



Case Study:
How to be a guest in the Beka nature reserve
Education for sustainable enjoyment of protected areas

The reserve for nature and people

The Beka nature reserve is located close to a big seaside city agglomeration. It is taken in care by Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (OTOP) that implements activities there to protect the saline meadows – one of the most valuable plant communities on the Polish Baltic coast and unique habitats for breeding and migrating birds. The reserve is an excellent wild space for local school to run nature education. It is also a popular trip destination for people, mostly families with children and enthusiasts of wild nature. Given the above mentioned OTOP created an educational path in the reserve to enable teachers running out-of-classroom lessons and a wide audience simply admiring nature. Nevertheless, visitors entering the most valuable areas not admitted to tourist usage were still noted there. Activities carried out by OTOP supported efforts of teachers to increase children’ and their families’ feeling of responsibility for sustainable enjoyment of natural resources.



Figure 1. A lesson in the Beka reserve



Aim of the project

1. To raise children' and their families' awareness of treasures of nature in the region and how people can benefit from them.
2. To contribute to behavioural changes of individuals (children, youth and adults) through the campaign education to respect the rules of visiting the protected areas, where people should be rather guests appreciating needs of nature.

Who was involved?

The activities were implemented in cooperation with local authorities and institutions responsible for environmental protection. Volunteers and teachers were invited to cooperation and their involvement enhanced our capacity for action.

The activities were addressed to local communities as a whole with a special attention given to young people, families, schools, touristic centres and local birdwatchers.

Activities

1. The most important stakeholders were recognized to define adequate means of communication of the main message of the campaign.
2. Informative-promotional materials were developed for schools and other stakeholders and for a distribution during outdoor events: the leaflet within the reserve and the brochure in a form of a guide along the educational path.
3. Digital tools targeting young people and internet users were created, i.e. a mobile app and a webpage dedicated to the Beka reserve. The app was prepared as a virtual trip in the reserve. Both tools provide a set of information: why nature in the reserve is unique and protected, what you can see there and how to visit and explore the reserve without disturbing nature. There are also suggestions what you can do for Beka available within the resources.
4. The photo exhibition "Natural paradise at the mouth of the Rewa river" presenting beauty of the Beka reserve was organised. An opening ceremony, held in the city library, was attended by school youth and their teachers, individuals and invited representatives of local authorities. The exposition is still available for the wide public as a "portable"



exhibition hosted by schools, educational centre as well as University of Gdańsk.



Figure 2 (left). School youth at the photo exhibition. Figure 3 (right). The outdoor lesson. What activities are admitted in the Beka reserve?

5. “How to be a guest in the Beka reserve” was a theme of the meeting arranged by OTOP and a city library with a well-recognized writer and birdwatcher. People living in the neighbourhood of the reserve were invited to this event to discuss together how to realise one’s own passions for nature and tourism in the responsible way.
6. School trips to the reserve for were arranged, especially during the autumn bird migration. Teachers were supported by volunteers in running the outdoor lessons. Volunteers helped also in face to face visitors education, providing as well information on the rules of visiting the reserve and using the educational path.
7. Small actions for the benefit of the reserve involved school groups. One of them was a clean-up action. Children and youth were invited to picking up the garbage in the reserve. The action was also an opportunity to integrate children from different schools as well as informal groups (scouts). The action was also attended by families.



Figure 4. The clean-up action



8. Media campaign. Communication was assured via emails to teachers, webpage, social media, radio, press articles. The article with the core topic of the campaign, written by well-known publicist, was published in the popular local daily newspaper.
9. The next step is development a short video with the core topic: Ethics of responsible birdwatchers and photographers.

Outcomes

- People living in the region and visiting the Beka reserve have been learning about the unique nature of this place, they have been taking an opportunity to observe and get to know species and habitats and to understand why and how the wild nature is protected in the reserve.
- Teachers are provided with a space and tools for out-of-classroom-learning. The effect of their educational work with school children regarding behaviour on protected areas was boosted through the campaign targeting the whole local community.
- School youth and their families were actively involved in small actions for the benefit of the reserve. They get belief they are able to impact on the nature positively.
- Thanks to resources developed within the project the outcomes can be continuing and strengthened in the future.

Key messages

1. Project activities are more effective once you not only targeting your direct audience (children and youth) but also other people impacting its life – families and local communities. It is important to find the common aim and platform for the whole wide audience and to adjust means of communication to the specific stakeholders.
2. Hands-on experience and directly involvement in practical action are crucial for achieving the expected outcomes.
3. To make the core message of the campaign well heard it is advisable to involve the authorities as ambassadors.



Reflection

1. Behavioural changes might be a long-term process so we should expect the gradual improvement of people's attitudes towards protected areas. Hence it is important to continue project activities using tools developed for this campaign.
2. While communicating the main message of our action we have been receiving rather positive feedback from people. In most cases it turned out that they broke the rules of visiting the reserve unwittingly. Hence there is a huge chance that addressees of the project can become ambassadors and supporters of your idea.

References and links:

1. The Beka reserve webpage: <http://rezerwat.otop.org.pl/>
2. "Beka. Rezerwat przyrody" App on Android and tablet available at Google Play and App Store.
3. The Beka nature reserve – leaflet: http://rezerwat.otop.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Rezerwat-Beka_ulotka_final.pdf
4. Błaszowska B., Marczewski A., Rachwald H., Kowalczyk F. Rezerwat przyrody Beka. Przewodnik po ścieżce edukacyjnej, Gdańsk 2018 (*The Beka nature reserve. Guide along the educational path*)
5. Marzenna Nowakowska, Buszując po Bece, Dziennik Bałtycki 2018, <http://rezerwat.otop.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Buszuj%C4%85c-po-Bece.pdf> (*An article about visiting the Beka reserve*)