

Conservation Results by Managing Change

**The Role of Communication, Education
and Public Awareness**



Experiences from Central Europe

Conservation Results by Managing Change

Development

Wild nature is increasingly under pressure from external development and change. Directors and managers in Ministries, State Agencies and Protected Areas, who are concerned with the conservation of nature face a range of challenges that originate in other sectors: e.g. as a result of urbanization, recreation, infrastructure and industrial development, pollution, and changes in agricultural practices. In Accession Countries to the European Union, membership of the EU brings new requirements for legislation and practices.

External pressures

These external pressures make it clearer than ever that nature cannot be conserved by the scientific community of nature conservationists and specialized organizations in relative isolation. As a consequence, conservation managers are gradually changing their approaches and practices.

Non-expert stakeholders

Conservation managers have to deal more and more with external stakeholders. These are often ignorant of conservation needs and benefits; they may even have a negative perception towards conservation. In many cases, however, the solution of conservation problems depends on changes in the opinions, attitudes and behaviour of these non-experts.

Constructive dialogue

Dealing with non-experts in other sectors means that conservation managers are forced to look beyond conservation science and start a constructive dialogue with them. That implies establishing working relations with government Ministries, with regional institutions from other Ministries, with local governments, with private landowners and with visitors. To engage them in nature conservation means a fundamental management change in operation and organization at all levels.

Instruments for conservation

To introduce these management changes in conservation, a Director of the Department of Nature Conservation in a Ministry or a Manager of a Protected Area can use legal and economic instruments and technical interventions. But in all cases it is vital to invest in human and financial resources to inform the public, to involve key stakeholders in finding solutions or to create mutual understanding to deal with conflicting interests.

New roles, new approaches

Conservation managers across Europe are finding out what it means to change their management style. They are recognizing how important communication, education and public awareness are to help them in this new role. They want to be acknowledged as relevant players in the inter-sectoral development debate, learn to use different ways of communication, and understand the difference even a change in tone of voice can make.

Tamas Marghescu, Director, IUCN Regional Office for Europe

“Central Europe is very rich in biological diversity and at the same time faces huge socio-economic challenges. IUCN supports Central European conservation managers in developing capacity for stakeholder participation.”



Experiences from Central Europe

This brochure illustrates some experiences from Central Europe, in which conservation managers have had to deal with questions such as:

- How do we deal with different perceptions?
- How do we ensure a wide range of stakeholders can participate?
- How do we work with private landowners?
- How do we involve local governments?
- How do we attract the interest of local communities to cooperate?
- How do we communicate with stakeholders about Natura 2000?

Ensuring stakeholder participation

Education and awareness are not enough

Dumping of domestic and other waste has long been a problem for Kampinoski National Park, just outside Warsaw. Over the years, the Park Directorate has attempted several times to resolve the issue by organizing clean-up campaigns involving school children. It held drawing competitions to raise children's awareness and, indirectly, that of their parents. And although these had some success, the effects were mostly modest and temporary. It became apparent that a real, sustained solution needs the participation of a wider range of stakeholders.

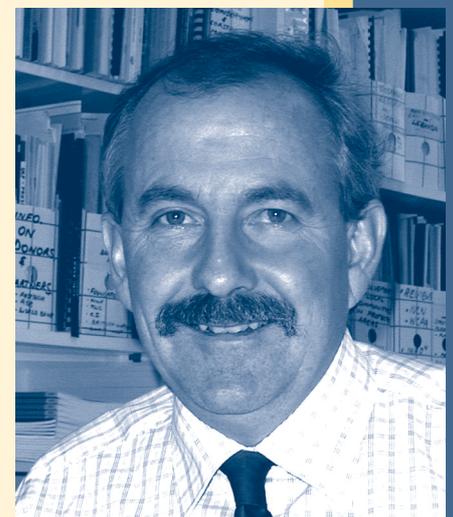
Exploring the problem together

The National Park Director hosted a series of meetings to look into possibilities for a cross-sectoral approach to waste management. It started with a pilot project in one municipality near the headquarters. Together with the local government, a local NGO, the town newspaper and school representatives, the issue was analysed. They considered a number of questions: Where does the problem arise most strongly? Who are the main groups that dump waste? Why do they do this? Is it a matter of not caring? Or does the current collection system not work well? Why are not all households covered by it? Is it too expensive? Are there no alternatives?

And, who is responsible for the solution? Can't we do this together? What are the capacities of the different partners to help in resolving the waste problem?

David Sheppard, Head, IUCN Protected Areas Programme

“Nature conservation is continuously confronted with external changes and developments. Managing changes requires flexible and open attitudes; willingness to confront new developments; and the courage to engage in new approaches. Success in nature conservation therefore strongly depends on change management.”



