



What innovative techniques are protected areas using to deliver important conservation messages?

Report of the Alfred Toepfer Natural Heritage Scholarship

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2. Background

The aim of applying for the scholarship was to learn from other countries, what way it is best to communicate the importance of a protected area to landowners and other stakeholders connected to the site. It is clear that by the time when they have decided to build in the area or make other activities which are not allowed according to the protected area legislation, it is too late. In that case stakeholders only get frustrated if they are not allowed to do what they planned. Somehow stakeholders should accept the fact that owning a land in a restricted area means special protection rules and they should consider those already before planning activities and constructions. Landowners should see the positive side of owning a land in a protected area, not only the restrictions.

From scholarships study trips I wanted to learn when is the right stage to communicate with stakeholders, especially landowners, and especially with which methods. Is it when a protected area is being planned or established? As in most cases, protected areas are already established – how to change existing landowners opinion then and thinking about the protected area more positive? How to communicate with new landowners? Which options does an Environmental Board have to convince landowners if previous steps have not been taken and landowners want to develop something in a protected area that the Environmental Board cannot allow?

As important as professional aspects, was the benefit that this scholarship would give to my personal development. I hoped to broaden my knowledge and get new experiences, but also new connections that can be used in the future. I hoped that the trip could be useful both for me and the people I'm visiting, because I could also share Estonian practices regarding nature conservation.



The trip to Georgia took place 26.Oct-5.Nov 2013, where I visited Javakheti National Park and Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park. In Austria I visited Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park and Gesäuse National Park between 1.Jun-10.Jun 2014.

3. GEORGIA

Parliament of Georgia takes a decision on establishing, territorial forming and raising the protective category of the Protected Areas in Georgia. The Management Plan is being approved by the Minister of Environment Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia.

The Agency of Protected Areas elaborates the Management Plan, which identifies the territorial organization and zoning of the protected area, as well as the integral development programs and budgets for protection, scientific research and monitoring, education, recreation, tourism, administration and other programs, and submits to the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources for official approval. The approved management plans are valid for 6 years with a possibility to revise in 3 years. Based on the approved management plans the protected areas are elaborating annual operational plans.

Protected Areas are being managed by the Protected Areas Agency.

Protected Areas categories are as follows: Strict Nature Reserve, National Park, Natural Monument, Managed Nature Reserve, Protected Landscape, Multiple Use Area.

The territories of Strict Nature Reserve, National Park, Natural Monument and the Managed Nature Reserve are only of public property.

