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Global Business Transformation in a Turbulent Era

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Global Business Transformation in a Turbulent Era

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KEY FEATURES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF THE POĽANA BIOSPHERE RESERVE

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ABSTRACT

Current global challenges highlight the need for smart use of limited resources and sustainable development of territories. Biosphere reserves as model territories represent an environment where biodiversity conservation with sustainable development is essential. These territories, based on the harmony of man and nature, should be smart managed through strategic spatial planning in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. The aim of the paper is to evaluate the current approach to the strategic planning of the biosphere reserves and on the example of the Poľana Biosphere Reserve to develop the key recommendations for its sustainable development strategy. The case study of Poľana Biosphere Reserve includes the SWOT analysis of the partial territorial potentials, which is supplemented by the assessment of the quality of life on its territory by its inhabitants through a questionnaire. The discussion and conclusion present a TOWS synthesis of the results of the analyses, based on which, together with examples of good practice, are formulated the key recommendations for the development strategy of the Poľana Biosphere Reserve.

Keywords: sustainable development, territory potential, Poľana Biosphere Reserve

INTRODUCTION

Biosphere reserve (BR) as an internationally recognized territory within the framework of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme, consisting of terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems and their combination, is devoted to strengthening sustainable development and supporting local solutions to global challenges, through connecting and preserving biodiversity with its sustainable use and development (UNESCO, 2022). The task is not only to preserve the natural heritage of the territory, but also cultural components in the form of traditions and a lifestyle of the people in the given territory, or their behaviour and socialization within the society belonging to this territory. (Lepeška, 2012; UNESCO, 2022). The development of BR is based on the participative approach, so the

local community as well as environment should benefit from the status of biosphere reserve (UNESCO, 2021; Turečková and Nevima, 2019).

However, the issue of sustainable development of BR is not paid adequate attention. The authors (Batisse, 1997; Ishwaran et. al, 2008; Ishwaran, 2012; König et al., 2022; Reed and Price, 2020; Bridgewater, 2002; UNESCO, 1996; UNESCO, 2015) stress the need of sustainable development within the transitional zone of BR, but there are less studies focusing on the strategical approach and its practical implementation (Yazdandoost, 2019; Van Cuong et. al, 2017; Gehrlein et. al., 2019; Jungmeier et. al, 2011; Mai, 2012; Vaňová et. al, 2023; Engelbauer, 2023). That is why the aim of the paper is to evaluate the current approach to the strategic planning of the biosphere reserves and on the example of the Polana Biosphere Reserve to develop the key recommendations for its sustainable development strategy.

The paper presents partial results of the project APVV-20-0108 Implementation of Agenda 2030 through biosphere reserves.

1. BIOSPHERE RESERVE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

The development of a BR reflects the specifics of spatial development (Maier, 2012; Vaňová 2006) as an economic and a social process that aims to create a viable and productive territory and build the long-term competitive advantage based on the use of spatial potential. Moreover, it also reflects the political, social needs of the community of the territory and the development of employment opportunities, equality, justice, participation and independence in the territory. Vitálišová, et. al (2021) support this approach as suitable for application in BRs and add that "their development will never be able to be based on progressive industrial development but should be based on the use of soft factors of development in combination with the exceptional natural potential."

The BR development is based on exploitation of the endogenous potential of the BR in line with the endogenous growth theory (Arestis et. al, 2007; Bharadwaj et. al, 2005; (Ivaničková in Gerulová, Kováč, 2010; Hontyová and Lisý, 1999; Svidroňová and Mikuš, 2014). Moreover, BRs can be seen also as objects of the theory of learning regions, in which knowledge and the capacity to learn and innovate are key factors for development. (Blažek and Uhlíř, 2021).

Sustainable development of the BR must reflect four functions which BR fulfill. They include a protection of biodiversity, ecosystems, and the landscape; affecting the social or cultural system; a support of science, research, and education with an emphasis on building partnerships at the local, regional and international level, (ŠOPSR, 2022; UNESCO, 2015; UNESCO, 2022; Vitálišová et. al, 2022;

Turečková et al., 2023; Sýkorová, 2023) and supporting mitigation and adaptation to climate change and other aspects of global environmental change (Špulerová et al., 2023).

