CASE STUDY

"NATURE CONSERVATION ENABLING SOCIAL SECURITY IN FARMING IN SREDIŠČE OB DRAVI" (SLOVENIA)

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1 Introduction: What is the case study about?

This case study (Nature conservation enabling social security in farming) deals with an area that is a combination of riparian flooded forest (approx. 230 ha) and mosaic agricultural landscape (approx. 200 ha) that together cover about 430 ha, approximately 7 km in length and 1 km wide (DOPPS, 2016). It is located in municipality Središče ob Dravi and is part of a larger area, planned to be declared as a Landscape park. However, the eastern part of this area lies in a different municipality (Ormož) and it is unlikely that this part will also be declared protected in the foreseeable future due to the lack of local support (Workshop 1).

Figure 1: Location of the municipality Središče ob Dravi within Slovenia

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<td>Središče ob Dravi</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2,078</td>
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Source: Statistical Office of Slovenia, 2016

The northern edge is the so-called first river terrace which represents a regularly (annually) flooded area. The southern edge of the planned Landscape park coincides with the state border with Croatia, which lies on a natural boundary, i.e. the river Drava. Part of the river with an extensive belt of floodplain forest between Ormož and Središče ob Dravi is the most preserved lowland river ecosystem of riparian forests² in Slovenia. It represents a typical Pannonian part of Slovenia – lowlands with dry summers and cold winters.

The riverbed is situated in the core of the riparian forest. The river’s meandering natural stream creates numerous sand banks and gravel islands; this unique and rare riparian habitat

² Lowland river ecosystems are the most endangered ecosystems in the Europe (Ward et al., 1999).
is inhabited by important national populations of different species\(^3\) and habitat types\(^4\), making them eligible as Natura 2000 sites. The agricultural landscape that continues from the forest edge to the first river terrace is a mosaic of unimproved and improved meadows, arable lands, and hedges (DOPPS, 2016).

There is almost no infrastructure in this area, except numerous macadam field paths and trails. Field plots are particularly small, often less than 1 hectare, which makes the agricultural landscape very heterogeneous. The entire agricultural mosaic is therefore of high natural value. There is no intensive logging as the forest is not commercially interesting. Moreover, large plots of riparian forests are owned by the local hunters’ association which declared the plots as no-hunting reserves with an exclusively conservation function (PEGASUS Field research, 2016).

**Figure 2:** The meandering river and agricultural mosaic

![The meandering river and agricultural mosaic](source:DOPPS archive)

In the past, due to regular floods, the agricultural landscape in the area consisted exclusively of unimproved meadows and pastures. Stimulated by the agricultural policy measures (in particular CAP Pillar 1 Direct payments), farmers have gradually started to change land use, turning meadows and pastures into fields and consolidating land.\(^5\) However, the river still floods, now washing away soil during every flood (PEGASUS Workshops 1 and 2, DOPPS, 2016, Reka Drava..., 1994).

\(^3\) Little Ringed Plover (Charadrius dubius), Common Sandpiper (Actitis hypoleucos), Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis), White-tailed Eagle (Haliaeetus albicilla), European Mudminnow (Umbra krameri), Spined Loach (Cobitis taenia), beetle Cucujus cinnaberinus; This is also the only region in Slovenia where the hamster Cricetus cricetus has been sighted.

\(^4\) Priority habitat type 91E0* - Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae.

\(^5\) In 2007-2013, implementation of the regional scheme of CAP Pillar 1 Direct payments in Slovenia differentiated between the payments for grassland (108 EUR/ha) and arable land (332 EUR/ha) (Kmetijski inštitut Slovenije, 2014).
There are two main ESBOs considered in this area and they are connected. The diversity of the mosaic agricultural and forestry landscape provides for important habitats, helping to conserve animal and plant biodiversity. These ESBOs are of course closely related to rural vitality, as the preserved agricultural landscape depends on farmers for its existence, yet a properly appreciated and valued ecosystem also has the ability to improve farmers’ livelihoods, if adequately promoted. Therefore, though the primary focus is on landscape and habitats, these ESBOs are inextricably related to a vital farmer population willing and able to maintain and promote -and, finally, capitalise on- the natural and cultural heritage. The ground hypothesis of this Case study is that promoting nature conservation in harmony with sustainable agricultural production has the potential to yield strong collateral benefits.

It is important to mention that the planned area of the Landscape park is only a part of a wider area with exceptional nature preservation significance. The planned Landscape park is in the vicinity of one of the major Slovenian reservoirs, the Ormož Lake. Its size is about 150 hectares and the border between Slovenia and Croatia runs over the lake. Although a result of man-made action (damming of the Drava River with hydro power plant Varaždin), the site became a key rest stop for migratory birds in Slovenia. In addition, next to the Ormož lake, a chain of lagoons (40 hectares) was created to serve as storage basins for wastewater of the former sugar factory in Ormož. Due to the large amounts of plant nutrients and, consequently, an abundance of food, the pools have become a constant point for both nesting and relocation of many endangered species of birds. Following the closure and dismantlement of the sugar factory in Ormož in 2007 (as part of the extensive closure of sugar factories following the financial incentives from CAP CMO sugar), the owners (Royal Cosun, NL) granted the whole area to DOPPS-BirdLife Slovenia with a view to establishing the nature reserve (DOPPS, 2016). The lagoons are now under the ownership and active management (including extensive agricultural use) by DOPPS-Birdlife Slovenia, making a good use of (mainly EU) project funding available.

