COMMON METHODS TO MAINTAIN ENGAGEMENT AMONG REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism
Deliverable DT1.1.3

Rosalind Bryce and Diana Valero, University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland

October 2017

SHAPE, 2017

SHA   Sustainable Heritage Areas

1. Introduction

Maintaining stakeholder engagement over the course of SHAPE and beyond the end of the project is key to ensuring the success of the sustainable ecotourism initiatives implemented and developed by SHAPE. The processes by which this is done will develop as work with stakeholders progresses and will depend on the ways in which stakeholders prefer to engage with the project. There has been considerable discussion between partners on the challenges associated with engaging stakeholders and maintaining their engagement (see DT1.1.2). The work done within the WPC – Communication is a key part of maintaining engagement through dissemination of project newsletters, posters and social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook.

2. Common methods to maintain engagement among regional stakeholder groups

2.1. Understanding stakeholder motivations and expectations

As explained in DT1.1.2, stakeholders will engage with SHAPE if the objectives and activities of the project are aligned with stakeholder motivations and if stakeholders understand what they may gain by investing their time in being involved. Stakeholder views on preferred means of communication and engagement will be gathered using a questionnaire associated with the first regional stakeholder meetings (see DT1.1.2). Efforts should be made to engage stakeholders via preferred formats and languages in a way that aligns with the geographical specificities of SHAs (see DT1.1.2). For example, in areas where groups and communities are separated by large distances, engagement may need to be targeted at groups in different areas. Similarly, if there are tensions or conflicts between different stakeholder groups, it may be necessary to engage groups separately in certain activities.

2.2. Building on existing partnerships

Where possible, SHAPE will capitalise on existing partnerships, collaborations and projects ongoing in SHAs. This should motivate stakeholders who wish to be involved with the growth and development of sustainable ecotourism initiatives. It is important to create links with existing projects and learn from past initiatives so that stakeholders feel that there is a logical development in the SHA that takes account of past experience (both positive and negative) and directly builds on previous exercises in stakeholder engagement.

In addition, it is beneficial to identify highly motivated stakeholders (e.g. SHAPE ambassadors or local champions) who have high social capital and interest in SHAPE activities. The involvement of such

individuals would promote awareness of SHAPE and facilitate the engagement of other stakeholders and the wider community.

2.3. Consideration and design of specific events for target groups e.g. youth, minority and indigenous groups (based on early stakeholder consultation)

The stakeholder identification processes (DT.1.1.1) will highlight target groups for engagement. Ensuring effective engagement with youth is a common theme across the SHAs. This will require specific events with a format that is attractive to younger people. Using film media has been discussed between SHAPE partners as a potentially effective way of engaging both with youth and other parts of communities, and will be explored as the project progresses. There is also scope to develop training and educational opportunities with stakeholders that would could provide both a common priority for stakeholders to unite around, and attractive opportunities for young people and other members of local communities. Training topics could include business development, work experience in different sectors, internships for college/university students in management of natural/cultural heritage assets etc.

2.4. **Co-development of SHAPE activities**

The SHAPE project has been structured to optimise the participation of stakeholders. By inviting stakeholders to participate in regional workshops to identify natural and cultural assets, challenges and solutions, activities for each SHA will be developed from the bottom up. Stakeholders should also be involved where possible in the management of the SHAPE outputs in each SHA. For example they should have key roles in, updating the maps as described in DT.2.1.2, development of the ecotourism initiatives, etc.   This will give stakeholders and communities a sense of ownership of the activities, which will increase the likelihood of their continued engagement.

2.5 Transparency and Feedback

Maintaining good communications with the stakeholders is vital for maintaining stakeholder engagement (DT.1.1.2 and Abrahamsen, 2017). The SHAPE partners will share information with the stakeholders in the different SHAs and with the wider community through the future e-service. Ensuring that this resource is relevant and responds to stakeholder demands is critical to its future uptake and impact.

Transparency about the aims of the project and local activities is necessary to create a positive context for the stakeholders' collaboration and engagement and to manage expectations. Providing stakeholders with ongoing feedback about how their contributions are influencing the development of project activities in the SHA is an important step in this process.

2.6 Learning journeys

The SHAPE learning journeys will be a core way of promoting and maintaining stakeholder engagement both within and between SHAs. The opportunity to travel to another country to discuss challenges and to input into ongoing SHAPE initiatives will be attractive to regional stakeholders. The

experience should provide fresh perspectives on regional issues and provide motivation for further engagement in SHAPE activities.

2.7. Monitoring and evaluating stakeholder engagement

It is important to have a means of monitoring progress with stakeholder engagement and there are a number of ways of doing this. Simple metrics on the numbers and diversity of stakeholders that attend the regional workshops and how these change over time will allow partners to track general engagement. Brief and targeted questionnaires disseminated at each regional workshops are an effective way of monitoring stakeholder perceptions of project direction and activities over time. In this way, stakeholders should feel as though they have a voice and an influence on the management of activities in the project. For the same reason, it is important to carefully manage stakeholder expectations in terms of how project activities can realistically be developed as part of SHAPE. Successful engagement can also be measured in terms of the commitment expressed by stakeholders towards partnerships and the development of initiatives. An objective of SHAPE is to secure long-term cooperation that will have a legacy beyond the end of SHAPE and this should be a positive message conveyed to stakeholders during the project.

Acknowledgments

References

Abrahamsen, 2017. SHAPE – Communications strategy. Internal document, Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism (SHAPE)

Bryce, R., 2017. Common methods to identify stakeholder groups and interactions. Deliverable 1.1.1, Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism (SHAPE). pp. 12

Bryce, R., and Valero, D., 2017. Common methods for regional stakeholder meetings. Deliverable 1.1.2, Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism (SHAPE). pp. 6

Sigurðardóttir, R., Bryce, R., Valero, D. and Price, M., 2017. Common participatory processes to map assets and assess climate change impacts. Deliverable 2.1.2, Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism (SHAPE). pp. 9