



Project Name: „Nature Conservation and Tourism“ Strategies for Interpretation and Communication in Tourism for the Low Tatra National Park/Slovakia

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Outline Communication Strategy of the Low Tatra National Park

1. INTRODUCTION

This *Outline communication strategy* is elaborated as an output of the project *Nature Conservation and Tourism - Strategies for Interpretation and Communication in Tourism for the Low Tatra National Park, Slovakia*. The project has been implemented by Ecological Tourism in Europe (Germany), Ekopolis Foundation and Low Tatras National Park administration (NAPANT) (both Slovakian) in 2006-2007. The project is supported by the German foundation Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt.

The purpose of the *Outline Communication Strategy* is to use the results of the first and second phase of the project to outline further suitable directions of the NAPANT's communication development. The strategy is principally based on the output of the first phase, thus the Communication and Interpretation Manual, and uses results and recommendations of the second phase outputs, mainly recommendations of a tourism analysis of four selected sites in the region. Further, a lot of other background documents and information as well as practical knowledge have been used.

Therefore this document, resulting from the project outcomes and expert judgments, has two intentions:

- Enhance and foster the at the time being provisional communication of nature conservation stakeholders with the local population within the existing framework;
- Develop further the communication strategy to improve communication results.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENT STATUS

Communication with the public

Communication with the public is not a priority of NAPANT (as well as its superordinate agency SOP SR) as capacity for this task hasn't been provided by NAPANT's administration. It is realised mainly incidentally by employees giving their contributions to the media (mainly TV and print media) in areas they are experts in. But the public communication is not based on a well-elaborated concept or a long-term strategy.

From time to time the national park administration publishes information leaflets, mainly about the national park and individual sites, e.g. Natura 2000 sites. The editing is quite regularly; depending on the funds is available from the SOP budget and projects. Press releases are published irregularly and without any strategy (5 – 7 times per year).

The web page of the NP in general is quite comprehensive whereas the design has to be improved. The communication towards children is rather good. There are two staff members designated for environmental education which includes communication aspects. However, they are strongly focused on pupils of elementary schools.

For the rangers, a basic set of standards for communicating with the public has been elaborated, but it defines mainly formal aspects like behaviour and conflict solving but no goals or contents of communication. In general the rangers respect these standards.

Communication with stakeholders

Though communication with stakeholders is also not defined in any strategy or concept, it is better developed than the communication with the broader public. Meetings and negotiations with stakeholders (land owners, municipalities, developers, etc.) take place frequently and all parties know that they should communicate with each other if they want to safeguard their interests. For the mainly informal communication with stakeholders (primarily mayors) the rangers are responsible in their respective „districts“. A yearbook has been published annually and is delivered to all relevant stakeholders.

Communication with the visitors of the protected areas (mainly hikers) is realised also by rangers and through information boards, leaflets and other information material and in the visitor centres, though focused activities do not take place often. Good experience has been made in communication with ski-alpinists in the framework of several working meetings where open and fair discussions about impacts and rules have been conducted.

3. SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT OF NAPANT

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good expert level of NP staff and its commitment to the nature protection; • Some contacts on media created; • NP administration realizes lack of communication and need of improvement; • NP administration keeps standard relations with stakeholders (they are not in direct conflict) • Three busy roads (one of EU importance) crossing/touching NP; • Several busy recreation/ski resorts are located in NP; 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No position in NP administration is designated for communication (neither spokesman nor communication manager); • General lack of skills in communication and of knowledge of the communication work's principles; • Prevailing opinion of conservationists that modern and creative communication (and marketing communication) is not suitable to be used regarding nature protection; • No communication strategy/concept of NP administration; • Strong dependence on funding; • Existing communication is not understandable and/or attractive for the broader public;
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NP administration is located in the regional centre Banska Bystrica where regional branches of important media are located; • Increasing general awareness of the importance of communication; • Availability of EU structural funds; • Nature protection attracts media and journalists if connected with some conflicts (development of ski-resort, logging, bears, etc.); 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low awareness of the superordinate SOP SR and the Ministry of Environment of the importance of communication in the nature protection (therefore low priority and lack of money); • Very restrictive rules of SOP SR regarding communication of subordinated protected areas administration (they are not allowed to communicate critical affairs, etc.); • Strong influence of politicians and political parties on issues of environmental protection (including nature protection) management; • No effective communication strategy/concept of SOP SR and MoE existing; • System of conservation compensation payments doesn't work efficiently mainly in case of forest owners, therefore they are embittered and not willing to communicate;

4. VISION

The Low Tatras National Park is the national park in Slovakia with the best communication performance, using communication with both public and stakeholders as effective means of nature conservation.

5. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal I To create sufficient capacity for NAPANT's communication

Objective I.I To create suitable conditions for a regular and proper communication of NAPANT

Objective I.II To improve communication skills of NAPANT's staff

Goal II To improve NAPANT's communication with the general public

Objective II.I To increase the general awareness of NAPANT and its branding and to improve its image and reputation among the general public

Objective II.II To enhance NAPANT's presence in the mass media

Objective II.III To improve NAPANT's web page

Goal III To improve NAPANT's communication with stakeholders

Objective III.I To increase the image and reputation of NAPANT among stakeholders

Objective III.II To improve the relationship of NAPANT with stakeholders

6. MEASURES

Goal I To create sufficient capacity for the NAPANT's communication

Objective I.I To create suitable conditions for a regular and proper communication of NAPANT

NAPANT's administration has no capacity for communication and public relations assigned. Necessary activities are carried by staff members such as experts and rangers who do not have adequate communication skills. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate a suitable structure, which allows developing and maintaining proper and regular communication of the park with both, general public and stakeholders.

Measure 1:

Elaborating of a comprehensive communication strategy

As it was indicated above this document is called *Outline Communication Strategy* and serves as an instrument to identify the directions of communication development of NAPANT. A comprehensive

communication strategy should be elaborated as soon as possible, depending on the available funds. Mainly it should contain the already identified global goals of NAPANT's communication as well as detailed steps and activities to achieve those goals. Further it should also include a communication plan (timeframe for communication activities), a financial plan and a monitoring plan.

The strategy should be elaborated by an external agency in close cooperation with NAPANT's administration, particularly its PR manager (see below).

It would be optimal if the comprehensive communication strategy of NAPANT would be based on and be compatible with the overall ŠOP SR communication strategy. Unfortunately the elaboration of such a strategy and its implementation are not to be expected in close future, due to the underestimation of the importance of communication and public relations for nature protection within the superordinate nature protection agencies in Slovakia. Therefore, NAPANT's communication strategy may be elaborated independently.

Measure 2:

To employ a PR manager and create adequate working conditions

Main tasks for the PR manager will be:

- a) Public relations (monitoring of issues related to NAPANT, organising events, maintenance of the web page, carrying out communication towards public, coordinating campaigns, etc.);
- b) Media relations (media plan, media list, personal contacts with journalist, press releases, press monitoring, press trips, press conferences, meetings with journalists and editors, preparation of documents for journalists, etc.);
- c) Communication with stakeholders (monitoring of issues related to stakeholders, list of stakeholders, maintenance of good relations with stakeholders, etc.);
- d) Management of issue-related communication and crisis communication.

Necessary working conditions:

- a) Efficient system of NAPANT's internal communication;
- b) Room and equipment (notebook + software, printer, mobile phone, several modes of the internet access, digital camera);
- c) General outdoor equipment;
- d) Flexible working times;
- e) Possibility to travel within NAPANT (sharing of company car).

Measure 3:

To hire a communication agency on a long-term basis

Though the employment of a PR manager is inevitable, he/she is not able to carry out the complete communication of NAPANT. An external agency should be hired to design and carry out more complex activities, like campaigns, development of a corporate design, production of PR material etc. Such an agency may also help and assist in topics for which the PR manager is not skilled enough.

Basic criteria for an agency selection:

- a) List of references (to be verified personally by PR manager);
- b) General approach of the agency to the topics of sustainable development;

- c) Operational mode and flexibility;
- d) Moderate pricing.

Measure 4:

To develop a corporate identity of NAPANT

As far as a general communication strategy (including a common corporate design) for national parks in Slovakia is not designed yet (and will probably not be developed in the nearer future), it seems to be efficient to design at least a basic corporate identity for NAPANT itself. Elements of such a corporate identity would be:

- a) Slogan (a logo does exist already, no need to change it);
- b) Publication materials (leaflets, annual book, booklets, maps, posters, etc.);
- c) Promotion giveaways;
- d) Business cards;
- e) Information and interpretation panels, identification of protected areas and of NAPANT's property;
- f) Web page

Objective I.II To improve the communication skills of NAPANT's staff

Measure 1:

To organise trainings on communication skills for NAPANT's staff

All staff members that get into contact with media, stakeholders or public, mainly directors, experts and rangers, should participate in these trainings.

The topics of the training should be focused on the improvement of:

- Self-presentation in front of mass media (including handling with microphone and camera), preparation of interviews and statements, delivery of materials for press releases, deliver speeches, etc.
- Meeting with public, conflict solving, working with children, leading the volunteers, negotiation capacities, polite appearance, assertiveness, etc.

