

## Redesigning of Biosphere Reserves in the Lake Neusiedl / Fertö Region – the view of stakeholders

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### Summary

In the Lake Neusiedl / Fertö region already in the late 1970ies long before the Seville Strategy came up two Biosphere Reserves were established. In Austria this old biosphere reserve should be transformed in a biosphere reserve according to the Seville Strategy and the Austrian National Criteria for Biosphere Reserves. In the MAB-Project "Redesigning the Biosphere Reserve Lake Neusiedl", which combines an ecological perspective to natural and cultural landscape, nature conservation and protected areas and a socio-economic perspective to regional identity and regional development, fundamentals for the restructuring process of an enlarged biosphere reserve are developed. This means that information about the perceptions and ideas of regional stakeholders has to be collected and to be initiated a first participatory process. In Addition within a cross-border cooperation project with colleagues from Hungary the conditions of the implementation of modern biosphere reserve concepts in Hungary were explored and in-depth interviews with regional experts were conducted. The presentation will compare some results of these qualitative interviews in Austria and Hungary and point out some conclusions for the redesigning process of the biosphere reserves.

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### Keywords

biosphere reserve, participatory process, cross-border cooperation, Lake Neusiedl / Fertö region

### Project duration, aims and investigation area

The presented results of stakeholder interviews in the transboundary Lake Neusiedl / Fertö region were obtained in the framework of two research projects. The Project "Redesigning the Biosphere Reserve Lake Neusiedl" (2006-2009, financed by MAB-Programme of Austrian Academy of Science) combined an ecological perspective to natural and cultural landscape, nature conservation and protected areas with a socio-economic perspective to regional identity and regional development. Founded in 1977 and consisting of the lake and the broad reed belt, the Biosphere Reserve Lake Neusiedl is not conform to the Seville-Strategy (1995) and the National Criteria for Biosphere Reserves in Austria (2006). The aims of this project were, in particular, options for enlargement and redesigning of the biosphere reserve according to the Seville Strategy through integrated landscape and regional development. Within the socio-economic surveys and first steps of a participatory process in-depth interviews were conducted. In the Hungarian part of the region the Biosphere Reserve Fertö (1979) was established on the area of the former National Park Fertö (later two times extended). Therefore the task of redesigning is similar but the legal and institutional framework of nature conservation and spatial planning is quite different. With regard to a potential future cross-border biosphere reserve a comparison study of stakeholder view in Hungary, financed by Action Austria-Hungary (OMAA), was realized in 2007/08. The investigation area is the whole Austrian-Hungarian region of Lake Neusiedl / Fertö.

### Methods

Besides questioning of residents and tourists in the Austrian as well as in the Hungarian part of the region in-depth interviews of different stakeholders (e.g. agriculture, tourism, spatial planning, national park, nature park, world heritage, mayors) were conducted (30 in Austria, 16 in Hungary). The interview guideline includes three parts: regional identity and image, tourism and regional development and the future biosphere reserve.

### Results

In due consideration of cognitive, affective and behavioural components of identity the analysis and interpretation of regional identity is based on the processes of identification by WEICHHART (1990, in respect of Graumann). Subject of the interviews was the first identification process – identifying

the region – with regional image factors and mental maps. Beyond that, we got a first impression about the third process – identifying with the region respectively the regional development. In the view of Austrian stakeholders the main image factors of the region are the lake as well as nature and landscape protection (more than 50 % of interviewees) followed by culture/cultural heritage, tourism, place names and wine/wine-growing (more than 33 % of interviewees). In Hungary the lake with the reed belt, culture/cultural heritage and landscape clearly dominate among regional image factors (more than 60 % of interviewees). A qualitative and integrated interpretation of the regional image shows some more differences between the stakeholder on the Austrian and Hungarian side of the lake. While in Hungary the connection of culture with the lake or lake and nature plays an important role, in Austria different combinations, place names and the regional diversity (more than four categories) determine the image of the region (see Figure 1).

