

Nature Conservation for Local Community: Sustainable Tourism Planning

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Introduction

Two Sustainable Tourism Management Plans (STMPs) were developed within the framework of the “SEA-Med project: Development of Sustainable Economic Activities in Marine Protected Areas”. STMPs are strategic documents for nature conservation and tourism sectors. They were initiated and developed by the nature conservation sector, although tourism sector was included in its development. One STMP was developed for Lastovo Archipelago Nature Park (Marine Protected Area (MPA)), which administratively covers the same territory as Lastovo Municipality. Lastovo is one of the most remote inhabited islands and located in southern Adriatic. The other STMP was developed for whole Dugi Otok, which Telascica Nature Park (MPA) is part of. Dugi Otok is located at the border between northern and central Adriatic.

Stakeholder engagement and planning process

STMPs have been developed from spring 2014 until end of 2015, by engaging all relevant stakeholders during its development (nature conservation sector, tourism boards, tourism agencies, accommodation service providers, divers, local farmers, NGOs, etc.). 219 stakeholders from 21 institutions, 8 NGOs and 27 private businesses were engaged during the management planning process. Croatian Agency for the Environment and Nature reviewed the STMPs and provided its input from the point of view of nature conservation. The Croatian Institute for Tourism has been engaged in the process as well, in order to ensure best practice from the tourism sector. The process for the development of the STMPs included capacity building of project team, stakeholder workshops, internal workshops, capacity building of MPA staff, study visits, establishment of Advisory Boards in each MPA, and public presentation of the STMPs with presentation of local products.

Capacity of the project team was built through 3 regional training workshops that dealt with: STMP development process and specific objectives; resource analysis with the goal of addressing negative impacts and defining activities; and consolidation of the plan, best practice examples, introduction into the marketing and communication of the MPAs. There were 3 stakeholder workshops in each MPA (6 in total) and they covered the following areas: SWOT analysis of sustainable tourism, elements of the vision and analysis of touristic activities; detailed development of the STMP activities; zoning of tourism, identification of thematic routes and de-

velopment of the Sustainable Tourism Guidebook for Dugi Otok and development of one educational trail on Lastovo. There were 5 internal workshops on Telascica and 4 internal workshops on Lastovo Archipelago. They were done before and after stakeholder workshops and included preparation for and evaluation of stakeholder workshops, as well as detailed development of specific parts of the plan.

Capacity of MPA staff was built through training workshop for the development of communication strategy (and subsequent internal workshops in each MPA), communications training and marketing training. Two study visits were organized during the process of STMP development – one national in order to showcase a protected area (PA) that has been having an advisory board for 10 years; and the other international in order to show best practice in cooperation between the public and the private sectors (or PAs and local producers and service providers) in the PA management. Advisory Boards of each MPA were established and these boards adopted the STMPs. Although not obligatory, public hearing was organized and after incorporating all comments from stakeholders, STMPs were publicly presented. These public presentations included presentation of the local products from family agriculture productions from Lastovo and Dugi Otok and guest performances of local a cappella groups.

The process was accompanied by the knowledge transfer to the SEA-Med Field Project in Albania (where STMP for Karaburun-Sazani Marine National Park has been developed) and experience-sharing with nature conservation sector in Croatia (presentation at the Annual Conservation Service Meeting) and Mediterranean MPA managers (MedPAN Regional Experience-Sharing Workshop). STMPs were used as best practice examples in the training seminar “Community Outreach and Participatory Protected area Management”.

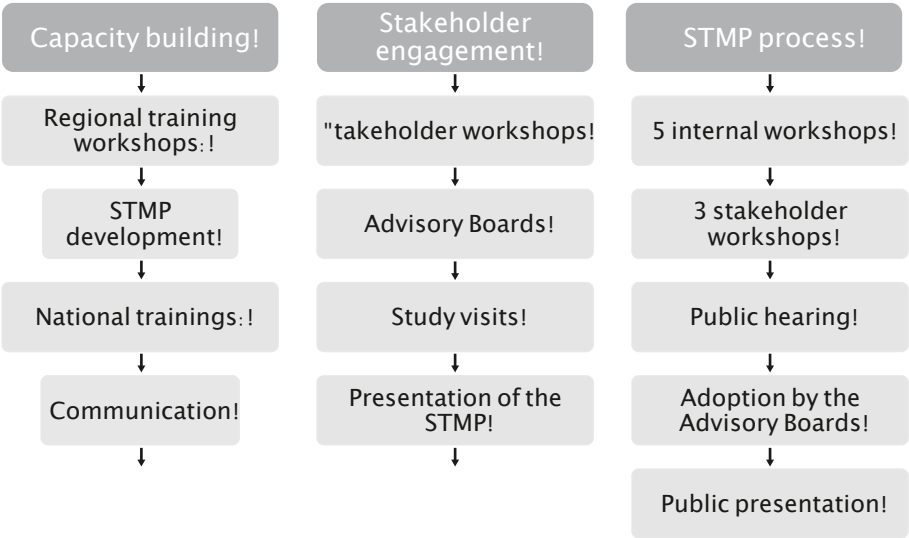


Figure 1. Elements of the process for the development of sustainable tourism management plans in Croatia

Structure and content of the plans

Structure of the plan follows the typical structure of the strategic documents: introduction and context, vision, objectives, activities, financing, monitoring and evaluation. Introduction encompasses general information on the STMP, implementation partners, regulatory and strategic framework, market analysis and tourism trends, tourism resource base and offer, and island as sustainable tourism destination. Planning part of the STMP includes objectives and indicators for achieving objectives, activities and implementation indicators, priorities, sustainability elements, time-frame, and partnerships (lead and partners).

During the three stakeholder workshops current state was analyzed, vision, objectives and activities of the STMPs were defined, as well as priorities and implementation partners. Special attention was given to sustainability of each activity, such as impact on natural and cultural values, income staying within the local community and impact on visitor satisfaction. Also, specific activities from the plans that will be implemented within the SEA-Med Project were jointly selected and planned in detail.

The islands are looked upon as unique destinations and the plans encompass tourism programs and offer, visitation system, quality of the destination, education and awareness raising, visitor infrastructure, contribution to setting up of the waste and wastewater management systems, and improved cooperation among all stakeholders. The focus of the STMPs stayed on MPAs, but with the view of MPAs being development drivers of the whole island.

Conclusions

Participatory approach is challenging and complex but it is the only approach that ensures ownership among actors and implementation of the plan. The planning process enabled improved cooperation between nature conservation and tourism sectors. The STMPs can be used as local tourism development plans. Although the plans were developed for the local level, the same approach could be applied for regional and national strategic planning processes. The process for the development of the STMPs could be used as best practice example for stakeholder engagement at the local level. In addition, adoption of STMPs laid the ground and enabled the development of project proposals related to sustainable tourism (including projects at the Mediterranean level).



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