Strategic planning in territories seeks to coordinate activities in the territory and to respect existing interest groups, aligning individual objectives. It is desirable to apply a demand-oriented (marketing) approach, which complements the traditional approach by identifying the needs of target groups, creating conditions for the effective use of the territory, the operation of the functions and activities of the territory based on the collectively set objectives (Vitálišová et al., 2017, Vaňová, 2006). To achieve a higher level of success in strategic planning is necessary the adapting planning cycles to the needs of individual companies, territories, stakeholders, citizens, etc., by introducing a strategic performance management system, or by integrating human resources systems into the strategic plan. (Dye and Sibony, 2007). This approach is possible applied also in the BRs, where the rules given by the Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO support this approach (UNESCO, 2021). The strategy of the BR should cover a multi-year period, be formulated through a participatory process, and adopted by the relevant decision-making body. UNESCO gives several reasons why a strategy for a biosphere reserve is necessary, e. g. coordination of activities, funding for the national government or potential donors; in-depth engagement with stakeholders and meeting their expectations, etc.

In the Slovak Republic, the current valid document that should be followed by the BRs is an Action Plan for the implementation of the UNESCO MAB Programme and the World Network of Biosphere Reserves in the Slovak Republic for the years 2018 to 2025, (ŠOPSR, 2022; Et. al., 2014; Ministry of the Environment; Rojíková, Orviský and Mihók, 2022; Urban, Miňová, 2024). To the other regulations that influence the strategic planning of BRs include spatial-planning and environmental programs and plans (the Territorial Ecological Stability System, Local Territorial Ecological Stability System, Regional Territorial Ecological Stability System, Landscape-ecological Plan, Territorial Planning of self-governing regions and Municipalities, District Development Action Plan, Visitors' Regulations of Protected Areas, and Programmes for Economic and Social Development of Municipalities and the Region). At the national level, the strategical planning of BRs have to adapt to the Habitats/Birds Directive, Management plan for Natura 2000 area, National Park Care Programme, Species Conservation Plan, National Programme Documents touching on nature and landscape conservation, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, Concept of Nature and Landscape Conservation, Development Strategy of State Nature Conservation of the Slovak Republic, or Communication and Interpretation Strategies for Nature Conservation, Enviro-strategy 2030 and Enviro-strategies of self-governing regions.

The fact remains that the key strategic documents and concepts mentioned above focus primarily on nature conservation and the environment of the areas concerned. Some of them belong to the

landscape ecological plans, that regulate the rational forms of the use of renewable and non-renewable resources while preserving all the natural, aesthetic, and cultural values of the country (Belčáková, 2013). However, the attention pays to overall socio-economic development is very limited, by this way it abstracts also from the development function of the BRs. Although key documents in biosphere reserves can be complemented by sectoral documentation, i.e. programme documents in specific areas of life in the territory (especially in the field of tourism development, support for business activities with an emphasis on agriculture, food industry, crafts, culture, e.g. Rural Development Programme, Strategic Plan of the Common Agricultural Policy, documentation of individual sectors, e.g. Tourism Development Plan, Water Plan, etc.), their real consideration and interconnection with the priorities of biosphere reserves is questionable in the conditions of Slovakia (Vitálišová et. al, 2021). An exception is partly the Poľana Biosphere Reserve, which, through its representatives and the civic association Coordination Council Poľana Biosphere Reserve, has been actively participating since 2013 in the processes aimed at setting priorities and strategies for the development of municipalities within the Poľana Biosphere Reserve, which is why it is also an object of our research and a case of good practice in Slovakia.

Essential for the development of BRs is also a support of the government and the involvement of stakeholders falling directly within or outside the territory (Walk et al., 2019). The promoting the collection and integration of knowledge, expertise and experience from different stakeholders is a core of participative governance of the biosphere reserve and contribute to its development based on collaboration (Mehmood, et al., 2023). The added value of participative governance is also the appreciation of the importance of natural and cultural heritage for the development of the state, its policies, and its conservation, which contributes to ecological sustainability. Bridgewater (2002) states that "ultimately, information gained from scientific research must be incorporated into meaningful management practices, and management must have a greater influence on research priorities. Both research and management need to be people-centred and directly linked to policy formulation. Ecological sustainability is a human-created ideal and will only be achieved through appropriate human behaviour. Biosphere reserves, as special places for people and nature, are a key tool for developing a truly sustainable system."