Joint ownership

The Park now sees that it does not stand alone in solving the waste issue. All parties have suggested how they can contribute. Each partner has specific expertise, contacts or funding possibilities. The local government is taking a strong lead in analyzing legal and practical alternatives to the current system of garbage collection. It is organizing a referendum to let citizens vote on a tax-based system that will include all households.

The local media have covered a range of publicity and information events. An information desk has been opened at a central location in town. In the community halls and schools, theatre plays

have linked a clean surroundings and pleasant living with a natural forest and better conservation in an entertaining way. These interventions provide citizens with an opportunity to ask questions and enter into dialogue. The positive process of cooperation has strengthened a strong feeling of partnership and shared responsibilities that will last beyond the duration of this joint project.

Changes in focus by working in partnership:

From:	To:
Individual	Cooperation
One way	Interactive
Temporary effect	Sustainable impact
Focus on results only	Focus on process as well as results

Working with private landowners

Information does not always reach the people who need it

Since 1994 wolves have appeared in the Protected Landscape Area of Beskydy in the Czech Republic. At first they caused substantial damage on local farms, because the majority had not taken adequate precautions. This experience caused a lot of negative publicity in the local press. As a result the large farmers took precautionary measures, but not the many small farmers. The Protected Area's management tried to inform all farmers on how to protect themselves against wolves and provided information on indemnity procedures. However, the information did not reach most of the targeted farmers.

Conservation means listening and learning

The Protected Area managers realized that the situation was not improving and that relations were deteriorating. It did help that in 2000 the legislation governing indemnity procedures was improved. In addition the management decided to invest in building its relationships with the farmers, using round table discussions as a mechanism. After asking external advice, they made visits to individual farmers and learned to listen to their concerns, not to bring up the issue of wolves immediately and realized that the rationale for a protected area is not clear to a farmer. Nevertheless they discovered many shared interests.



RNDr. Libor Ambrozek, Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic

“Successful nature conservation and landscape protection in the 21st century require an ongoing dialogue between management and relevant stakeholders.”

Partners in nature management

The first round table resulted in an ongoing process to jointly explore ways in which farming and nature conservation can help each other. A growing number of farmers have started to understand the aims of the protected area, and are willing to keep in touch and act as ambassadors. This process also resulted in promises from the Park Director to explore how he could put on the agenda of the local authorities some of the problems of access roads to farms. In this new approach to farmers, the Park Directorate acts not as enforcing agency but as a partner with the farmers in nature management.

Changes in attitudes and behaviour of the conservation managers for their new role

From:

Perceiving farmers as ‘enemies’
Focusing on science
Seeing the farmers as the problem
Sending messages
Trying to press farmers to welcome wolves
Behaving as experts
Formal and authoritarian behaviour

To:

Perceiving farmers as fellow human beings
Focusing on people as well as science
Realizing everyone is part of the problem
Listening and having an open mind
Changing attitudes from negative to neutral
Behaving as partners
Informal and more egalitarian behaviour

Involving local governments

Decrees do not always work

The conservation objectives of protected areas are not always actively supported by their adjacent local governments. In the case of Hungary’s Hortobagy National Park, the Park Directorate has somewhat different ideas on the protection of Lake Tisza than the surrounding municipalities, which want to exploit its tourism potential. It is the Environment Ministry’s experience that simply issuing a decree will not work. In similar situations relationships have worsened between the protected area and other stakeholders, creating a very negative atmosphere.

Dialogue, information systems, campaigns and seminars

The choice was made to use a communication approach: brainstorming sessions were organized with all parties to create mutual understanding, reveal shared interests and develop a common vision.

The Lake Tisza municipalities and the Park Directorate began to form a joint system, in which focal points maintain an early information and consultation system about planned developments. A joint awareness campaign was initiated to inform citizens about these processes. The Park held a seminar for municipal officers in which the different aspects of its conservation work were highlighted, so as to create understanding among the other parties.

Ms. Maria Korodi, Minister of Environment and Water, Hungary

“National parks have to start talks with local governments on jointly developing nature management programmes, such as selective waste treatment in the parks.”



Creating partnerships takes time but is effective

Partnership building is a slow process, which requires changes in the way Protected Area managers deal with partners. But the process is paying off. Several municipalities have indicated the wish to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Park Directorate in which this cooperation will be formalized.

Communicating internally and externally

One Park cannot do it alone

One of the challenges facing the National Park Slovenský kras in Slovakia is to protect endangered species listed in the European Union Habitat Directive. Some species and habitats have developed as a result of human activities such as mowing and grazing and depend on these activities. But social and economic circumstances have changed over the last decades. Some species and habitats are now at risk because the grasslands are not used anymore, villages have become smaller and sheep farming is no longer carried out. The landscape has gradually changed because of ecological succession. The Park has produced scientific publications about its rare species and brochures for the general public, but it does not have enough human and financial resources to manage the entire area, let alone to change trends.

