie

schon vorher erwähnt, von diesem Managementplan, den wir für die Grenze haben, für unseren Bereich zumindest, für den österreichischen Teil schaue, dass das mit umgesetzt wird. Wir haben auch die Projekte, die für Österreich umgesetzt werden. Da war ich eben dabei, dass das ausgesucht wurde. Also, und daher habe ich so den Einfluss getätigt und gehabt, ja.

Interviewer (00:14:12): Und was sind die Ziele und Bedürfnisse für Sie als Stakeholder? Was für Ziele haben Sie, welche Bedürfnisse haben Sie gegenüber dem Schutzgebiet?

Interlocutor (00:14:42): Das Ziel ist natürlich, nachdem ich aus dem, ähm, Gewässerbereich komme, dem Gewässer viel Raum zu geben. Die Grenzmur war ja sehr mäandrierend dort in diesem Bereich und flottierend. Ja, das ist jetzt eben leider nicht mehr der Fall, sie hat einen sehr geradlinigen Verlauf, und eben auch in unserem Managementplan haben wir das, äh, drinnen, dass man wieder etwas versucht dem Fluss mehr Raum zu geben. Die Befestigung vor allem, die es an der Sohle gibt, an den Sohl-Wänden sozusagen, herauszunehmen, dass sie da wirklich ihren Bereich sich selbst Material auch nehmen kann. Wir haben ja auch das Problem mit der Eintiefung an der Grenzmur in dem Bereich und alle Projekte, die wir jetzt in den letzten Jahren hatten, zielen eigentlich darauf hin, dass wir auch einen Sedimentausgleich mit den Projekten erzielen können. Ja und eben gleichzeitig dem Fluss mehr Raum bieten kann. Das bringt natürlich wieder Vorteile für den Naturschutz und für alle Tiere, die dort in dem Bereich tätig sind und unterwegs sind. Ähm, wobei man sicher auch aufpassen muss, weil wenn man dem Fluss mehr Raum gibt, dann muss man schauen, dass er trotzdem eine sogenannte Niederwasserrinne auf alle Fälle hat, einen Bereich sozusagen, in dem auch die größeren Fische dann wandern können. Wir haben ja doch auch größere Exemplare dort in dem Bereich, die auch in die Obersteiermark möchten. Da müssen wir eben auf das dann achten.

Interviewer (00:16:03): Und in welchem Umfang sollten sowohl Sie als Stakeholder als auch andere Stakeholdergruppen Ihrer Meinung nach in das Schutzgebiet integriert werden?

Interlocutor (00:16:20): Wenn das so ein großes Projekt und ein großes Vorhaben ist, dann besteht natürlich immer die Gefahr, dass man einen Stakeholder mal vergisst. Wenn wir jetzt irgendein bestimmtes Projekt umsetzen möchten, das heißt, wenn man mit dem Projekt startet, also mit einer Umsetzung gerne starten möchte, dann sollte man nochmal als Erstes, glaub ich, alle Stakeholder immer informieren und sozusagen auch die Möglichkeit bieten, ähm, auch ihre Meinung kundzutun. Ob man es dann in den detaillierten weiteren Planungsbereich noch mit integriert das hängt eben damit zusammen, denke ich, ob der jetzt kundgetan hat, dass er da jetzt mitarbeiten möchte oder nicht. Aber ich glaube grundsätzlich sollten wir zuerst einmal sicher immer alle informieren, was gerade läuft, und dann gibt es natürlich sicher immer wieder kleinere Gruppen, die dann jetzt detaillierter reingehen. Das wäre meiner Meinung nach ein guter Weg für das.

Interviewer (00:17:43): Was glauben Sie, was für eine Art des Ansprechens wäre dafür geeignet, sowohl für Sie als auch für andere? Also in welcher Form das stattfinden sollte?