2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The presented case study of Poľana Biosphere Reserve is based on the secondary data from the official statistical sources and officially published information on the website of stakeholders, municipalities within the BR. The source of primary data were personal unstructured interviews with representatives of the Poľana BR (manager and coordinator of biosphere reserve) and local stakeholders (local

entrepreneurs, local action group, members of civil association Coordination Council of the BR Poľana). The second part of primary data set were results of the questionnaire survey among citizens of Poľana BR aimed at the evaluation of the quality of life in the BR Poľana. Data collection was conducted from November 2022 to August 2023. The research sample consisted of 101 respondents from 19 to 60+ years. The survey was conducted electronically via Qualtrics Survey, shared via email, social media as well as personally. The research sample is representative by gender (Chi-square test - Asymp. Sig. = 0,136) and age (Chi-square test - Asymp. Sig. = 0,051). To process the collected data, we used basic mathematical and statistical methods. For testing and data analysis we used the Friedman test and Wilcoxon test through SPSS program and MS Excel application.

To systematize the gain data and evaluate them we used a SWOT analysis. It assesses the external and internal environment based on the expert assessment of 10 experts from the practice (-2 - weakest point, greatest threat, +2 - strongest point, greatest opportunity) who have professional competence and direct relationship with the researched biosphere reserve and the results of the questionnaire survey. These results were subsequently transformed into the TOWS synthesis.

The object of our research is the Poľana BR, which was declared the second biosphere reserve in Slovakia. It is located in the central part of Slovakia. The Poľana Mountain, the best-preserved tertiary volcano in Slovakia, has been protected since 1981 as part of the Poľana Protected Landscape Area with its director, what is also the head of the biosphere reserve. In 1990, the protected area was included in the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves for its exceptionally high natural and landscape value. Spanning an area of 24,158.23 hectares, it comprises a core zone of 1,333 hectares, a buffer zone of 7,930 hectares, and a transition zone of 11,097 hectares. With its pinnacle reaching 1458 meters and its base resting at 460 meters above sea level, the landscape bears testimony to its volcanic origins, boasting a diverse array of geological features including imposing rock formations, cascading waterfalls, and rugged lava flows. Blanketing 85% of the reserve's expanse are diverse forests, ranging from oak to spruce, while over 86% of the land is under the stewardship of Forests Slovakia. This unique landscape serves as an ideal backdrop for ecotourism, characterized by a patchwork of cultivated fields interspersed with meadows and pastures, often bordered by thickets of willows, brambles, and wild cherries. Traditional agricultural practices such as hand scythe mowing and sheep grazing lend a timeless charm to the region, complemented by quaint wooden settlements featuring distinctive structures like house, haylofts, and farm buildings. Adding to the allure of the landscape are intricately painted wooden crosses and a rich tapestry of folk-art traditions, deeply rooted in the region's folklore and customs, embodying the spirit of the local community (Vitálišová, Vavrúšová, Piscová, 2023). It includes 13 cadastral territories - municipalities Detva, Dúbravy, Hriňová in Detva district; municipality Očová as part of the Zvolen district; municipalities Hrochoť, Lubietová, Poniky,

Povrazník as part of the Banská Bystrica district and Čierny Balog, Hronec, Sihla, Strelníky, Valaská in the Brezno district (Urban, 2016)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the research results, we focused on the evaluation of the partial potentials of the Poľana Biosphere. The first component of the potential is a natural-geographic potential, the so-called environmental identity of the Poľana BR. This component includes the potential of abiotic and biotic components of the territory and secondary landscape structure (Urban, 2016). The second component of the potential is the socio-economic potential of the Poľana BR. This component represents the socio-economic conditions of the area given by its unique location and territory, specific products, but also the social capital in the area. The third component of the potential is the socio-demographic potential of the Poľana BR. This component is formed by the possibilities and capacity of the human capital of the territory. The last, fourth component of the potential is the innovation potential of the Poľana BR. This potential represents research and education conditions and environment, cultural diversification, background for new ideas, innovations or third sector activities in the area. The evaluation of each potential is based on the average assessment by the representatives of the biosphere reserves as well as by the experts from practice.