Goal II To improve NAPANT's communication with the general public

Objective II.I To increase the general awareness of NAPANT and its branding and to improve its image and reputation among the general public

Measure 1

To enhance the perception of visitors and general public in order to increase NAPANT's branding and reputation

Selected sub-measures are:

- a) Information and directing panels on main roads crossing and/ or touching NAPANT territories (mainly E77 through Donovaly, road 72 through Certovica, road through Vernar, highway D1 and road E50 through Liptov region, road 66 through Horehronie region).
- b) Signage/guidance system for car and cycle transportation from main roads to selected sites and resorts (to Demanovska valley, to Bystra valley, to Janska valley etc.);
- c) NAPANT's labeling of orientation and parking systems in selected sites (Demanovska valley, Bystra valley – Trangoska, Certovica pass, Donovaly pass, etc.);
- d) Information system of outdoor and indoor panels, maps and expositions in selected recreation centres (Demanovka valley, Bystra valley, City of Liptovsky Mikulas, Donovaly pass, Certovica pass, etc.);
- e) Labeling and maintenance of the marked hiking- and cycle-trails in NAPANT territories and in its close vicinity;
- f) Labeling of selected facilities, particularly accommodation sites, camps, shelters and huts, shops, selected post-offices, etc.
- g) Ad-hoc posters and banners located in suitable places (permanent or occasionally);
- h) Distribution of several advertising giveaways e.g. pens, t-shirts, caps, umbrellas, bags, etc.

Measure 2

To build up an information and interpretation system for NAPANT and its natural and cultural values

Selected sub-measures are:

- a) Set up of an unified information point system at strategically important and frequented sites
- b) Set up of at least 10 interpretative trails focused on the natural and cultural heritage, NAPANT's landscape and the positive coexistence of man and nature;
- c) Marking of all Natura 2000 sites with interpretation panels in order to inform visitors about the fact that they are entering a Natura 2000 site, its natural assets and the meaning of the Natura 2000 designation;
- d) Improvement of existing and development of new visitor centres (five in total – Banska Bystrica, Bystra Dolina, Demanovska Dolina, Liptovsky Hradok, Donovaly)

- e) Establishment of a number of information points at frequently visited sites such as tourist information centres, village shops, post offices, municipal offices, etc.
- f) Development of modern channels for the dissemination of information about NAPANT and its natural and cultural values, using multimedia (film, CD/DVD, electronic presentations, etc.)

Measure 3

To publish printed material about NAPANT

Print products are still an inevitable part of communication. Therefore a set of printed material will be published and distributed, e.g.:

- A main leaflet about NAPANT and a set of leaflets about the most important sites of the park and important topics;
- Guidebooks and field-guides helping visitors to admire and understand the natural heritage and its protection;
- Indoor and outdoor posters of NAPANT.

Measure 4

To produce advertisement giveaways

Objective II.II To enhance NAPANT's presence in the mass media

There are no doubts about the purpose of this objective: mass media are opinion- and even policy-makers; therefore the ability of NAPANT to be visible in mass-media (mainly in positive or neutral way) is crucial.

Measure 1

To organise meetings and trips with journalists

It is important to cultivate personal relations with journalists. Media should know a contact person within NAPANT's staff they can contact personally whenever necessary.

Regular informal meetings and trips to interesting areas of NAPANT (wilderness areas, hot-spots of tourism impacts, etc.) for the journalists will be organised and journalists will be invited to events organised by NAPANT (opening ceremonies, ranger days, etc.).

Measure 2

To launch regular press releases

Systematic information is a crucial aspect of working together with the mass media. NAPANT will launch regular press releases regarding the actual situation, management measures, events, etc. whenever possible and suitable. Also datasheets about NAPANT will be published.

Objective II.III To improve NAPANT's web page

Measure 1

To improve NAPANT's web page

The web page www.napant.sk is comprehensive and its content well-elaborated. On the other hand the design and structure doesn't allow using the full internet potential for communication and it requires much capacity to maintain. To improve the communication and informative function of the page, it needs a new design and structure. The page will be programmed using a content management system software and advanced functions and features may be used, e.g. optimisation for search engines, distributing of electronic newsletters, GIS viewer and interactive maps, GPS database, content marketing (AdWords, E-target, etc.).

Goal III To improve NAPANT's communication with stakeholders

Measures described in Goals I. and II. contribute also to Goal III. However, specific measures will strengthen the realisation of this goal.

Objective III.I To increase the image and reputation of NAPANT among stakeholders

Measure 1

To publish a NAPANT magazine

A magazine is a good medium for image- and opinion making. Therefore, the magazine should fulfil two aspects: interesting content (attractive for stakeholders) and a very representative form. The magazine will be published quarterly and contain information on the natural and cultural heritage, nature conservation management, events, projects and programmes etc.