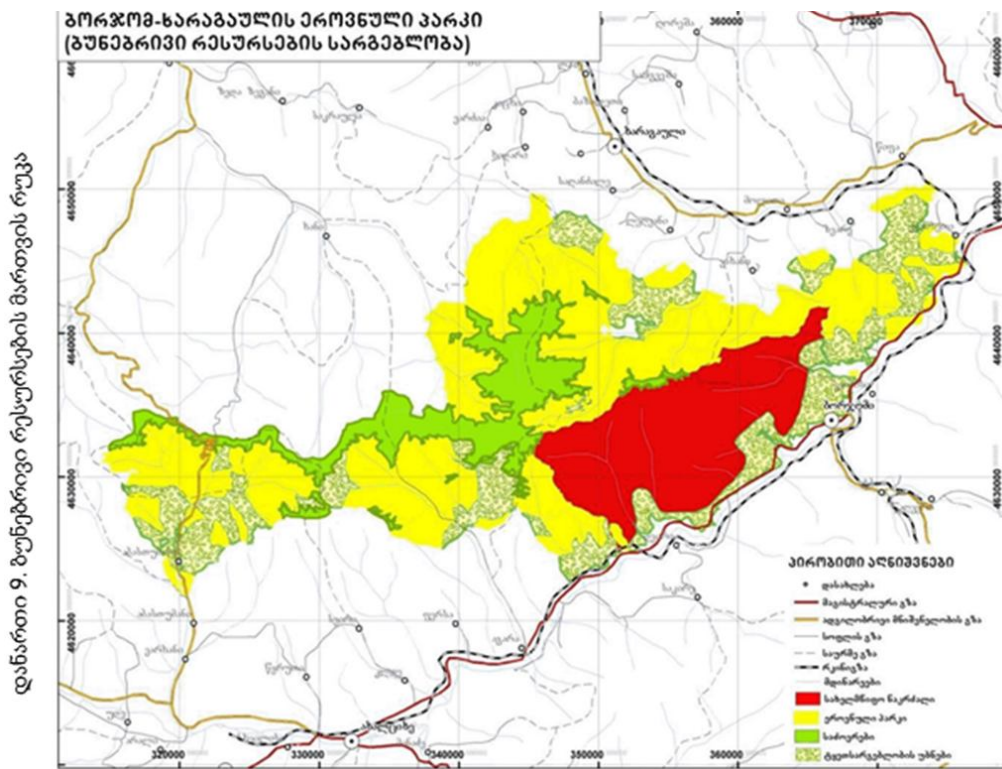
3.1. Sites visited in Georgia

3.1.1. Borjomi-Kharagauli Protected Areas (BKPA)

The Borjomi-Kharagauli protected areas consist of Borjomi Strict Nature Reserve, Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park and Nedzvi Managed Reserve. Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park is the first National Park in Caucasus that corresponds to the international standards. It was established in 1995 and was officially opened in 2001. All lands inside the borders of Borjomi-Kharagauli Protected Areas are State property.

The area of Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park is 61 235 ha. In 2007 the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park became a member of European network of Protected Areas – Pan Park that is a guarantee for highest level protection of these Protected Areas and sustainable development of tourism. The National Park covers the territories, which are the marginal parts of several historical regions of Georgia. The Protected Areas are located in the regions of Tori, Imereti and Samtskhe.





Geologically, the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park belongs to the fold system of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains and covers the central subzone of Achara-Trialeti fold zone. The region is mainly constructed with so-called Borjomi flysch sediments of lower Eocene: marl clays, marls, limestone sandstones and marl limestones; its construction also includes the sediments of Oligocene and Neogene ages and volcanic sediment formations.

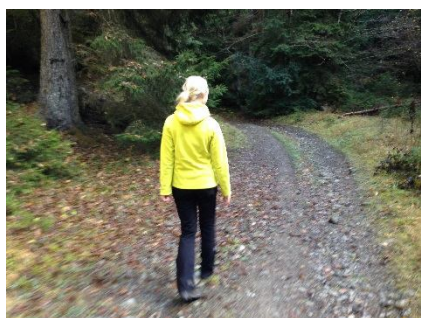
The main wealth of the national park is forest (75% of the territory), where large areas of virgin mixed forests are protected; fragments of unique, relict colchic forests are found here. The fauna of Borjomi-Kharagauli is diverse. The beauty of the National Park is its mammal habitants. Among large carnivores one can find Gray wolf, lynx and Brown bear. Among the hoofed animals, Caucasian Red Deer, Chamois and Wild boar can be found frequently in the territory of the National Park.



Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park has a well arranged tourist infrastructure. The comfortable shelters located in the Park will host the visitors in its different sectors in Merelisi (Imereti sector), Atskuri (Samtskhe area), Likani and Kvabiskhevi (Borjomi area). Besides, in the Borjomi town and Bakuriani borough there are several big and small comfortable hotels.

The sub-alpine meadows of Borjomi-Kharagauli national park have been used for centuries as summer grazing for livestock. Livestock grazing inside the park provides a livelihood to numerous families living in the vicinity of the national park. When the national park was established some of the meadows were included in the traditional use zone to allow

continuation of this use under strictly controlled conditions designed to prevent over-grazing and to enable restoration of meadows which suffered from over-grazing in the past. Before the National Park was established the more accessible forest territories of the protected areas had been a source of fuel wood for many years. Families in many of the villages adjacent to the protected areas still depend on wood for heating their houses and for cooking and continue to rely on fuel wood supplied from forest territories in the national park which have been designated for that purpose. The pastures and forests in the protected areas provide plants with prophylactic and healing properties which villagers use to make traditional medicines. Villagers also use the fruits, nuts and fungi which grow in the protected areas for eating. The territories occupied by the protected areas were once used for hunting and fishing but both of these activities were prohibited following the creation of the protected areas.



The protected areas provide for a wide range of sustainable tourism activities: hiking and horse riding tracks, that give opportunities to travel several days and to stay overnight in specially constructed shelters and camping sites, bike riding, observing nature and landscape and taking photos, educational and cultural tours, bird and animal watching, and summer camps. Corresponding infrastructure has been created for all these activities and is maintained by the

administration of protected areas.