Natural-geographic potential			
Strengths	EA	Weaknesses	EA
Variety and species richness of fauna	1,9	Overgrowth of selected animal species (brown bear)	-0,9
Unique surface shapes in the territory	1,8	Overexploitation of natural resources	-0,5
Unique topography of the territory	1,7	Loss of natural symbiosis (man and nature, reduction of grassland, change in natural habitat composition)	-0,3
Diverse forest system	1,7		
A large number of important animal species	1,7	Water pollution	-0,3
Opportunities	EA	Threats	EA
Possibility of drawing EU funds in partnerships and for joint development projects	1,4	Climate change	-1,3
Eco-forms of tourism development	1,3		
New practices in the care and preservation of fauna and flora	1	Damage to ecosystems and biodiversity from the negative impacts of human and animal activities.	-0,7
Lifestyle change focused in leisure time spent with the search for peace, relaxation	0,8		
Socio-economic potential			
Strengths	EA	Weaknesses	EA
Unique folklore and ethnography	2	Lack of promotion of the territory	-1,1
Exceptional food products	1,4	Undiversified range of services	-1
Agricultural and forestry opportunities	1,2	Small value attributed to the BR title (missed opportunities)	-0,9
Possibilities and conditions for hiking and sports and relaxation activities	1,2	Disappearance of traditional agricultural practices of farmers in the territory	-0,7

Easy access to the territory	0,6	Poor service infrastructure (restaurants, shops, health services, etc.)	-0,7
Opportunities	EA	Threats	EA
Possibilities of drawing EU funds in partnerships and for joint development projects	1,4	The outflow of the young generation	-1,4
Eco-forms of tourism development	1,1	Population ageing	-1,3
Activities of regional tourism organizations suitable for wider promotion of the territory and products	1	Lack of support at national level for the preservation of such ethnologically specific territories	-1
		High rise in cost of living, inflation, rising energy prices	-0,9
Completion of transport infrastructure of self-governing regions and at national level	0,9	Lack of interest of the young generation in traditions, traditional crafts	-0,8
Socio-demographic potential			
Strengths	EA	Weaknesses	EA
Knowledge of traditional product creation practices by locals	0,9	Outflow of young inhabitants from the territory	-1,6
Manually skilled population	0,7	Predomination of the elderly population	-1,2
Low population density	0,4	Low number of job opportunities in the territory	-0,9
Conditions and means for creating new jobs	0,3	Loss of interest in traditional crafts and lack of generational renewal	-0,7
Opportunities	EA	Threats	EA
Possibilities of drawing EU funds in partnerships and for joint development projects	1,4	Consumerist lifestyle	-1,4
Networking of entities leading to the development of partnerships	1,3		
New job opportunities through ecotourism development	1,3	Growing share of silver population	-1,1
Increasing the rate of promotion of the territory, leading to an increase in its integrity	1,1		
Development of dual education	0,8	High rise in cost of living, inflation, rising energy prices	-0,8
Changes in lifestyle preferences of potential residents and its promotion	0,7		
Innovative potential			
Strengths	EB	Weaknesses	EB
Existence and activities of representatives of the Poľana Protected Landscape Area and the Coordination Council of the BR Poľana	1,5	Lack of interest in BR	-1,4
		Lack of awareness among stakeholders	-0,7
Existence and implementation of the research projects in cooperation with the BR Poľana	1,2	Means and conditions for research and innovation in the territory	-0,1
Opportunities	EB	Threats	EB
Possibilities of drawing EU funds in partnerships and for joint development projects	1,5	Insufficient financial, capacity and legislative support for BR	-1,7
Possibilities of support of science, research, education through various domestic and foreign grant schemes	1,4		
Increasing the extent of stakeholder networking and taking advantage of the existence of the Poľana Biosphere Reserve	1,2		

Table 1 SWOT analysis of the potential of Biosphere Reserve Poľana by expert assessment

Secondly, we present the results of the analysis of the assessment of the quality of life in the Pořana BR by its inhabitants. The selected research results present figure 1.