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6 E.g. Project LIVEDRAVA, carried out through the LIFE+ financial mechanism.
DOPPS-BirdLife Slovenia, in close cooperation with the municipality of Središče ob Dravi, has also been the main driving force behind efforts to establish the Landscape park. The current campaign is not the first one of this kind in the area. Similar ideas were put forward in the early 1990s, but the approach at that time was very different (Pegasus Workshop 2). The public presentations of the idea are said to have been presented in a restrictive and prohibitive manner, which clearly led to the resistance of the local population, especially of the owners of agricultural land in the area.

This time, after an extensive experience (in particular with the above described Ormož lagoons), DOPPS-BirdLife Slovenia is promoting the approach of preserving the landscape of the planned park through sustainable agricultural land use. It has invested considerable efforts to communicate with the right authorities, as well as concerned locals, regarding what precisely the Landscape park would mean for the local community, both in the sense of benefits to the local populace and in the sense of limitations to farming. DOPPS-BirdLife sees the preservation of traditional farming practices, mosaic landscape and special habitats as an opportunity to improve the area’s appeal as a tourist destination and to start promoting its specificities through a unique experience, including a tailored tourist and culinary offer (PEGASUS Workshop 1, 2015). The initially planned area, included in expert studies, on which the public consultations were based, covered a larger territory, including a part of the Ormož lake and the Ormož lagoons (both situated in the nearby municipality of Ormož). After several public consultation rounds, opposition in Ormož led to the decision to limit the planned Landscape park area to the municipality Središče ob Dravi.

The farmers in this area (mainly small farmers) are very proud of the traditional landscape in the area and have a special attitude towards the river Drava (PEGASUS Field Survey, 2016). However, most of them are also very conservative regarding the land issue, and some of them have fears that the future Natural park will prevent agriculture or even interfere with property rights (PEGASUS Field Survey, 2016). These were also the main reasons for the failure of the first campaign to establish a Landscape park in 1994. Since their conversion from grassland to arable land in the 1970s, these plots are have remained in intensive arable use; farms managing these plots naturally see the potential conservation area as a threat to their way of living and working. Though most of these sceptics have been appeased, there are still some tensions to be overcome (PEGASUS Field Survey, 2016). It has to be accentuated that a part of these areas is susceptible to frequent floods which, at major outbreaks (last in 2012) result in strong land erosion. For this reason, it is hard to justify intensive arable production in a flood-susceptible area.

The local community also has groups of proponents of the Landscape park. People that are more in favour of the idea of Landscape park often associate in different groups (e.g. hunting, tourism, bee-keeping), most of them characterised by a growing awareness that the agricultural mosaic in combination with the riparian forest along Drava is unique and a determination to preserve it as a question of local heritage. Some of them also see the creation of the Landscape park and its associated trademark as a development opportunity, that has the potential to create new local employment and strengthen rural vitality (PEGASUS Field Survey, 2016).

A key factor for the creation of the Landscape park is the local community. The municipality Središče ob Dravi and especially its mayor, Mr. Jurij Borko, have a very positive attitude to-
wards the Landscape park (PEGASUS Workshop 1, 2015). The mayor also sees the establishment of the Landscape park as a great developmental opportunity with the potential to connect the rather disinterested farmers into a slightly more cohesive community or at least bring economic benefits to the locals. The municipal council is also generally favourably inclined towards the decision to declare the Landscape park and has full support from the Ministry of Environment and Spatial planning (PEGASUS Workshop 1, 2015).

The entire case study area has been a part of the Natura 2000 network (Special Protected Area (SPA) »Drava« that extends across the Croatian border) since 2004. The plan to introduce additional measures to preserve this area is part of a larger Life+ project LIVEDRAVA, co-funded by the European Union and Slovenian government. The entire project area lies in the lowland part of Drava between Maribor and Središče ob Dravi. The project started in September 2012 and is to end in December 2017. The goals of the project are to:

1) Maintain and improve the status of Natura 2000 species in the project area;
2) Ensure the sustainable management of the river below Maribor in a way that will simultaneously ensure adequate flood protection and positively affect Natura 2000 conservation goals;
3) Improve the cooperation of key stakeholders along the river Drava;
4) Inform the wider public regarding the importance of the river’s natural heritage for the sustainable development of the region (Reka Drava …, 2014).

The initial plan was to establish the Landscape park in the year 2014 and it was to include the area in the adjacent Ormož municipality. However, this suggestion was met with strong resistance in Ormož and the planned area in Središče has been reduced, as well (PEGASUS Workshop 1, 2015). If all goes according to plan, the compromise area has good chances to be declared in the near future. Currently (June 2016), the dossier is in the stage of determining the nature protection conditions at the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, which will be followed by a public presentation and launching initiatives. According to our interview with the municipality representatives (PEGASUS Field Survey, 2016), if “nothing surprising happens at the current stage of the dossier at the Ministry of Environment (in terms of new restrictions or limitations), the municipal council will most likely approve it”.

