

Concepts of Sustainable & Rural Tourism Developments

An investigation into factors of success in participatory planning approaches

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Aim

To establish criteria for successful implementation of sustainable tourism strategies in rural regions of the Danube area by means of participatory planning approaches.

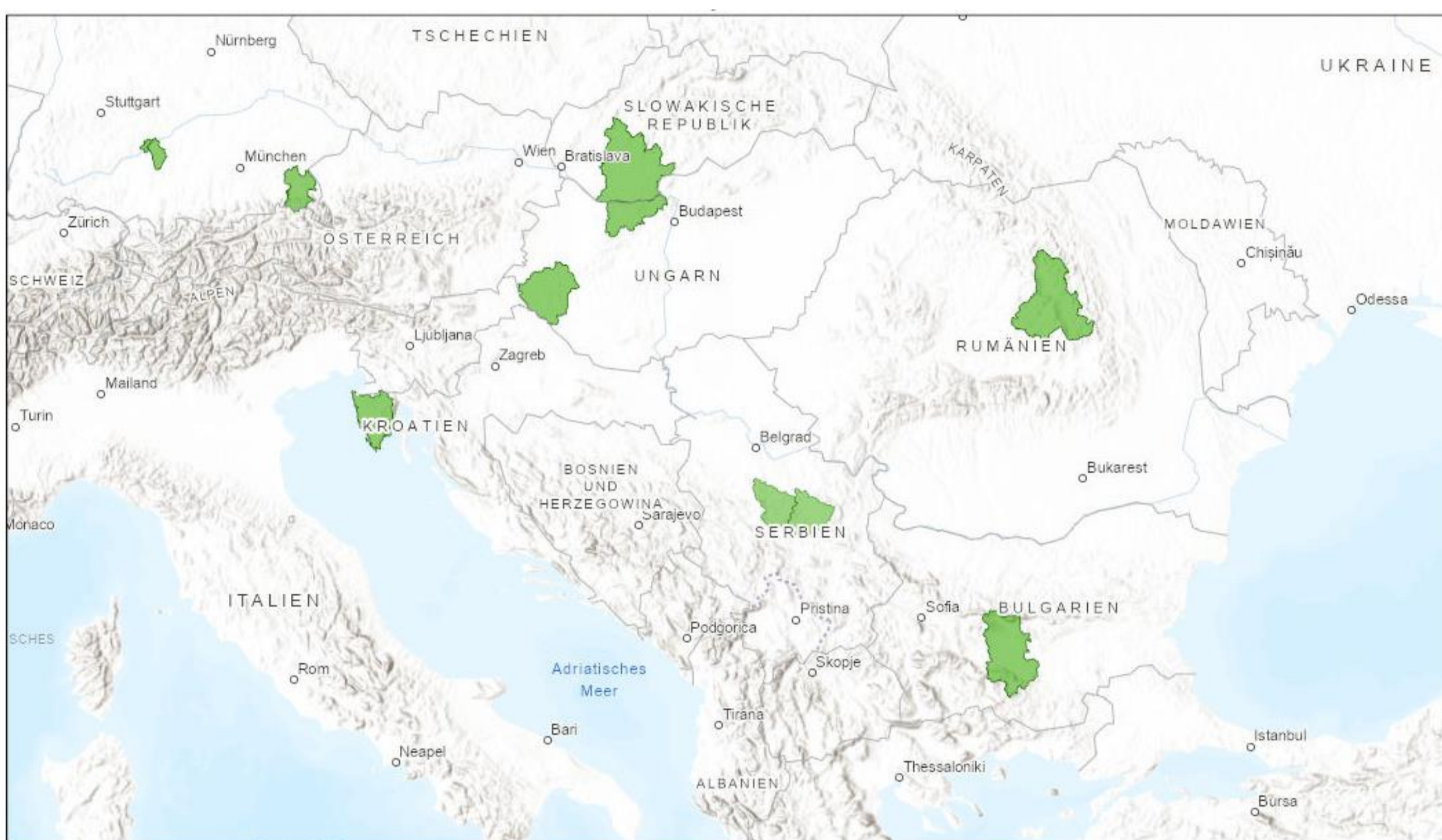


Fig. 1: Study areas in the Danube region (Wanner, 2021)

Preliminary results

Policies

Considering the recognition of importance for high level policies such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals or European Union documents, it was recognized that there is a disconnect between the aims of these documents and their implementation at the tourism destination level. Recommendations for bridging this gap were discussed in **Wanner, Seier & Pröbstl-Haider (2019)**.

Destination level

The involvement of stakeholders (defined in this case as those involved in providing tourism services and local planning) is vital for successful implementation of long-term sustainable tourism development in rural regions. However, there are varying perceptions of what is meant by sustainability and how to transfer this into practical and participatory planning approaches. **Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider (2019)** discuss how a tailored step-by-step planning approach is needed to overcome barriers to stakeholder involvement and to assist the destination in successful long-term sustainable tourism development.

Local Stakeholders

Research showed by **Wanner, Pröbstl-Haider & Feilhammer (2021)** illustrated that stakeholders continue to be a resource that is not used to its full potential, as they are stewards of the landscape being used as the backdrop for tourism. Generating a clear and joint strategy is more important than abstract or irrelevant indicators in tourism planning. Thus, it is vital that stakeholders are involved from the beginning and planning content is comprehensively linked to useful indicators in cooperation and coordination with stakeholders.

Background

The investigated areas were based on initial work within the Interreg project INSIGHTS, gathering information on stakeholders, policy and sustainability indicators while developing regional sustainable tourism strategies in 8 regions in the Danube Transnational Programme area. The data obtained formed the research basis. The study area was expanded to include the Achenal region in southern Germany.

Methodology

To combine both research with implementation, action research (McNiff 2013, Reason & Bradbury 2006) was chosen as an appropriate methodology. Guidelines and templates developed (e.g. Meyer & Pröbstl-Haider 2018) and used in a step-by-step planning approach with local stakeholders.

Furthermore, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews (Matthews & Ross 2010) were used to collect further in-depth information from local stakeholders participating in tourism planning concerning the implementation of policy and use of sustainability indicators after Interreg project completion.

These methodological approaches were complemented by a policy analysis (Mayer & Pröbstl-Haider 2018; Beck 2018) to determine how tourism development is influenced across planning levels.



Fig. 2: Summary of criteria for success based on preliminary results (Wanner, 2021)

Outlook

The destination level is recognized as holding a central role in the implementation of sustainable tourism strategies in rural regions. Their understanding of policy and local needs and goals bridges the gap identified between higher level sustainability goals and differing local understandings of these contents. Furthermore, they are able to ensure strong cohesion between local stakeholders for long-term implementation. A guideline for destinations addressing criteria for successful rural tourism strategy implementation is being drafted to ensure research results can be provided to practitioners.