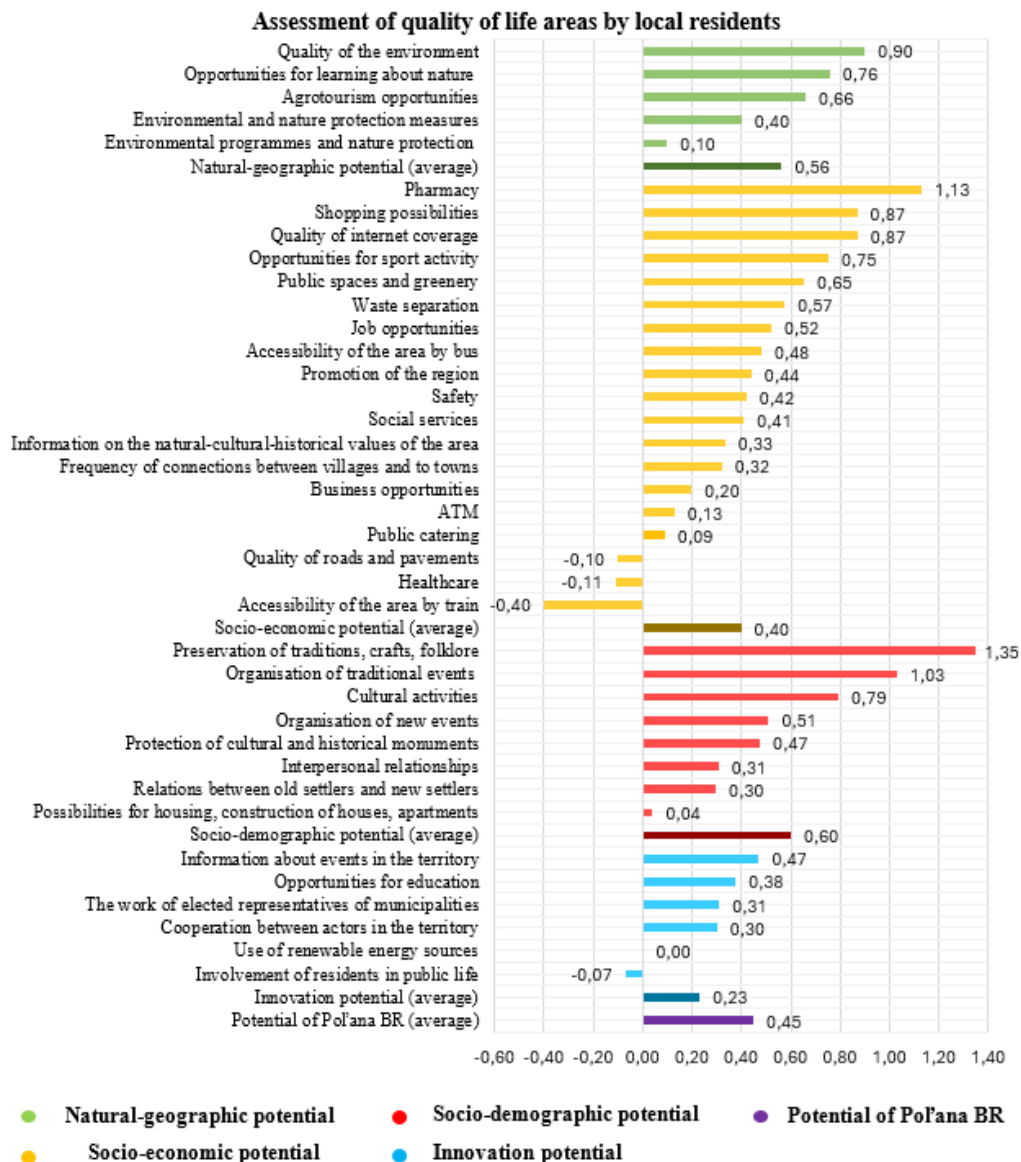


Figure 1 Assessment of quality-of-life areas by residents

The figure 1 illustrates the average scores of all respondents in each aspect of life in the area evaluated on a scale of -2 (dissatisfied) to +2 (satisfied). Within the natural-geographic potential, residents rated the areas of environmental quality (0,90), opportunities to explore nature (0,76), and the possibility of agro-tourism (0,66) as the highest quality of life. The least quality according to residents are programs in the area of environmental and nature protection. The top ranked quality of life area in socio-economic potential according to residents is pharmacy (1,13), followed by shopping options (0,87) and quality of internet coverage (0,87). Residents rank the area's accessibility by train (-0,40), health services (-0,11) and the quality of roads and sidewalks (-0,10) as the least quality of life. Regarding