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7 [http://livedrava.ptice.si/domov/o-projektu/opis/] This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 633814
Figure 4: The current proposal for the Landscape park territory

Source: DOPPS archive

It is worth mentioning that apart from the first time in 1994, there was another unsuccessful attempt to establish a Landscape park in 2004. According to the information acquired (PEGASUS Field Survey, 2016), it can be that the timing of the second initiative was not appropriate, as there was not enough need from the local population to search for alternative development perspectives. The current economic crisis is thus helping to spur these changes.
2 Definition of the social-ecological system (SES) studied

2.1 Figure of the SES, using the SES Framework

2.2 Short characterisation of key drivers/motivations

Public drivers

In addition to relevant national conservation legislation (the Nature Conservation Act and Environmental protection Act), the area has been included in Natura 2000 since 2004 and Natura 2000 limitations apply. Both parts of the area are completely included in the SPA (SI5000011 Drava). The entire forest part and a minor part of agricultural landscape are included in the SAC (SI3000220 Drava), as well (DOPPS, 2016). The area already fulfils all the necessary conditions to be declared a Landscape park under the Nature Conservation Act. In addition, the Decree on protective forests and forests with a special purpose (UL RS 88/05), has declared these forests as protected and intensive logging is not allowed. Forest management is regulated by forestry plans, with the conservation function prevalent, so the forest is of no commercial interest.

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The prevailing agricultural land use in the case study area is arable land. For this reason, the area probably records the greatest significance of CAP Pillar 1 payments for arable land of all four case study areas. These payments influence ESBO provision both indirectly and directly. The indirect effect stems from the general influence that income support through basic payments has on agricultural production, while the direct effect is meant to be achieved through the introduction of the greening component of direct payments (for larger plots of arable land) and the cross-compliance mechanism. The result has been that farmers have gradually changed land use. While in the past, the agricultural mosaic in the area consisted exclusively of unimproved meadows and pastures due to regular floods, farmers started turning meadows and pastures into fields and consolidating land, resulting in degradation of farmland and biodiversity (see also section 2.4).

The significance of Rural development policy measures relevant for ESBO provision in the case study area is relatively low, which is typical of areas in Slovenia with prevailing arable production. Until 2014, ‘light-green’ Agri-environmental payments for integrated arable production were most widely used. These are now being replaced by AE&C payments for operations such as green winter cover, or (enhanced) crop rotation. According to our investigations (Workshop 1, PEGASUS Field Survey, 2016), there is only one ecological farm in the area (farming outside the planned Landscape park area).

In 2014-2020, the municipality Središče ob Dravi is taking part in a newly-established „LAG UE Ormož“, which emerged from splitting the former (2007-13) ‘regional’ LAG Prlekija. The LAG is relatively small, as it covers only three municipalities (Ormož, Središče ob Dravi, Sv. Tomaž). According to our interviews with members of the Management Committee of the LAG, projects that build their potentials on nature conservation / sustainable management fit well into the Local Development Strategy (PEGASUS Field Survey, 2016). However, due to a delay in approving the LEADER/CLLD Local Development Strategies in Slovenia, the first calls for tenders from this source can be expected only in late 2016.

Another important policy tool that can provide support for projects building on ‘green growth’ of the area is Interreg V-A SI-HR (2014-2020). The cross-border character of this programme is especially important in this aspect, as the planned Landscape park is situated at the river border with Croatia, having very similar development challenges and potentials as the area on the other side of the border. In addition to this, all three priority areas of the programme fit well to the needs of the Case study area.

Support through local policymakers has been quite good, on the other hand. The municipality and its mayor have a positive attitude towards the Landscape park and the council has endorsed the decision to declare a conservation area, which is also supported by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning.

**Market drivers**

Despite the fact that agricultural production is an important element of the local economy and that the majority of (arable) production is carried out on small farms with scattered plots,
cooperation among farmers is low. Apart from a local branch of a larger agricultural cooperative (Agricultural Cooperative Ptuj, Središče ob Dravi branch), there is no organized production of agricultural produce. The situation along agricultural value chains is even worse. Farmers have only limited experience with collective market actions. Many of them traditionally grow pumpkins and sell pumpkin seeds to the local oil mill (Oljarna Središče ob Dravi), which produces and sells an entire palette of pumpkin products and is quite well known outside the region. Once per year the municipality and oil mill organize a pumpkin festival and the mill has a small store. However, there is no local market where one could buy regional products in one place, nor is there any integrated tourist offer. A few farmers in the area have started diversifying into tourism and leisure activities, marketing organized horse riding in nature, canoeing, cycling, swimming etc. In the vicinity of the park, there is a (nationally renowned) wine region Jeruzalem/Ormož, with a long tradition of winemaking and an interesting gastronomic offer, mostly as complementary activities on farms. The municipality Središče ob Dravi has no accommodation facilities, however, and one restaurant only. Some primary producers have diversified into gastronomic products like honey, yet so far nobody has been able or willing to ‘connect the dots’ between these isolated activities and create a cohesive whole (Workshop 1, PEGASUS Field Survey, 2016).