There is a potential for developing winter tourism in the national park. It is possible to create winter tourist products, such as snowshoe walking. The protected areas administration has a partnership relationship with local service providers. The local population and businesses offer different kind of services to visitors, such as: hotel, horses, guides, transportation and catering, also various cultural tours in the region of the national park.

When visiting Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park I had a meeting with the director of national park and with a member of the administrative division.



3.1.2. Javakheti Protected Areas System (JPAS)

Javakheti Protected Areas System includes Javakheti National Park and 5 wetland sanctuaries. The JPAS is established in 2011. The main purpose of this PA is the protection of ecosystems of national and international



ჯავახეთის ეროვნული პარკი
JAVAKHETI NATIONAL PARK

importance and promotion of sustainable tourist and recreational activity.

The Javakheti National Park is located inside the triangle formed by the borders of Georgia, Armenia and Turkey.

The total area of the Javakheti National park is 13 498 ha. The Javakheti National Park is mostly mountainous area limited by the state border from the south (park boundaries in other directions pass via the mountain slopes depending on the current land use and ownership forms). Lakes and wetlands are scattered as separate “isles” around the plateau or plateau-like areas within the radius of 1-16 km of the park’s southern and eastern borders (the Kartsakhi Wetland Sanctuary being the nearest and the Lake Madatapa Sanctuary being the farthest of them).

The lands within the Javakheti PAs’ boundaries are property of the State. In the traditional use zone of the Javakheti National Park, including certain areas in the Kartsakhi Wetlands Sanctuary, Sulda Wetlands Sanctuary, Lake Khanchali Sanctuary, Lake Bugdasheni Sanctuary and Lake Madatapa Sanctuary, the local population is engaged in limited use of renewable natural resources.

Grazing is the main economical activity on the territory of the Javakheti National Park. Given that there are almost no big herbivorous animals left in the region, sound grazing is of particular importance for sustainable functioning of grass ecosystems. Hence, promotion of controlled grazing in corresponding areas should be considered as one of the PAs’ goals. Furthermore, traditional livestock breeding practices and livestock products can be attractive for tourists and create additional income generation source for the local population maintained in the long-term outlook.



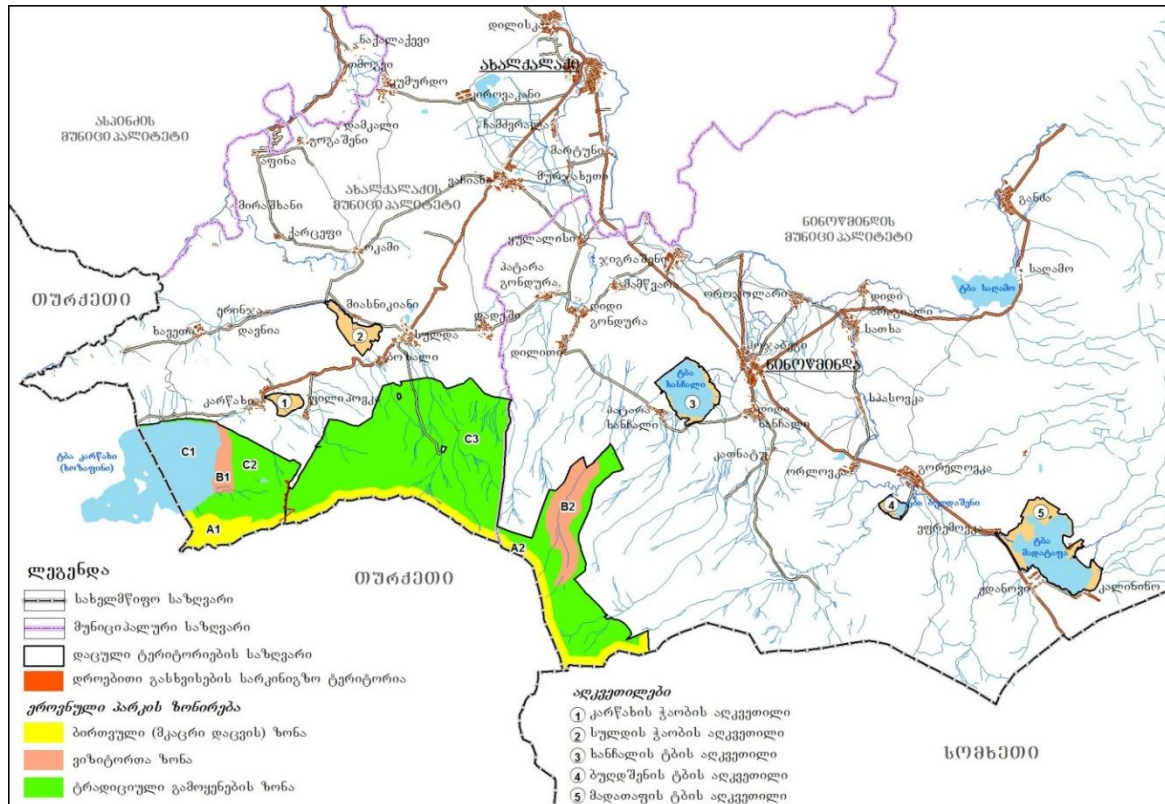
Georgian and Azerbaijani herdsmen from other municipalities (Sagarejo and Marneuli) use the largest part of the National Park area for grazing. To ensure effective management of the pastures, it is very important to cooperate not only with local residents, but also with these nomadic groups. The herdsmen set up plastic tents in the main grazing belts (2.300 and 2.600 m asl) and stay there from May till September. They annually take land on lease from local landowners and mainly graze sheep. There are up to 30 stations in the park, i.e. up to 45.000 heads of sheep and 3000 heads of cattle are grazing there in summer. Precise data on the area of lands leased on the territory of the National Park prior to its establishment is unavailable. According to obtained data, in 2009, 200 ha of pastures were leased out for 10 years in Ninotsminda region on the territory of the National Park.