socio-demographic potential, residents are most satisfied with the area of preserving traditions, crafts, folklore (1,35) and the organization of traditional events (1,03). They are least satisfied with the possibilities for housing, construction of houses, flats (0,04). On average, the respondents rate the socio-demographic potential with a value of 0,60. The last potential examined is the innovation potential, within which residents are most satisfied with information about events in the territory (0,47) and with opportunities for education (0,38). They are least satisfied with the residents' involvement in public life (-0,07). To conclude, the inhabitants are most satisfied with the areas of socio-demographic potential, which are mainly related to the preservation of traditions, crafts and folklore, or culture and the organization of traditional events in the territory. This is followed by the natural-geographical potential, which is dominated by the quality of the environment, and the socio-economic potential, which is also the area with which the inhabitants are most dissatisfied, in terms of accessibility, the quality of infrastructure and the quality of services in the territory. Nevertheless, the socio-economic potential exceeds the overall average rating for innovation potential. The overall evaluation of the potential is presented by the violet color as an average evaluation of all potential components.

The findings through the Friedman test showed that the residents of the Biosphere Reserve rank the preservation of traditions, crafts, folklore, shopping opportunities, cultural activities, opportunities to explore nature and the organization of traditional events among the areas with which they are most satisfied. The residents are least satisfied with the quality of roads and footpaths and the accessibility of the area. However, residents also ranked areas such as: frequency of connections between villages to towns, business opportunities, opportunities for housing, construction of houses and apartments, or promotion of the region, cooperation of actors in the territory and the work of elected representatives of towns and villages among these areas. They were also less satisfied with the following areas: public catering, ATM, job opportunities and information about the natural and cultural-historical values of the territory. The Wilcoxon test showed that the findings on satisfaction with the preservation of traditions, crafts and folklore and dissatisfaction with the accessibility of the territory by train can be statistically generalized to all inhabitants of the Poľana Biosphere Reserve.

Subsequently, based on the results of the questionnaire survey as well as the SWOT analysis of the potentials we elaborated the TOWS synthesis in figure 2.