Figure 5: Some locals are offering riding in the Landscape park before it has even been established

Source: http://www.dravariding.si/index.php/sl/kdo-smo

The area is economically relatively very weak, its income per person one of the lowest in Slovenia and unemployment rate among the highest (SORs, 2016). This also means a generally low level of education. Farmers are mostly older people and they are not developing any supplementary activity. On the other hand, a few younger farmers, mainly farm successors, are well aware of the importance of developing such activities on farms and adding value to their products. It is clear to some of the representatives of the new generation that their future is in their own products of high value, but they lack for knowledge, financial capital, and business ideas. Locals are also to some extent aware that the unique mix of traditional cultural and preserved natural landscape has the potential to yield some economic benefits from the potential Landscape park (PEGASUS Field Survey, 2016).

Some believe that through the Landscape park they will have more chances to positively affect and even enhance ESBO provision and hope to establish new workplaces offering potential visitors different services that are now practically completely missing. Economic opportunities deriving from the ESBO are not yet capitalised upon, nor is there a model in sight that would build on this challenge and connect individual producers. We see this as a major challenge for
further work on this case study. One step in this direction would be to explore the possibility of creating a product of a ‘virtual daily tourist visit’ presenting possible locations and services offered to (different target groups of) Landscape park visitors.

**Private initiative**

The most important private actor in the process of establishing a Landscape park has been the Slovenian Birdlife branch, DOPPS. While they are the senior project partner in the entire LIVEDRAVA project, they have placed a strong focus of their activities towards the Središče ob Dravi Landscape park. They offer active assistance to the local community in coordinating between private and conservation interests, fostering compromises and responding to the concerns of farmers and other local groups.

Namely, many farmers, are still quite sceptical regarding the Landscape park and additional limitations that this might impose on them. This probably comes as a consequence of various reasons. Most recently, this might be due to their Natura 2000 experience, which dealt quite a blow to conventional practices. In addition, this has to do with the process of expropriation of formerly common land along the riverbanks (after WW II) and a slow return process, in combination with some locally resounding negative cases involving the current tenants of this land. Although there is no direct link between the establishment of the Landscape park and the described problem, negative sentiments probably have to do with the expectations of yet another set of restrictions and rules on their land. According to the proposed management regulation for the Landscape park (DOPPS, 2016) there will be no new limitations as compared to the current practice (which is regulated by Natura 2000 requirements). However, tangible benefits to the local population and field owners are also only hypothetical at the moment, which results in a lower interest of the local population.

In 2014 and 2015, 6 public meetings and discussions were organized by the municipality and DOPPS where locals were informed about the relevant aspect of Landscape parks (Workshop 1). Best practices from Landscape parks in Slovenia and neighbouring Croatia were presented, and all farming and business perspectives were thoroughly discussed. An excursion for locals was organised to the Landscape park Goričko, to show that people can cohabitate with a Landscape park and even benefit from it (Workshop 1, 2015).

The mayor Mr. Jurij Borko, though representing the municipality, is also personally committed to the establishment of the Landscape park. He shares DOPPS’ view that the park is also an opportunity for economic development, rather than being an obstacle for the local economy (Workshop 1). In a municipality of this size (slightly over 2000 inhabitants), personal attitudes and relations play important role and his support for the cause is quite indispensable.

### 2.3 Description of other important variables chosen

The above description entails all the relevant factors that influence the SES.

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9 Interviews in our field research reveal the practice of (illegal) gravel extraction on the disputed land, currently rented from the Farmland and Forest Fund of the Republic of Slovenia.
2.4 Discussion of the SES

Figure 6: Focus group meeting in Središče ob Dravi, 24.5.2016.

The greatest wealth of the river is its free meandering stream and river dynamics, resulting in a constantly changing shape of the riverbed. In the planned Landscape park area, a large number of different habitat types have been identified, enabling areas of extremely high biodiversity. So far, 105 species of nesting birds, 15 species of amphibians, 9 species of reptiles and numerous mammals have been found, among which the most important is the otter, the most endangered mammal in Europe. The area’s environmental significance also pertains to aquatic life; the Drava river is a habitat to 43 species of fish, while its tributaries are home to crayfish and the brook lamprey, and various snail and shellfish in the backwaters.

There is a general perception, at least in Slovenia, that nature preservation and farming are at odds. Indeed, the introduction of Natura 2000 has brought with it many limitations for farmers, and in Slovenia, this represents 37.2 % of the territory\(^1\). Understandably, this has inconvenienced many farmers, resulting in a general negative attitude towards Natura 2000 in Slovenian agriculture. However, some key opinion-makers in the municipality do not have such problems with it; indeed, they wish to declare a Landscape park and start using the protection status of the area (together with its charismatic species, like the otter) as a development perspective.

In addition to improving locals’ livelihoods by creating business opportunities, the Landscape park could help to maintain traditional farming and protect biodiversity. Moreover, there is an important synergy between farming, ensuring flood safety and neophyte control. Since grazing is not allowed in Slovenian forests, riparian forests are overgrown by neophytes (Solidago spp., Rudbeckia sp., Fallopia sp., Impatiens glandulifera, etc.), and roughness in the forest ground level has increased, resulting in increased local flood effects (DOPPS, 2016).

\(^1\) [link to Natura 2000 in Slovenia]

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tainable grazing practices (entirely in accordance with Natura 2000 regulations) could be implemented again, reducing neophytes and the roughness problem and increasing flood safety. Discussions regarding this issue have not emerged yet, so as not to jeopardize the Landscape park project, but it is logical if we look at natural conditions on the ground (erosion of arable land due to regular floods).

