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## PRESS RELEASE

### Towards defining criteria for effective management of World Heritage beech forests

Just before the COVID-19 developments in Europe took a turn for the worse, the Centre for Econics and Ecosystem Management at Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development organized a BEECH POWER workshop in Eberswalde. Its aim was to define a structure and related criteria for a standardized approach that would assist managers of component parts of the UNESCO Beech forest World Heritage property. All seven project partners, as well as further practitioners and experts from nine countries attended the workshop, including the associated partners Schorfheide Chorin Biosphere Reserve, Germany, the Slovenian Ministry for the Environment and Spatial Planning, the European Beech Forest Network, and the Coordination Office of the World Heritage property. An important task for the BEECH POWER project is to develop a tool for managers of protected areas that encompass component parts of the World Heritage property. With this tool, managers would evaluate the effectiveness and quality of their management regarding the conservation of the beech forest ecosystems. As a result, the tool would provide managers the opportunity to identify gaps and offer guidance to enhance the management quality. To make this rather abstract concept more understandable and clear, the participants discussed with each other how such a tool should look like, to be both viable and effective.

#### A common code of best practice

It was agreed that the partners will focus on the development of a so-called ‘Common code of best practice for World Heritage beech forest management’. This code would be a document for managers, that stimulates adaptive learning and reflection. It will be based on solid scientific principles, as well as existing and potential best practices of successful beech forest management from various locations across Europe. Hereby, it will provide a check-list that managers use to identify their own strengths, as well as existing gaps and how to close them.

The code will comprise eight principles with corresponding criteria and indicators, covering different spatial and crosscutting dimensions. To maximize its effectiveness, the code will integrate and align with existing official frameworks that apply to the UNESCO World Heritage property, such as the The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention and IUCN recommendations. The code will have a complementary character by addressing the management quality. Applying an ecosystem-based approach, this code will help to reduce ambiguity and room for interpretation across the different countries sharing the World Heritage property.

#### Next steps

The code is to assist managers and should be used to provide leverage for improving their work, and for increasing resources and support from authorities and political levels. Through close collaboration with the Coordination Office, BEECH POWER aims at



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an official recognition by the Joint Management Committee as a guidance document for all component parts of the World Heritage property.

The next steps include further development of the content for all eight principles. The results of working group meetings that took place during the workshop will be used as a basis, providing both scientific and operational expertise. A follow-up workshop to further develop the indicators of the common code of best practice is planned in Kalkalpen National Park in June 2020. Depending on the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, this workshop is likely to be implemented in the form of an online meeting. Visit our [Youtube channel](#) for interviews with participating experts.



## Background: The BEECH POWER project

The UNESCO World Heritage (WH) Site ‘Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe’ represents the most complex transnational serial natural site in the UNESCO portfolio - comprising 94 component parts in 18 countries. The programme area shares almost 25% of the components parts distributed in 5 countries (AT, DE, HR, SK and SI). While local management units of the component parts face similar challenges, i.e. concerning buffer zone management, the respective environmental and socio-economic contexts differ considerably on local and national level. The main project objective is to improve management quality and effectiveness of the WH site to safeguard the ecosystem integrity of the single component parts by improving capacities and active participation possibilities of relevant stakeholders.

The project takes an ecosystem-based and participatory approach working on different administrative levels to anchor the WH site in sustainable regional development and produce replicable and innovative models for WH beech forests and their local surroundings (i.e. WH Beech Communities, sustainable buffer zone management, Beech Forest Quality Standard). The main outputs are guidelines and strategies for stakeholder participation and regional development, a handbook for buffer zone management, recommendations for visitor management, a communication concept and a Beech Forest Quality Standard that support protected area administrations, public authorities and actors from civil society in their daily work. The results will be applicable for other WH component parts outside the programme area. The transnational cooperation responds to the challenges of a transnational WH site, as comprehensive solutions must reflect the heterogeneity of the single component parts. Further, it ensures the establishment of a WH-wide learning network between different stakeholders that would not be possible on national level.

For more information on the project: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/BEECH-POWER.html>

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