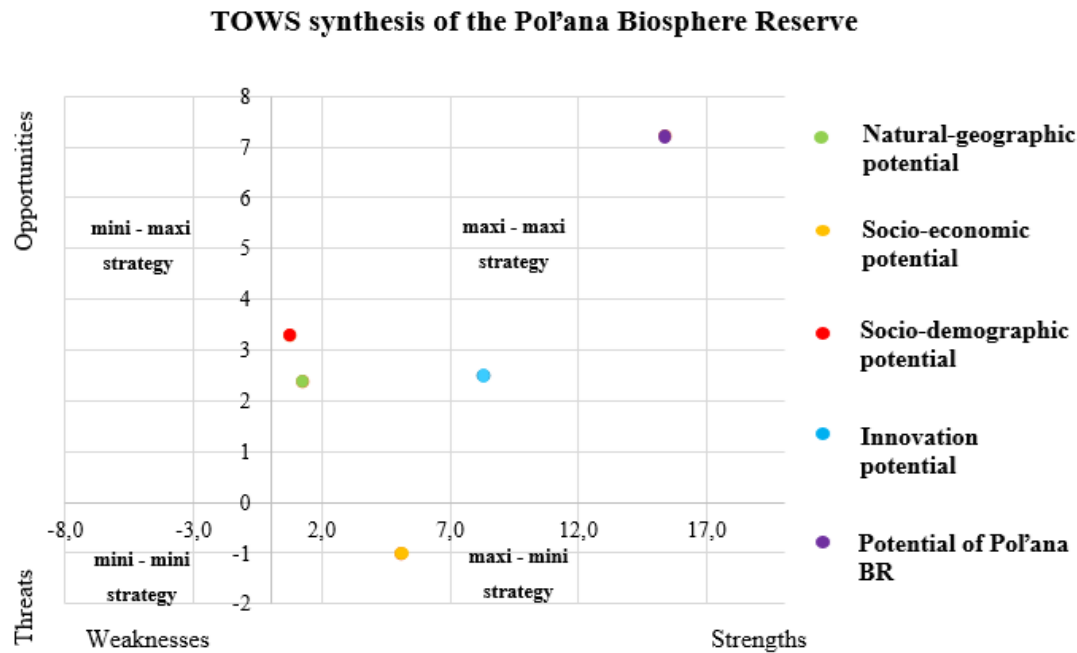


Figure 2. TOWS synthesis of the Poľana Biosphere Reserve

The summary assessment of the natural-geographic potential is located in quadrant 1. The area has several strengths, which are mainly represented by the diversity and species richness of the fauna and the unique surface formations. It also has strong opportunities, which in this case are the possibilities of drawing on EU funds in partnerships and for joint development projects or eco-forms of tourism development. Thus, the appropriate development strategy is the maxi-maxi strategy, based on developing strengths and maximizing the use of opportunities. The socio-economic potential of the biosphere reserve is in quadrant 4. It means that this potential has strengths but is dominated by threats, i.e., it is a maxi-mini strategy. The threats are mainly the outflow of the young generation from the area, the ageing of the population, or the lack of support at national level for the conservation of such an ethnologically specific area. Strengths are in particular the unique folklore and ethnography, the exceptional food products, the agricultural and forestry possibilities, and the opportunities and conditions for tourism and sports and leisure activities. In this case, the strengths should be exploited as much as possible, and the territory should try to avoid potential threats. They also influence the socio-demographic potential, which is located in quadrant 1, where we see strong opportunities but also strengths. The strongest opportunities within this potential are the possibilities to draw on EU funds in partnerships and for joint development projects, the networking of actors leading to the development of partnerships, new job opportunities, or an increase in the level of promotion of the territory leading to an increase in its integrity. The strengths of this potential are, in particular, the knowledge of traditional methods of creating products by local people, the preservation of traditions, crafts and folklore, the organisation of various traditional events and the manual skills of the population. Again, this is a maxi-maxi strategy, the essence of which should be to develop strengths

and maximise the use of opportunities. The innovation potential, as well as the natural-geographic potential and the socio-demographic potential, is located in quadrant 1, and thus the maxi-maxi strategy is recommended. There is a prevalence of strengths represented by the existence and activities of the representatives of the Poľana Protected Landscape Area and the Coordination Council Poľana BR, as well as the existence and implementation of the research projects in cooperation with the Poľana BR. Within this potential, we also have relatively strong opportunities, which are mainly formed by the possibility of drawing funds from the EU funds, the possibility of supporting science, research and education through various domestic and foreign grant schemes, or an increased level of networking of stakeholders and taking advantage of the existence of the reserve. The sum of the assessments was then used to identify an overall potential assessment, which is located in quadrant 1, which means that the Poľana Biosphere Reserve has a prevalence of strengths and opportunities, thus the recommended overall development strategy is the maxi-maxi strategy. Nevertheless, the prevalence of threats in the socio-economic potential and several weaknesses in the socio-demographic potential need to be taken into account.

The strategic planning framework of the Poľana BR use the methodology that reflects the recommendations of UNESCO (2021) and experts on the topic as Vaňová (2006); Vitálišová et. al, (2022); Urban, Miňová, (2024); Vitálišová et. al, (2021). The detailed analysis showed that there should be implemented a maxi-maxi strategy. However, this rather offensive strategy could mean a threat to the Poľana BR, which could be a threat to some of its strongest assets as richness of the flora and fauna. Therefore, the particularities and specificity of this environment should be respected. On the basis of the research findings or examples of good practice from abroad, we propose key recommendations of a strategy for the sustainable development of the Poľana BR. They are softer in nature and that support the sustainable development of the BR but do not threaten it.

Firstly, the common vision and aims for the strategical development of the Biosphere Reserve Poľana should be defined with active involvement of relevant stakeholders. Based on the research results, we can identify three main areas of development. The first one is the empowerment and opportunities for the local population with focus on the support for local producers, particularly craftsmen, farmers, and food producers, and by this way on promoting traditional agriculture and specific local products. Collaboration among regional trademarks brands could enhance marketing networks and promotion efforts. The Poľana BR has great agricultural land but faces challenges in lack of skilled workers and regular sels for its products. Collaborating with local farmers, restaurants, and schools to source and promote locally produced goods could enhance interest and strengthen the catering sector. A model from the Luberon Lure Biosphere Reserve in France, the 'From the farm to your canteen' project, demonstrates how connecting producers with school canteens can promote healthy eating with locally