Floods have also become more of a problem for farmers due to the land use changes made in the past few decades. In socialist times, farmers turned unameliorated meadows and pastures into fields due to pressures to produce more food. After accession to the EU, this was replaced by economic rationalism related with higher subsidy levels for arable land. Despite the fact that the river still floods regularly, eroding soil, farmers sow the land and even insure their crops, knowing that they will probably be destroyed. The direct payments also stimulated land consolidation, thus degrading the area’s biodiversity. Still, the biodiversity and traditional landscape mosaic are significantly better preserved than in the wider surroundings.

As mentioned before, there have been two previous attempts to establish a Landscape park, both unsuccessful because, firstly, there was not enough communication from local enthusiasts to the wider local public, and secondly, there was not enough need for the people to seek alternative development perspectives. The third attempt has been thoroughly communicated to the locals from the very beginning, while the financial crisis has forced people into searching for new business opportunities (Workshop 1).

Although the Landscape park is not yet established, its future management has already been discussed, and the foreseen management is definitely innovative for Slovenia. Recent practices are inefficient in many Landscape parks – they are managed either by a state institution or not at all, while some only exist on paper. In the case of Središče ob Dravi, management will be carried out in a consortium consisting of representatives of the municipality, farmers, tourist association and a nature-conservation NGO. This could serve as a good practice example for other protected areas, where there is now a “no management” situation, resulting in dramatic losses of public goods. Hopefully the planned management in Središče ob Dravi will also be able to help locals make use of the park’s potential.

2.5 Common aims, conflicting interests and goals

As already described above, the area has untapped opportunities for both nature conservation and economic vitality with a coordinated action between the establishment of the Landscape park and adding value by developing new markets (e.g. green tourism) or through ESBO attributes. These relations are not entirely without potentially conflicting situations, however. The conflict between agricultural and nature preservation exists and can be resolved only in a careful dialogue. Looking from a long-term perspective, adding value (in agriculture, tourism, etc.) through ESBO attributes, without re-investing in nature preservation, could end in irreversible damage, both environmental and social. Active management of the Landscape park thus entails a constant dialogue between actors, seeking for a balance between nature protection and economic development.

2.6 Other issues arising from SES analysis and context/case study specific aspects/issues

Already addressed in the above text.
3 Status of the SES and potentials

3.1 Description of the SES

The economic situation in the region is not favourable. Only a few workplaces are available. Young people are moving out at an increasing rate and the level of education is low. The establishment of a Landscape park could improve the possibilities of applying for project funding under different financial mechanisms, enable networking and cooperation between similar parks, and function as an umbrella trademark for future products and services from the area. It would contribute significantly to the visibility and promotion of the municipality (or the entire environmentally sensitive area, if neighbouring Ormož eventually decides to join). An influx of development funds could help with the development of new economic activities and attract young people to the area.

As the mayor Jurij Borko mentioned at the focus group meeting (Workshop 1), there have been unsuccessful attempts in the past to get people to cooperate in business undertakings (e.g. wine production). Yet the people seem reluctant to risk such a joint venture. For example, when asked to form a cooperative, a successful winemaker in the area refused to “drag free-loaders along”, and this is the prevalent (perhaps not entirely unsubstantiated) attitude of successful producers.

However, the oil mill, which has a visitor turnover of 50-100 buses per year and a small shop to sell its products, is a kind of nucleus around which local food producers and artisans can sell their products (Pegasus Field Study, 2016). This is even more the case following traditional events organised by the oil mill, such as e.g. the annual Pumpkin Fair, visited by 2-3 thousand visitors. The oil mill is currently investing in a new, larger and aesthetically more appealing shop with a ‘local food and crafts’ department and a tasting room (to be opened by autumn 2016). The potential of this outlet should not be overestimated, nor the growth pace of the locally offered products that fit to the common denominator / ‘brand’ of the area. However, as good practices reveal, a thoughtful start, albeit slow, will attract newcomers into a mutually reinforcing destination ‘brand’.

The mayor pointed out the prevailing investment mentality: people shape their business ideas around municipality (or other) tenders, counting on grants from the public purse. The results of such actions are often questionable. To illustrate, in 2007 the municipality offered funds for agriculture and most were used to buy farming machinery. This phenomenon is quite widespread in Slovenia11. But, as the mayor said: “What good is it if we have the most tractors in the world,” if this is the only investment we can come up with when offered funds intended for the development of agriculture?

The only ecological farmer in the area sees this widespread, somewhat backwards, mentality as the biggest obstacle to the success of the future park. In his opinion, changing the conventional farmers’ minds would require the presence of a charismatic leader and he knows of no such person. Almost as if to back this view, another local farmer present at the focus group meeting voiced his doubts about the project, saying that the local inhabitants’ purchasing

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11 Slovenia has the highest number of tractors per square kilometre of arable land (5,895.2 in 2009, Japan comes second with 4,532.1; World Bank data, see [http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/3.2](http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/3.2)).
power is low, stated that he does not really see himself participating, and wanted to know what additional limitations the park will bring.

Another practical concern that came up during the focus meeting group is the absence of accommodation facilities in the area. The mayor refuted the importance of this element; in his opinion, the target group is daily tourists, like the oil mill visitors, who seek special destinations. At the moment, it is crucial to reach a consensus and form a coherent tourist offer; the lack of such an offer is causing the loss of tourists who wish to see more. However, given the broad array of activities available (swimming, riding, cycling, trekking, etc.), it seems likely that the lack of accommodation will become an issue eventually.

