

Arguing for effective biodiversity conservation in the Lower Danube Catchment, Romania



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Context

Different policies and management plans developed and implemented over the years in the Romanian Lower Danube River Catchment (RoLDC) had a wide range of long term objectives for agriculture and nature conservation, mainly achieved through conventional protection of particular endangered species. The transition from this sectoral approach to nature conservation to a sustainable management of RoLDC, in accordance with international and European conventions, strategies and directives, generated conflicts between objectives of sectoral policies and those aimed at biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

The case study was carried out in the Romanian Lower Danube River Catchment (RoLDC) focusing on the Small Islands of Braila Nature Park (SIBr) area (Fig. 1) – a remnant wetland that still preserves the biological diversity and the full range of ecosystem's functions.

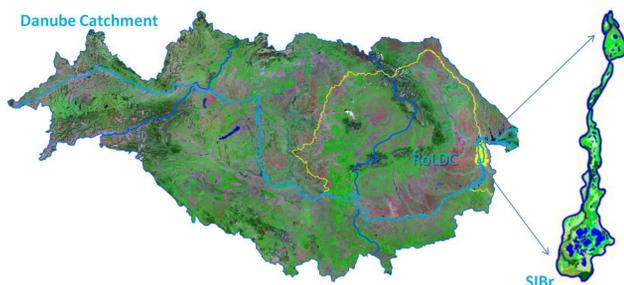


Figure 1. The study area – Small Island of Braila Nature Park in the Romanian Lower Danube River Catchment.

Arguments

This analysis follows the evolution, efficiency and shortcomings of the arguments used for conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity, that played crucial roles in obtaining formal protected area status (Ramsar Site, Natura 2000 site, Natural Park) and in the process of development and implementation of management plans.



The main argumentation lines covered aspects regarding:

- the uniqueness of the area arising from the rich diversity of landscape and species,
- the natural importance of the area as remnant wetland from the large Lower Danube Wetland System,
- the importance of protected areas for providing resources and services to local communities and
- the compliance with national, European and international legislation for nature conservation.

Framing

Stakeholders of the study area include both individuals and groups of people who influence the management measures in the area – “influential stakeholder” – and those who have no influence, but are directly affected by the planned changes, and whose interests should be considered by the decision-makers.

Figure 2 shows the main stakeholders identified that are, or should directly or indirectly be involved in policy development and decision-making in management of the SIBr area.

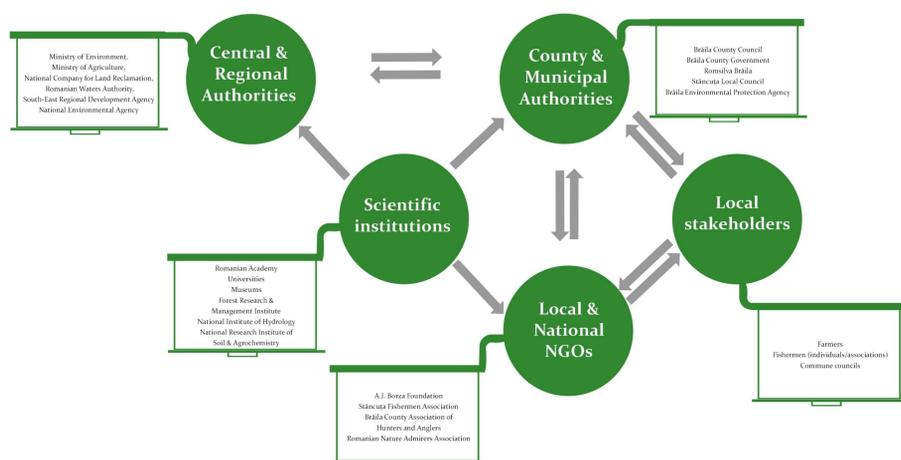


Figure 2. The map of stakeholders of the Small Islands of Braila area. Note: → one way influence; ↔ two way influence

A summary of the frequencies of the different argument type categories put forward by each of the main stakeholder groups is provided in Fig. 3 below:

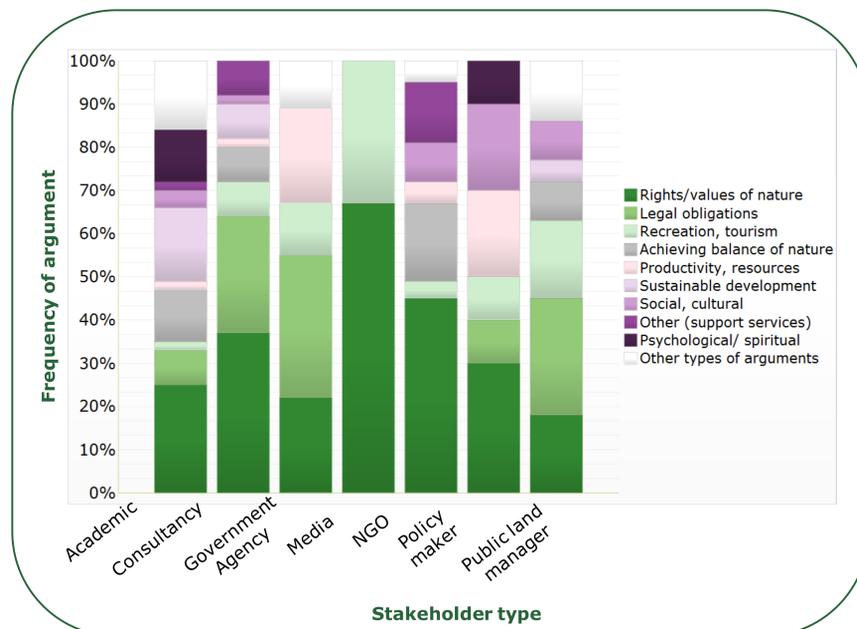


Figure 3. Argument frequency per stakeholder category (% of type argument/ all identified arguments)

Effectiveness

An argument is considered to have an effect when, after being placed in one given event related to a certain level of the decision making process it changes a behaviour or changes another arguments used in another event.

- At higher levels of political/decisional cycle (e.g. regional - Strategy for fishing area, international - designation as Ramsar Site, Natura 2000 site), the argumentation appealed to more general concepts (e.g. as *uses and non-uses values of nature*), scientific and ethical argumentation being more effective at this level.
- Legal arguments (imposed by protected area regulation), issued at national level had a higher effect at local level.
- Arguments emphasizing direct benefits were effective both at local level (for local population, as well as local authorities when implementing the management plans or reconstruction works) and at national level (in the procedure for designation the Natural Park statute).

Transferability

Arguments that proved to have a high efficiency in the studied area could be a good example to other similar areas - either from the point of view of landscape characteristics or from the point of view of national/international statute recognition. However, since there cannot be identical areas/situations/contexts, arguments should always be adapted, reformulated in order to meet specific conditions, although general characteristics, proved to be efficient, can be followed.

Lessons learned

- The success of an argument for biodiversity conservation depends on how it is properly adjusted to different stakeholders' perceptions of values of nature
- Ensuring a common language for all involved stakeholders is a key condition in order to achieve the highest effectiveness of the used arguments in the biodiversity conservation process
- Communications on biodiversity issues need to be in a manner that is related to people's everyday life experiences and in more popular terms in order to achieve an efficient and sustainable management of resources and services provided by natural ecosystems



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