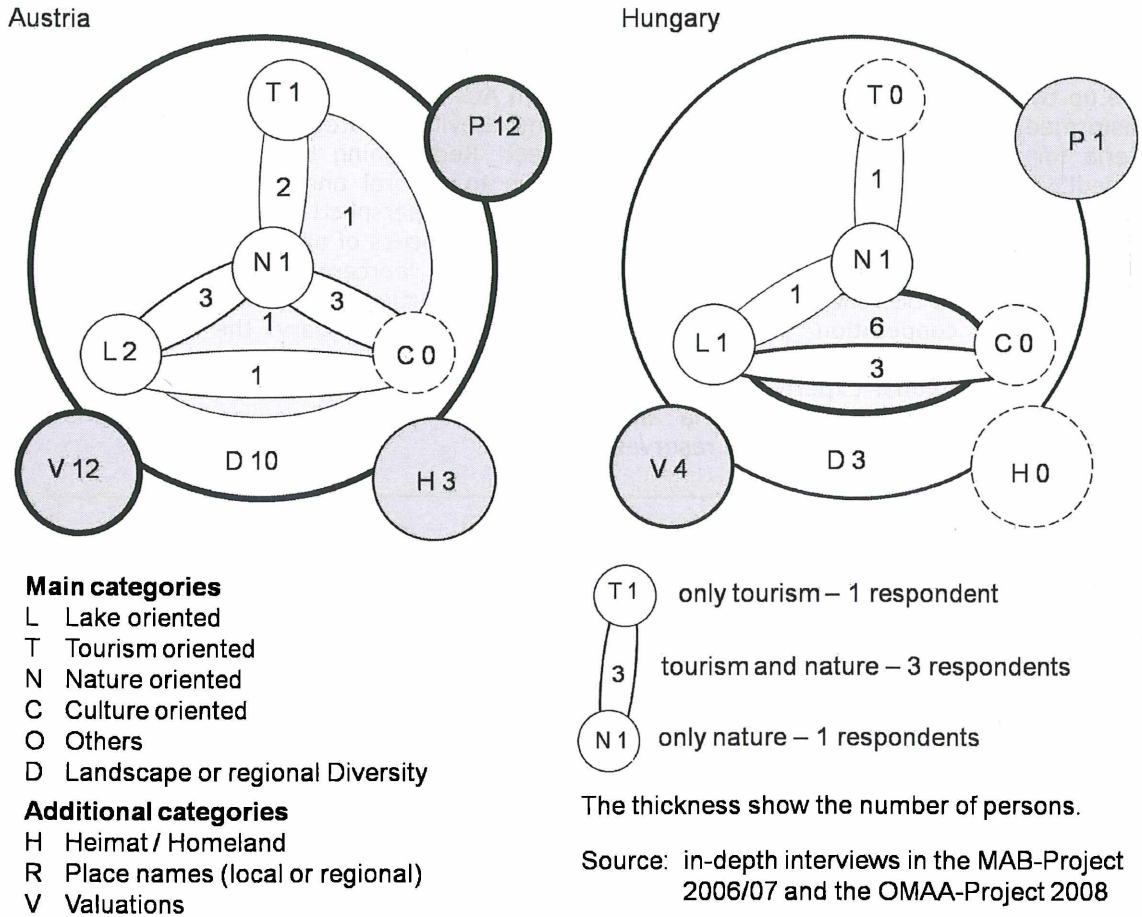


Figure 1: The regional image in the view of Austrian and Hungarian Stakeholder

In the field of regional development a clear correlation between the regional image and the strengths of the region is identified. First of all, the Austrian respondents have mentioned the lake, landscape and touristic aspects, followed by economic factors, the people and nature conservation. In Hungary beneficial geographical position of the region and the possibilities of cooperation are ranking first among the strength. The importance of cultural aspects is again greater than in Austria. The biggest problems are seen in the lack of money, the bad state of the road network and different conflicts, for instance between the development of settlements and nature conservation. In Austria quite different problems are mentioned, in particular structural problems in tourism and the short season, a lack of jobs, increasing transit traffic and a low water level of the lake (see Table 1).

