

Christine Kehl / Elke Baranek

## Information and Emotion

### Creating a brand image for the Spreewald Water Edge Project

*The protection of nature and resources plays a leading role in biosphere reserves. In the Spreewald biosphere reserve, the Spreewald Water Edge Project is the most important project. This major conservation project is supported within the framework of a programme of the Federal Ministry of the Environment with the objective of ensuring that large areas of natural or close-to natural landscapes of outstanding trans-regional importance are secured against risks on a permanent basis. This type of projects is often not well received by the local inhabitants. Thus public relations and image-building activities are all the more important.*

#### SPREEWALD WATER EDGE PROJECT



The project is making 12,3 million euros available to the Spreewald biosphere reserve up to 2013. The measures taken will help to improve the capacity of the landscape to store water, revitalise fen areas and to improve the living conditions of flowing water bodies. Examples:

- To increase the structural diversity, seven large oxbow lakes have been reconnected and many smaller oxbow lakes partly opened, water bodies have been desilted and natural bank structures encouraged.
- To ease the migration of fish, over 50 barrages have been equipped with ascent supports and obsolete water management constructions have been removed. Water bodies are enabled to flow again.
- By holding back water and remodelling ditches, moors can be protected and revitalised.

The onset of the project in the year 2000 was preceded by a heated discussion in the municipalities and among individual stakeholders in the biosphere reserve. This discussion led to the conclusion that participation and involvement of the community is a prerequisite for the success of the project. Therefore the conservation project was accompanied by a procedure of moderation and delivery of comprehensive information with the objective to create a positive image for the Spreewald Water Edge Project. Professional support was available to boost this public relations work right from the start.

The target groups  
are crucial

#### Delivering information and creating an image

The approach can be compared to that of marketing of brand products. What epitomises a 'brand' is affected very much by subjective impressions and perception of people. Unfortunately the public perception of conservation projects is more often than not hardly positive and conflicts are often in the foreground. Thus conservation projects are often plagued with image problems. The project in the Spree Forest however shows that public relations do have an influence on public perception and that a positive image can be accomplished.

Image creation is very closely connected to the attributed identity of a product or project. This identity is initially very sketchy and must first be developed. The creation of an identity for the nature conservation project in the Spree Forest was stimulated by communication processes within the framework of the moderation and participation procedure; by communication processes within the strategy group, the internal decision-making body; by agreeing on rules of the game; by situation analysis; by specialist and regional working groups; by numerous information events for the general public and by press relations.

Measures for communication and information must be embedded in an overall structure that continually examines the target groups: Who are we trying to reach anyway? Suggestions for the 'correct' questions and structures are offered by marketing theories for brand products, for example, the 'brand steering wheel'

developed by Prof. Franz-Rudolf Esch of the University of Giessen (cp. illustration).

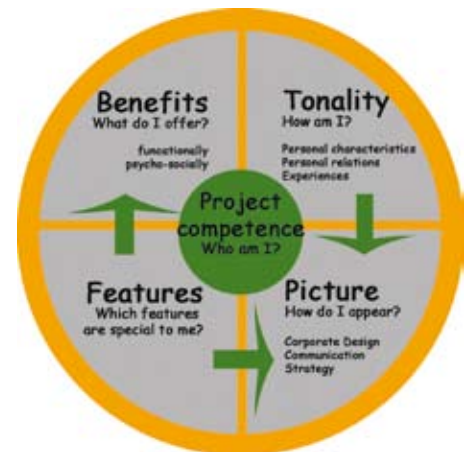
The analysis referring to the central 'project competence' focuses on the question which core competences the nature conservation project has? Positive aspects worth mentioning are that only trans-regionally representative regions can profit from funding of the Federal Government; that federal states have to contribute and that the projects need to be regionally embedded. A rather negative aspect is the perception that such projects are above all initiated and supported politically rather than economically.

'Special features' of the Spreewald Water Edge Project are that its regional sponsor is an administrative union of municipalities, that it is planned for the long-term, is financially secure and organised in a participatory manner. This results in transparent decision-making processes, a focus

on precise project goals and measures as well as an integration of the measures into an overall conservation concept.

### Conveying the benefits transparently

The next step in the analysis concerns the 'benefits', which target groups gain from the project's 'special features'. A much differentiated outlook is particularly necessary in this case. The main benefit of the project is the stabilisation of the landscape in the Spree Forest. This is of significance for nature conservation but also for land users. The conservation of rare animal and plant species is of particular significance for conservation. Economic value creation and impulses for regional development are meaningful across the board. With regard to that, political and economic alliances can be



## UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Spreewald

The Spreewald was designated by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve in 1991. It is situated one hundred kilometres southeast of Berlin. It is a large inland delta of the River Spree and consists of meadows with a finely structured network of small water channels, forests on

wetlands, riparian forests and extensive wet meadows. The area spans 475 km<sup>2</sup> and its character has, for centuries, been stamped by human use in the form of small farmsteads distributed in a mosaic-like pattern. Today, it still is to a large extent in close touch with nature. It is hardly

dissected by roads and offers numerous rare species of flora and fauna a habitat, for example storks, otters or dragonflies.