Interlocutor (00:18:01): Dieses Ansprechen, also diese Informationen, das kann man sich eigentlich auch fast wie einen Newsletter vorstellen denk ich mal. Also das kann ruhig über E-Mail oder über so Plattformen sein. Bei Plattformen ist das dann halt immer so, da kommen dann vielleicht auch andere, wo die Gruppe dann noch größer wird. Das ist die Frage, ob man das dann nicht im Rahmen eines Projekts selbst macht, wo man dann noch andere Beteiligungen sozusagen hereinholt. Ich denk mir so: Die Stakeholder, die grundsätzlich mit an Bord sind, im Moment schon mit an Bord sind, die könnten ja über einen Newsletter mal informiert werden grundsätzlich über das, was gerade läuft. Viel Aufwand.

Interviewer (00:18:58): Was glauben Sie sind die größten Hürden, die das Schutzgebiet zu überwinden hat? Inwiefern können Stakeholder da mitwirken?

Interlocutor (00:19:14): Energiewirtschaft ist bestimmt ein Thema. Nicht nur auf österreichischer Seite, sondern sicher auch auf slowenischer und weitergehend. Da haben wir in unserem Gesetz sozusagen vom Biosphärenpark zumindest drinnen, dass es energiewirtschaftlich jetzt nicht genutzt werden soll. Ändert aber nix daran, dass es vielleicht auch gerade an der Grenze oder bissl außerhalb von diesem Gebiet dann zu solchen, äh, Projekten oder Umsetzungen kommen kann. Da ist halt auf alle Fälle auch jetzt im Moment der Druck sehr hoch. Wasserkraftenergie oder Windenergie oder Solarenergie – das sind nämlich die Energiearten, die im Moment forciert werden und sehr stark gefördert werden. Was gibt's noch für Probleme? Probleme sind sicher auch siedlungspolitisch, also es gibt sicher auch Stellen, wo der Druck von Siedlungen auf die Gewässer sehr groß ist. Ich habe das von einem ... ich glaube es war die ungarischen Kollegen, oder waren es die kroatischen? Ich weiß es jetzt nicht mehr ganz genau, aber die haben eben erzählt, dass jetzt gerade direkt am Fluss ein Riesenprojekt der Gemeinde geplant wird, so eine Art Veranstaltungszentrum/Gemeindezentrum. Und das sind dann halt so Dinge. Also da ist der Druck sicher auch da. Ich glaube das sind also die Hauptpunkte.

Interviewer (00:21:05): Und wie könnten diese Themen mithilfe von Stakeholdern angegangen werden? Wie kann man Stakeholder mehr in solche Herausforderungen involvieren?

Interlocutor (00:21:25): Auf alle Fälle ist es sicher gut, wenn man einen Austausch hat zwischen den verschiedenen Stakeholdern und auch zwischen den verschiedenen Ländern. Also es gibt ja auch gleiche Stakeholder in verschiedenen Ländern und da ist es nicht so schlecht, wenn die sich miteinander austauschen können, weil der eine vielleicht dieses und jenes schon gehabt hat und auch wenn, äh, die Gesetze jetzt nicht immer die gleichen sind, so kann doch eine gewisse Vorgangsweise immer bissl hergeleitet werden und da ist ein Austausch, ein fachlicher Austausch sicher nicht schlecht, wie man mit solchen Problematiken dann umgehen kann und wie man so etwas vielleicht dann auch auf nationaler Ebene daneben lösen kann. Also so wie wir in unserem Bereich jetzt im Biosphärenpark Gesetz drinstehen haben, dass Energiewirtschaft jetzt in dem Abschnitt nicht erlaubt ist, oder nicht gestattet ist, kann das ein anderes Land dann sicher auch dementsprechend vielleicht beschließen, wenn es nicht eh schon beschlossen ist. Ja, und so denke ich mir, dass wir eben durch diese Zusammenarbeit unter den Stakeholdern untereinander auch solche Dinge fördern können, dass man da Lösungen findet dafür.

Interviewer (00:22:48): Okay, dann wären wir bereits am Ende unseres Interviews angelangt. Vielen Dank für die zahlreichen Informationen und Ihre Zeit. Es hat mich sehr gefreut mit Ihnen über dieses Thema zu sprechen.