Measure 2

Events – open house and ranger days

The events will be organised in order to show the stakeholders work and activities of NAPANT's administration. Besides traditional events for children and pupils also other groups will be targeted e.g. hikers, alpinists, forest owners, etc.

Objective III.II To improve the relationship of NAPANT with stakeholders

Measure 1

To establish stakeholder groups meeting regularly

Regular stakeholder meetings with the NAPANT administration in form of consultation boards will be established. All stakeholder groups are represented in this board, including municipalities, forest owners, small and big tourism businesses, entrepreneurs' associations, hunters, fishermen, hikers, outdoor sports clubs, civic society, etc.

Two boards are recommended – one for the Northern area (the Liptov region) and one for the Southern area (the Upper Hron region) in order to make them more flexible and more focused.

The goal of the stakeholder boards is to establish regular communication, information and opinion exchange and to maintain a mutual consultation process.

Measure 2

Annual book.

The annual book summarises all necessary information regarding the national park for one year. It contains information about the park and its administration, describes achievements, improvements of the natural environment, projects and their results in the given year, lists decisions and statements and many more features.

The communication goal of the annual book is to keep stakeholders informed and to confirm the park administrations interest to do so. The annual book is already published regularly by NAPANT and should be realised also the upcoming years.

Measure 3

Electronic newsletter

The newsletter will provide regular information to stakeholders. It will be delivered monthly based upon a receivers' agreement.

Measure 4

Workshops and consultations fora

The NAPANT administration will organise workshops and consultations fora, focused on specific topics. The goal is to show interest in communication and information and to get the opinion of stakeholders and consultancy regarding specific topics. Meetings should be organised and facilitated by a third party (to avoid prejudices). In close future workshops should be organised regarding the new management plan.

Measure 5

Monothematic leaflets

Monothematic leaflets focused on specific topics will be published. Planned topics are:

- How to get a development approval in protected areas (re-print);
- The NAPANT Visitors Order (in popular way, for hikers, bikers, alpinists, etc.);

- Riding in NAPANT (for cross-motorbikes, ATV, off-road and snowmobile riders);
- Sustainable forest management;
- What is the NAPANT management plan?

6. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

Funding

The main aspect concerning the implementation of the *Outline Communication Strategy* is funding. The NAPANT administration understands the necessity of this strategy and is willing to implement it. However, there is no capacity and no reasonable funds left to ensure the implementation of all measures at this moment. Therefore, NAPANT will start to implement a selected set of measures which will be financed within the framework of the project supported by DBU and several projects funded by EU structural funds.

Internal conditions of the ŠOP SR

The communication of NAPANT is regulated by internal directives of the ŠOP SR, which NAPANT is part of. These directives concern mainly the communication with mass media. For the time being, any media communication of any employee of the ŠOP SR (except directors) is prohibited unless he/she will get authorization from the ŠOP SR director. The purpose of this directive is to prevent the dissemination of information regarding the restructuring of the ŠOP SR and the current approaches of ŠOP SR (and the Ministry of Environment) to nature protection in Slovakia. This policy is connected with the general crisis of nature and biodiversity protection managed by Slovak public authorities.

This regulation touches also NAPANT's administration, therefore it makes no sense to plan any media communication in the near future. We expect that the situation regarding media communication may improve within 6-9 months. Regular media communication may be launched then.

The situation regarding other forms of communication is much better. Measures in this field are applicable immediately as interpretation, labeling, internet, stakeholder communication, production of promotion materials and giveaways, etc. is not restricted through SOP regulations.

Outlook:

NAPANT will begin to implement the proposed measures of the *Outline Communication Strategy* immediately (except media communication) using available funds. At the same time it will start to raise funds for elaborating the comprehensive communication strategy with the aim to implement it continuously on an appropriate level within the next years (including media communication).

7. MONITORING

Though this is just an outline communication strategy which is temporary, monitoring of its implementation is necessary. The results of the monitoring will be used mainly for operative decision about forms and ways of communication.

There will be specific monitoring methods for each of the communication measures:

- Media communication will be monitored by collecting of all references and quotations of NAPANT and its staff in all media. This will be done both by NAPANT staff itself and an external monitoring agency. Vary basic evaluation is possible: dependence of references of NAPANT on related communication activities, on the target groups, on topics, etc.
- Web page's efficiency will be evaluated by standard evaluation services (search engine analysis, etc.). One person of the NAPANT staff will be trained for on-line marketing evaluation (as a part time job).
- Efficiency of the outdoor and indoor promotion will be monitored by rangers who will record the audience rate of individual communication means (panels, signs, banners, interpretation trails, etc.).