sourced ingredients. Established in 2009, the project has enabled numerous municipalities to incorporate significant percentages of local and organic produce into their daily school meals. The second area is a support of the sustainable tourism development, particularly through ecotourism and rural tourism, ensuring harmony between tourist flow, environmental protection, and local well-being. BR boasts four main hiking trails, suitable for cycling, and potential for winter sports like cross-country skiing. Other attractions are traditional folklore festivals and culture presentation. The however, the society is struggling with several problems such as the migration of young people, the alienation of the population, the loss of interest in traditional agriculture, etc. Therefore, ecotourism represents the development of activities that are respectful of the unique nature, but at the same time create opportunities for the local population and for the empowerment of areas with which they are not satisfied. Through ecotourism, residents can find new jobs or new business opportunities in the newly offered services, or, by bringing back those that have disappeared, increase their income and standard of living. Addressing these weaknesses through ecotourism initiatives can enhance the area's appeal while preserving its natural beauty and benefiting local communities. The third area of recommendations is oriented on strengthening public awareness and partnership in the territory. Although the area has great potential, if it is not sufficiently promoted among inhabitants as well as for visitors. The promotional activities are done more or less as voluntarily by the administrator of the biosphere reserve, which is reflected in the range of activities. Educational initiatives, including workshops and conferences, are conducted by the Poľana Protected Landscape Area at a high professional level. The promotion of the biosphere reserve as an "ecotourism destination" should be enhanced through systematic collaboration with local actors and communities. Drawing inspiration from the Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve, creating a network of information points could improve visitor experience and educational outreach. Biosphere reserve managers play a crucial role in regional development, actively promoting economic and social activities while preserving the area's identity and culture. However, there is a need to raise awareness among the local population about the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme and the role of the Coordination Council Poľana Biosphere Reserve. Despite efforts through various channels such as websites and social media, there is a perceived lack of information about the BR's natural and cultural values. Engagement of inhabitants is essential for the success of development activities in the reserve. Case studies from Italy highlight the importance of community involvement, which aligns with the positive perception of living within the biosphere reserve among residents and mayors (Mondino, Beery, 2019). Strengthening educational efforts, particularly among different age groups, can further enhance community engagement and support for the reserve's sustainable development goals.

CONCLUSIONS

The strategic development planning of the BR is an underdeveloped issue, which importance has increasing dramatically especially because of the great climatic changes. In the paper, we applied the strategical planning framework in the BR Pořana as a pilot, where we tested the methodology of analysis based on analysis SWOT and synthesis TOWS. The analysis was based on the evaluation of the BR potential - natural, geographic, socio-economic, socio-demographic and innovative. Based on the potential evaluation, we formulated the recommendations for the development activities. The synthesis TOWS indicates as the most suitable maxi-maxi strategy, leveraging strengths and maximizing opportunities. However, the delicate balance between development and environmental preservation must be maintained to safeguard the reserve's unique biodiversity and landscape.

Key recommendations include defining a common vision for development with stakeholder involvement, focusing on empowering the local population through support for traditional agriculture and ecotourism initiatives based on the uniqueness of the natural and socio-cultural wealth in the Pořana BR. The activities within these priorities could strengthen the interest in the territory, tourism, traditional agriculture, and help solving the problem of the outflow of young people from the territory, who would be motivated to stay and find a job, increase their income, skill level and standard of living, through the newly created job opportunities or the completion of the infrastructure that ecotourism will offer. (Vitálišová and Vavruřová, 2023; Vitálišová et. al., 2023).

Effective collaboration among stakeholders, including biosphere reserve managers, local communities, and policymakers, is crucial for successful implementation. By aligning strategies with the reserve's unique attributes and addressing existing challenges, the Pořana BR can realize its full potential as a model for sustainable development while preserving its natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

The pilot testing of the methodology for the strategic planning of BR showed that it can a suitable approach for these specific territories. It meets the rules of UNESCO guidelines and brings the added value in looking for the stakeholders 'consensus in development activities. Moreover, it opens also the new research areas, as identification of the most suitable control mechanism, useful tools of participatory governance in BR or "correct" division of power and tasks among stakeholders in BR, etc.

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