Most focus group members agreed that there is a need to find somebody to connect the local producers (somebody who is also commercially motivated for successful work). Given the rise in demand for both local delicacies and experiential tourism, the area has much to gain and nothing to lose. However, it seems that the biggest obstacle in the way of such a consortium is the lack of trust.

3.2 Relationships between farming and forestry, and the quantity and quality of ESBOs

Though the unmanaged river ecosystem already has high natural value on its own, traditional agricultural management has resulted in a combination of cultivated and uncultivated land. This has yielded the existing mosaic landscape, providing rich habitats and high biodiversity.

While the traditional landscape would not exist without the historical way of farming, more recently farming has had a detrimental effect on the provision of the studied ESBO (though perhaps the quantity of food produced in the system has increased): the quality of habitats is declining.

There is no commercial exploitation of forests in the area of the future Park, but the management of forests in general is helping to maintain the level and quality of ESBO provision.

3.3 Key motivational, institutional and socio-economic factors

This study investigates the process of an establishment of a Landscape park area in a (demographically, economically) lagging area of a post-transition country. What makes the case even more interesting is to compare the previous attempts (2 in last 20 years), which were resting more on a restrictive-prescriptive paradigm. This attempt is now more inclusive and takes account of the prevailing use of the area, i.e. agriculture. The idea is to mutually reinforce (a) the provision of site-specific ESBOs through natural conservation in relation to more environmentally sound land management practices, and (b) the improvement of the economic vitality of the area through better incomes / newly generated jobs for local land managers, in this case particularly farmers.

Our assessment is that the key factor of success is a conscious and organized individual. The key social group in the process are farmers / land managers. Through a process of good practice demonstration, dialogue, cooperation and collective action, the consciousness and motivation for environmentally sound practices (also behind relatively strong NATURA 2000 conditions) can be built. The advantages of working in a protected area can be best accepted through a positive experience. The process to come to a positive experience is demanding, and entails actions such as the development of entrepreneurial ideas (individually and collectively), of new products and services for potential customers; first to visitors of the area and
in later stages, to customers whose interest and willingness to purchase locally is reinforced by the ESBO. The range of products and services entails various local foods and beverages, local artisanal products, or services linked to the visit of the Landscape park (guiding, leisure and sports activities). The area has the potential to build its visibility and uniqueness with natural amenities, gastronomy, a collective brand, by establishing of a Landscape park and by increasing visits. In order to accommodate the latter, there is a need to develop proper infrastructure that enables providing visitors with food, accommodation and, above all, an authentic and memorable experience.

Our assessment is that – at least at the starting stage – the willing and capable individuals need motivation for these changes. This task could be entrusted to local institutional factors. Currently, this entails primarily the municipality, different social groups and the LAG. DOPPS-Birdlife Slovenia with its project experience could play a catalytic, but not leading role. Stronger engagement could be expected from other (quasi-) public institutions (e.g. the chamber of agriculture). Market drivers are also present, but not strongly. Shaping a common vision through an Action plan is necessary, followed by an actively engaged (also commercially stimulated?), systematic and coordinated/inclusive effort. An important (and probably the most challenging) task is to stimulate collective action of a large and diverse group of actors, and to make this action permanent. In the end, success will be decided by the individual, the one who will decide consciously to improve his practices and also be economically rewarded.

The stakeholders are aware that the establishment of a Landscape park does not mean that now “everything will be automatically better”, but they see this as one of prerequisites for their future (Workshop 1). Although the Landscape park is not declared yet, its future management has already been discussed. The coordination process among stakeholders has resulted in a decision that the conditions for agricultural practices will not go beyond the existing Natura 2000 requirements, which current agricultural practices should in principle already be compliant with.

Projects arising from the idea of linking nature protection with economic vitality fit well to the Europe 2020 objectives of green, smart and inclusive growth. In this respect, the range of EU funding mechanisms is relatively wide (CLLD/Leader, ESIF, EARDF, Life+, Interreg). Funds available are not lacking; the challenge is to generate viable ideas and develop a critical mass for own funding. On the other side, it can be easier to reach consensus on priority projects and carry these out efficiently in small, cohesive communities (e.g. local state aids, projects funded through CLLD/LEADER).

At the first Workshop, Dominik Bombek (DOPPS) stated that if the idea of co-operation is hard to reach at the start, a group of farmers could be attracted to develop open-farms. Any farmer could do this on his own, while tourists would go from farm to farm, depending on their offer. The mayor preferred the option of consolidating the offer at the entry point to the Landscape park. As the area is not suitable for permanent infrastructure (floods), the already existing stands for the marketplace could be an initial option. There was also discussion of a mobile market, which would take place in the peak season. However, a bigger challenge at the moment would be to establish a ‘package’ of goods and services that would fit to the concept of the Landscape park.
3.4 Levels of provision, trends and determinants

The quality of habitats is evaluated with standard methods of environmental monitoring. The public Institute for Nature Conservation is responsible for the provision of detailed guidelines for environmental monitoring (DOPPS-BirdLife is subcontracted for certain tasks, for example monitoring indicator bird species). Some rough economic and demographic data for the assessment of rural vitality are available at NUTS-5 (municipality) level, but some additional effort is required to improve the information. For a precise evaluation of ESBOs it would be necessary to first develop relevant criteria and indicators, and then acquire some more detailed information.