An important objective of the biosphere reserve is to preserve forms of use typical for this region. Agriculture as a sole source of income for the small farmsteads is no longer profitable against the backdrop of contemporary agricultural politics; therefore most of the homesteads, without external support, would have to be given up. The biosphere reserve is aiming at reliable and stable funding models for the farmers, for example via a foundation model, with the goal of preserving the cultural landscape.

Other focus issues of the biosphere reserve are the large-scale nature conservation projects for water retention, for renaturing canals and land-improvement; in addition, there are considerable efforts in innovative environmental education using modern media and new nature-tourism offers.



Photo © Biosphärenreservat Spreewald

Further information:  
<http://www.mluv.brandenburg.de/cms/detail.php/lbm1.c.323683.de>

established with stakeholders, who regard the nature conservation project from the point of view of contracting parties and investors. Apart from these functional benefits, the psychosocial benefit should not be underestimated. The project offers the opportunity to make a commitment, thereby making a mark in the region.

### ‘Tonality’ and ‘picture’

The communication of ‘core competencies’, ‘attributes’ and ‘benefits’ can only succeed when it is clear how the project identity fits into the interaction context of the respective target groups. The attributes ‘authentic’, ‘cooperative’, ‘ability to learn’, and ‘modern’ were chosen for

the Spreewald Water Edge Project. These need to be experienced and have to be visible – for example through choosing an individual communication structure and a distinctive corporate design. In the Water Edge Project, these elements and formats were worked out early on and were pursued continually. The most important identification mark is the logo for recognition of all information media. The burbot was chosen as a logo because this fish has played an important role in the region and is, nowadays, threatened with extinction. The project’s website <http://www.grps.info> is a central communication element, because of the unequalled access possibilities and the topicality of the information. Furthermore, exhibition and information leaflets were created to present and explain individual measures; the resulting feedback was substantial.



## Full of Life

*UNESCO Biosphere Reserves – Model Regions for Sustainable Development*

This English language volume of 180 pages published in 2005 by the German MAB National Committee represents another up-to-date overview of the MAB Programme in Germany.

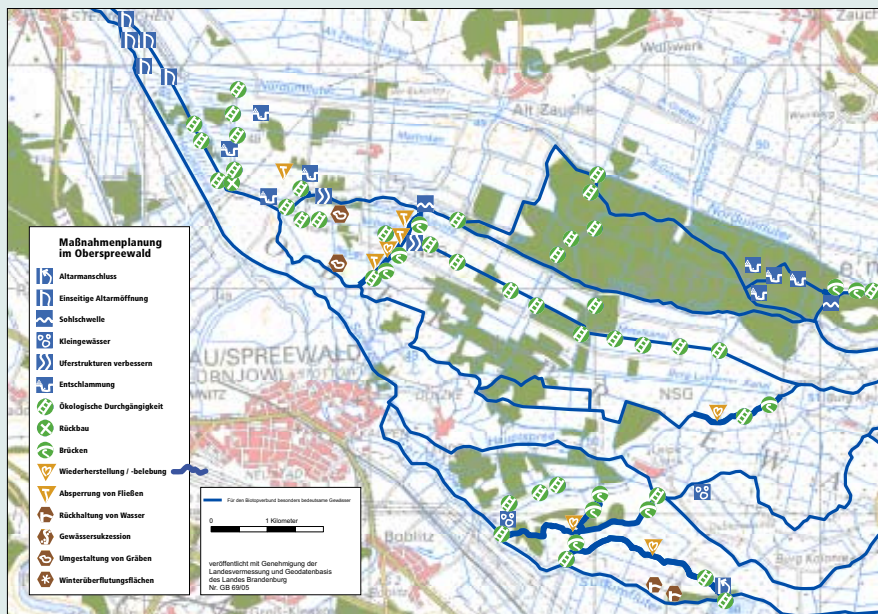
Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg,  
ISBN: 3-540-20077-0

In summary, it can be said that effective communication demands a concept regarding its content and design, a clear profile and a clear sender. The instruments and media applied require continuity and must be adapted to specific situations and requirements. The experiences of the Spreewald Water Edge Project show that communication under these circumstances can contribute to the creation of a positive image for nature conservation.

The project has, meanwhile, established itself as a regional stakeholder. Public information events are regularly attended by hundreds of inhabitants of the Spree Forest, who are keen to learn about the progress of the project.

*Dr. Christine Kehl has been running the management-team of the Spreewald Water Edge Project since 2001. She has a PhD in Biology and a Diploma in Financial Management.*

*Elke Baranek works as a freelance moderator and has been a scientific assistant at the Technical University Berlin since 2002. She has a Diploma in Landscape Architecture and a PhD in Agricultural Marketing.*



### Literature

Baranek, E.; Günther, B.; Kehl, C. (2005): Moderation Procedure in the Water Edge Project. In: German MAB National Committee (Ed.) (2005). Full of Life. UNESCO biosphere reserves – Model regions for sustainable development. Berlin Heidelberg, pp.136-138.

Esch, F.-R. (2005): Strategie und Technik der Markenführung, 3. Aufl., Verlag Franz Vahlen, München

Kehl, C. (2005): Das Gewässerrandstreifenprojekt Spreewald: Ein Projekt für Mensch und Natur. In: Umweltpanorama, Heft 7, Berliner Umweltagentur

Further information: [www.grps.infov](http://www.grps.infov)