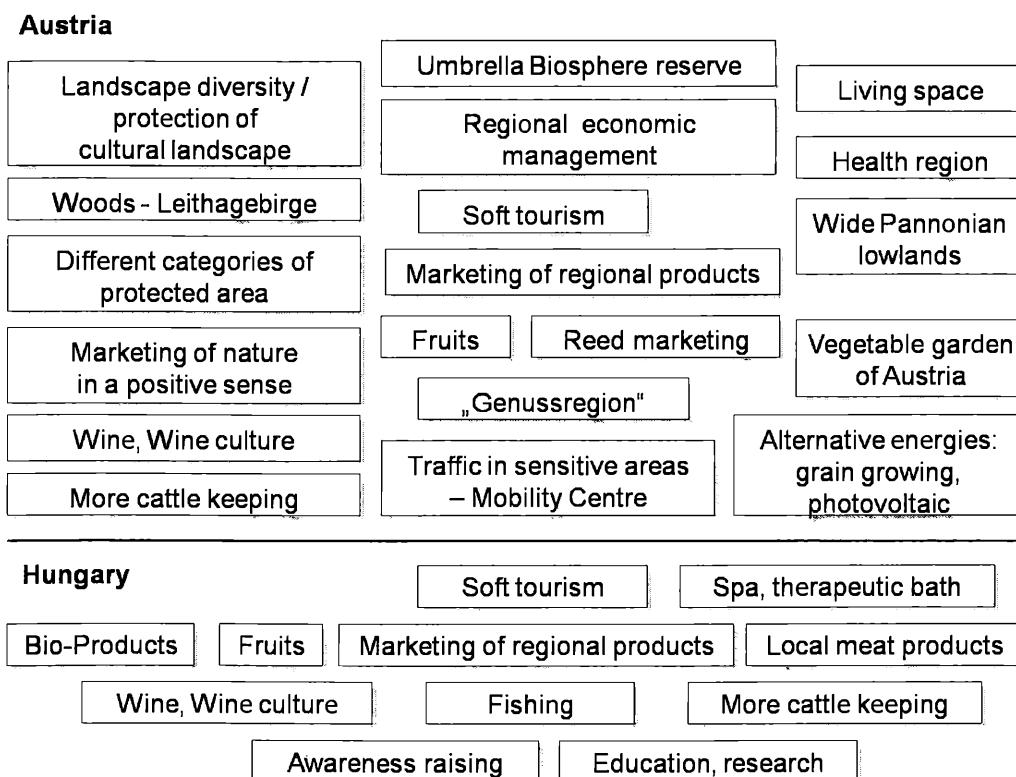
Most respondents didn't know the Biosphere Reserve, but were receptive to this issue. Some interview partners in Austria as well as in Hungary react sceptically to this new protection category and institution. Austrian stakeholders see the importance of a future Biosphere Reserve Lake Neusiedl more in regional development than in the landscape protection, because several other protection categories exist in the region (e.g. National Park, Natura 2000 areas, World Heritage, Nature Park). A biosphere reserve could coordinate the landscape preservation and contribute to raising awareness and regional identity. In Hungary, the expectation of a possible biosphere

reserve in the future, based mainly on cohesion in the region (this is corresponding with the aforementioned strengths). Furthermore, its importance is seen in tourism development, research and like in Austria in the awareness raising and regional identity. The ideas for the redesigning of the biosphere reserve are diverse in both states while offering numerous opportunities for synergies and cooperation (see Figure 2).

Table 1: Strengths and greatest Problems of the Lake Neusiedl / Fertö Region in the view of Austrian and Hungarian Stakeholder

Austria	Hungary
<b>Strengths</b>	
landscape / lake / climate tourism	beneficial geographical position bilateral possibilities for cooperation
wine / regional products people / culture traffic / infrastructure economic resources / development	nature / traditional cultivation spiritual and cultural values
nature conservation / protected areas job market / quality of life beneficial geographical position / border region	touristic potential identity / positive identity
<b>Problems</b>	
structure of tourism / deficits	lack of money
lack of jobs / commuters motorway / transit traffic water level of the lake / water supply	bad state of the road network
change of land use / settlement pressure deficits in infrastructure / lack of money regional development / management agricultural marketing	conflict of interest between individual interests, nature conservation and settlement development

Source: in-depth interviews in the MAB-Project 2006/07 and the OMAA-Project 2008



Source: in-depth interviews in the MAB-Project 2006/07 and the OMAA-Project 2008

Figure 2: Possible orientation of a future Biosphere Reserve in the view of Austrian and Hungarian Stakeholder

## Discussion

In the transboundary Lake Neusiedl / Fertő landscape, which is characterised through decades of separate development, interviews of Austrian and Hungarian stakeholders show similar as well as quite different perceptions and ideas. The comparison study and the discussion in an Austrian-Hungarian research team contribute to a better understanding of these differences within a cross-border and intercultural region. In the Lake Neusiedl / Fertő region several cross-border protected areas and institutions exist, which show again and again the influence of the different economic, political and social conditions in Hungary and Austria. It is a very important task nowadays, to develop some interregional cooperation between Austria and Hungary. One of the main tasks in this job is the touristic development.

## References

WEICHHART Peter (1990): Raumbezogene Identität: Bausteine zu einer Theorie räumlich-sozialer Kognition und Identifikation, Stuttgart.

In-depth interviews in the context of the MAB-Project „Redesigning Biosphere Reserve Lake Neusiedl“ in Austria 2006/07 and the OMAA-Project “Landscape research on Hungarian and Austrian side of Lake Neusiedl/Fertő“ in Hungary 2008.

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