ESBO provision: quality is quite high, but declining; quantity could be higher if number of visitors increased (though limits of the habitat need to be respected), especially if it results in increased rural vitality (increased incomes and a higher level of appreciation and awareness). There are different groups of potential providers: agri-business is developing slowly, tourism operators are also not very reactive. Currently, provision is left entirely to individual incentive (see e.g. Drava Riding), the culinary offer is underdeveloped and is thus also under-appreciated. Some members of the community appreciate the preserved nature and cultural heritage, while the majority remain passive.

Demand for ESBOs is currently limited to organised groups interested in nature protection. The place is poorly promoted and relatively remote at the national level. All this results in the fact that the general awareness of the place is low. However, a positive experience with the Ormož lagoons (an area of environmental interest in the vicinity, managed by DOPPS) shows that the demand can increase rapidly, when at least the basic infrastructure and interpretation are provided.

The trends are improving. From the viewpoint of nature preservation, the political relevance of the issue is growing. The awareness of climate change threats, biodiversity decline etc. has increased the awareness and appreciation of the wider society and policies are responding slowly.

Optimism among the local population regarding the planned Landscape park is growing, as it is considered that the park will bring new development opportunities for the local community. The current public opinion is supportive of the idea of the Landscape park Središče ob Dravi. Recently, in 2014 and 2015, six public meetings and discussions were organized where local inhabitants were informed about various development aspects linked with the establishment of the Landscape park. Good practices from Landscape parks of Slovenia and neighbouring Croatia were presented, and all farming and business perspectives were thoroughly discussed. An excursion for locals was organised to Landscape park Goričko, which is our Case study site number 3, to encourage people by showing them a case of good practice. The public meetings and excursion were jointly organized by the municipality and DOPPS-BirdLife Slovenia (DOPPS, 2016).

3.5 Relevant governance arrangements and institutional frameworks

Until now, the municipality and DOPPS-BirdLife Slovenia have been exposed the most in promoting the project of a Landscape park in Središče ob Dravi. Following the (likely) proclamation of the Landscape park, it is envisaged (and desirable by the current promoters) that representatives of other civil groups and associations (e.g. tourist workers, hunters, beekeepers)
The importance of communication and coordinated action is also underlined by two unsuccessful previous attempts, both failing (also) due to inadequate communication.

Indirectly, environmental policy has also played an important role in the growing acceptance of the idea of a Landscape park. Natura 2000 requirements have paved the way towards more sustainable agricultural practices in the Study area. The LiveDrava project is an additional stimulus in terms of financial support for the development of basic environmental infrastructure and interpretation.

More could be expected from the CAP. First, there is a conflicting situation between CAP Pillar 1 Direct payments that are pushing arable land into intensive production and work as a disincentive to farmers to return to grassland use of the area. Such a move would be rational, not just from the environmental aspect, but also economically, as flood erosion sweeps away the soil regularly. Habitat AECM have unique rules for the entire country and thus lack case-targeted provisions.

Among institutional actors, a more proactive role of public agricultural extension services is somewhat lacking. The extension service is generally disinclined towards environmental projects and sees its role primarily in production-related issues.

3.6 Other context/case study specific aspects/issues
To our knowledge, the above text describes all the relevant aspects.

4 Conclusions derived from analysis in Steps 1 and 2

4.1 Key findings on the particular SES and its potentials

This case study explores a specific case, where we are looking for potential effects that the creation of the park could have on the ESBOs nature conservation and rural vitality. The idea is that the creation of the Landscape park can also bring economic benefits for the local population, handicapped by remoteness and a lack of alternative employment and income opportunities.

Establishment of the Landscape park was primarily an initiative of environmental NGOs. It has been accepted by the local community which, apart from the importance of nature conservation, also sees the project as an opportunity for economic development of the area. The latter can only be capitalised upon through the restructuring of current practices and collective action, which is currently lacking in the area. The willingness and ability of individuals to change is the key determinant. Adding to this the scepticism of some farmers regarding the idea of Landscape park, we can see that the design of the park and thus potential enhancement of ESBOs depend primarily on the human factor.

The river Drava with its unique and pristine environment is highly appreciated by the local inhabitants and environmental NGO. However, the latter group link the appreciation of the area with the establishment of the Landscape park. On the other hand, the farming community is more reserved, mainly due to expectations of further tightening of regimes and limits to ownership/right to dispose with their own land. In addition, the current CAP subsidy system is deterring changes in land use.

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Awareness and provision can be increased through the adequate development of additional products and services related to the Landscape park. A coordinated and carefully selected/targeted effort will be needed in terms of marketing and increasing visibility of the future park.

4.2 Governance arrangements and institutional frameworks

The institutional framework has enabled nature conservation activities (role of Natura 2000). These activities are further promoted by NGOs (DOPPS, hunting association). Establishment of the Landscape park is being attempted through Life+ funding. Agricultural practices have adapted, which cannot be said of arable land in the flooding areas. In this case, restitution of arable land back to grassland would even increase environmental benefits.