Steps towards cooperation

The Park decided to invest in ways of interesting villagers in cooperation to restore and maintain some of the grasslands in their historic condition and to rediscover the feeling of being proud of their village and its surroundings. A staff member explored village life, identified opinion leaders, held meetings, provided people with information where needed, and collected photos of the landscape and traditional village life from the old days. The park staff established relationships, helped with advice on local tourist initiatives and stimulated the interest of villagers in clearing bushes and mowing one particularly precious site.

Need for internal communication

One finding from experience is that it is important to inform colleagues in the National Park to gain their active support. Otherwise, they do not understand why it is important to leave the office so often, hold meetings and spend money on communication. While staff keep a distance from the villagers it will be difficult to institutionalize cooperation and manage the grasslands in a sustainable partnership with the village. Good internal communication is therefore a precondition for successful and effective external communication.



Prof. RNDr. László Miklós, DrSc., Minister of Environment, Slovak Republic

“Innovative legislation is not always accepted with understanding. Effective communication is needed to create the necessary support in society.”

Communicating Natura 2000

Communication plan

The Slovene Ministry of Environment and national Environment Agency realized that one of their major challenges is to communicate the European Union's Natura 2000 to various stakeholders. They plan to use National Parks and regional branches of the Institute for Nature Conservation as intermediaries to reach the many local stakeholders.

Learning by doing in pilot projects

Through pilot projects, conservation managers have experienced in practice what it is like to consider conservation and communication aspects together in a synergistic and simultaneous way. They also discovered that often they are acting on the basis of their own assumptions, without asking the opinion of local people. Recognising this has helped them to listen and work with different local stakeholders to build a partnership with them.

Focus groups

A major tool for listening is the use of focus groups: non-directive interviewing of a specific social group representing a segment of consumers, voters, or stakeholders in a policy issue. A technique from commercial and social marketing, it draws on group interaction to gain greater insight into why certain opinions are held. Focus groups are used to improve planning and design of new products or programmes, to provide means for evaluation, and to provide insights and qualitative

Changes after focus groups:

From:

Planning based on assumptions

Focus only on conservation

“Push” strategy

Conservation managers as initiators

Villagers as ‘objects’

To:

Planning based on the goals of stakeholders

Focus on socio-economic aspects as well as conservation

“Pull” strategy

Conservation managers as advisors

Villagers as ‘subjects’

data for communication and marketing strategies. Good consumer-orientated companies have been using focus groups for years. Increasingly they are used in politics, policy making and policy implementation.

Learning by listening

One of the major lessons learned in the pilot projects was that staff need to invest much more time in diagnosing the problem, before planning and implementing interventions. The focus groups were very helpful for this diagnosis. The actions originally planned were changed as a result of the analysis and the outcome of the focus groups. The results of the new interventions proved to be much more effective in terms of time, costs and, foremost, quality.

Janez Kopac M.A., Minister for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy, Republic of Slovenia

“Our challenge when implementing Natura 2000 is co-operation and fine-tuning with other sectors, above all agriculture.”



The challenges for managers in nature conservation

To deal effectively with changes in conservation practice requires corresponding changes in management within Park Directorates and other conservation bodies. A manager has numerous tools to facilitate the successful implementation of technical interventions. In some cases legislation and law enforcement are needed. In other situations incentives such as subsidies or facilities are more suitable. In almost all cases one needs to invest in communication to inform the public about measures, to involve target groups in finding a solution, and to create mutual understanding across sectors to deal with conflicting interests.

European targets

At the Ministerial Conference 'Environment for Europe' in Kiev 2003, the Council for the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Strategy (PEBLDS) formulated the following goal for communication, education and public awareness (CEPA):

"By 2008, at least half of the countries in the pan-European region are implementing national Communication, Education and Public Awareness action plans, in order to communicate biodiversity policies and to increase multi-stakeholder participation, particularly indigenous and local communities, in their implementation." (STRA-CO (2003) 5 rev. final, 1 February 2003)

Central European response

This brochure shows the practical efforts Central European countries are currently making towards this end. At the same time it illustrates the need for further capacity development and coaching of technical conservationists and decision makers to become more effective and strategic communicators. The examples* show how commitment and support is still required from national governments and international donors and organizations to develop the capacity for communication.

International expertise

The IUCN Commission on Education and Communication (CEC) offers advice and provides capacity development programmes for conservation managers and policy makers on communication, while the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) is the leading global network of protected area specialists.



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