Preservation of the existing agricultural use patterns has been stimulated by differential payments for arable land (significantly higher) and grassland. In this situation, CAP Pillar 1 Direct payments also offset the positive impacts of the CAP Pillar 2 measures. Notwithstanding the significant contribution of CAP payments\(^\text{12}\) to the income of farmers in Slovenia (according to the Economic Accounts for Agriculture (KIS, 2015), these payments represent over 50% of the factor income), the policy itself does not contribute sufficiently to the situation of farmers, which see the situation as bad. Some in this area have restructured (also into organic production), but most holdings are passive and stagnate. The agricultural land remains in use, but this is not enough to generate growth and development to improve the economic vitality of the local population. Undesired structural change in local agricultural production is continuing. Our assessment of territorially based measures, such as CLLD/Leader and Interreg is more positive.

4.3 Other enabling or limiting factors

Market drivers are currently inactive in the case study area. At the moment, they are not seen as drivers that stimulate private initiatives linked with the Landscape park. The main reason for this is probably the human factor. Risk aversion, ignorance, lack of entrepreneurial spirit, conservatism, are only some of the possible reasons for the Case study area to be avoiding creativity, adaptation and change. All this is also linked to the age- and educational structure. The understanding of agricultural production and environmental issues by a part of the farming community and agricultural institutions (e.g. the Chamber of agriculture, which has representatives on the territory of the municipality) is also an important problem. For them, sustainable land management practices are seen as a threat. This is quite a relevant limiting factor for efforts to improve the current status of the ESBOs.

4.4 Reflections on the case study methodology used and potential improvements

The methodology has enabled a relatively clear analysis. We went to several rounds of workshops and interviews, which became quite time-consuming and difficult to manage logistically. Significantly more time should be allowed for the execution of this phase.

A big credit goes to the local stakeholders who put much effort in their Case study. Both key actors, the mayor of the municipality Središče ob Dravi, and DOPPS-BirdLife Slovenia acquired most of the information about the interviews and locations to visit. This support significantly

\(^{12}\) Including CAP Pillar 1 Direct payments, and CAP Pillar 2 AEC and ANC payments.
contributed to the execution of the analysis. We got the opportunity to speak with all parties, including the opponents. We also included students in the Field work stage, who were given additional momentum and enabled us to carry out a wider range of work, particularly the in-depth interviews.

5 Research and action mandate for Steps 3 and 4

5.1 Agreed objectives of activities to be undertaken with initiative/stakeholders

If this case is chosen for further study, it is first necessary to at least roughly visualise the basic infrastructure needed to develop the Landscape park into a tourist destination, and to come out with some initial ideas on how to actually create an additional offer, capitalising on the newly acquired status of the area. Secondly, it would be necessary to visit the majority of landowners in the Landscape park area to get a more in-depth information about the exact reasons for possible objections and potential changes in farming practice.

5.2 Innovations, impact, transferability, potential risks and research bias

The case is interesting as we are actually following the establishment of a Landscape park with various ESBOs in a relatively (economically and demographically) lagging area, where it is not necessary that the experience of more developed areas will be relevant. Thus, the experience gained will be informative for similar cases. Due to the complexity of the story, however, it is questionable whether the time horizon available for the implementation of innovative practices in the Study area will be adequate.

6 References


Internet sources:
http://www.dravariding.si/index.php/sl/kdo-smo
7 ANNEX

7.1 Documentation of research and action progress

Workshop 1 (Središče ob Dravi, 24.5.2016): Focus group meeting with local stakeholders on institutional drivers of ESBO provision. Participants:

- Jurij Borko (mayor),
- Mirjana Panič (president of local Agricultural Committee),
- Marko Kočev (farmer, member of municipal Council),
- Damijan Vesenjak (member of municipal Council),
- Jure Kolarič (ecological farmer),
- Dominik Bomber (DOPPS),
- Damijan Denac (DOPPS),
- Tanja Šumrada (DOPPS),
- Emil Erjavec (BF),
- Luka Juvančič (BF),
- Ilona Rac (BF),
- Uršula Trček (BF, student),
- Vesna Turšič (BF, student).

Field work (June 2016): In-depth interviews with stakeholders regarding their views on the potentials and threats regarding the future Landscape park. Interviewees:

- Aleš Plohl (president of Beekeeping society),
- Dragica Florjanič (Oil mill representative, president of Tourist association),
- Jurij Dogša (manager of Sugar factory Ormož, president of Hunting association),
- Miha Sok (president of Equestrian association, farmer),
- Boštjan Horvat (farmer),
- Samo & Vesna Žerjav (teacher (Samo), baker (Vesna); both farmers),
- Marko Kočev (farmer),
- Božidar Borko (pastry shop owner, member of Equestrian association),
- Anton Prosnik (ecologist, baker, member of Fishing association),
- Miro Kranjčec (farmer),
- Jure Kolarič (ecological farmer).

7.2 Supporting data and statistics


This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 633814
3. Slovenian Tourist Association http://www.slovenia.info/si/naravni-parki/Krajinski-park-Sredi%C5%A1%C4%8De-ob-Dra.htm?naravni_parki=7344&lng=1


5. Uredba o varovalnih gozdovih in gozdovih s posebnim namenom [Decree on protective forests and forests with a special purpose] (UL RS, 88/05, 56/07, 29/09, 91/10, 1/13 and 39/15)