The Javakheti National Park is subdivided into the following zones: strictly protected zone, visitors’ zone and traditional use zone.

The strictly protected zone is intended for conservation of intact nature as well as for non-manipulation research and educational activities. This zone traditionally coincides with the border zone that is well protected by the existing regime. Thus, the zone comprises the upper, border part of the National Park, with almost intact grass ecosystems. In future, in parallel with socioeconomic development of the country and decreasing population's need for natural resource use, the strictly protected zone will be expanded to 3038 ha by adding some areas from the traditional use zone.



The Visitors' Zone is intended for the protection of the environment, recreational and educational activities. The zone includes areas almost unchanged by economic activities, and consists of ecosystems that are most representative for the park. These are areas that are interesting and attractive for visitors, first of all, perceptionally and aesthetically. The Visitors' zone consists of two separate sites: Lake Kartsakhi and so-called Tiger's Canyon (Vepkhvis Canyon). Lake Kartsakhi is the only lake in the region that has not experienced serious human impact thanks to its transboundary location. The Tiger's Canyon includes fragments of habitats that consist of fragmented rock, stones and grass, and is very perspective for horse-riding tourism. The area of the Tiger's Canyon is 3 times larger than the Lake Kartsakhi site.



The Traditional Use Zone is intended for the protection of the environment and for traditional use of renewable natural resources (rangelands, fish resources). The area includes land ecosystems (sub-Alpine and Alpine) and water ecosystems (mainly the Georgian part of Lake

Kartsakhi), i.e. areas of the National Park that have been for centuries used as summer pastures and haylands by the local population as well as by people from other regions of Georgia (for so called nomadic livestock-breeding), also as for fishing by the local population.

Traditionally, the Javakheti area is used for pasture with the locals depending upon farming as the primary source of their livelihoods. The region is particularly suitable for growing vegetables and fruit. Apiculture is relatively developed and farming is very widespread but incomes remain at a level which is insufficient for making a decent standard of living. Money-commodity relations are very weak in the target region. The locals get their necessary products mainly through barter exchange.

A situation such as this, therefore, makes the local population dependent upon natural resources including those resources from the Javakheti National Park.

When visiting Javakheti national park, I had a meeting with the project manager of “Establishment of Javakheti National Park in Georgia” project and with the director of the Javakheti National Park.

3.2. Techniques from Georgia to deliver important conservation messages

The key element to deliver conservation messages is to involve locals into PA planning and management. In the management plans are set goals and actions regarding involving locals to the management of national parks. For that there are the following activities planned:

- Elaborating eligibility criteria for local community involvement in the PA management, and selection of local community representatives
- Setting up an Advisory Board and involvement of selected representatives in the Board’s activities. Members: local population, local government, local NGOs, media representatives etc
- Setting up support groups of local volunteers and their involvement in field works
- Other

Below are described in more details different involvement and awareness raising measures in Georgia.

3.2.1. The Eco-Education and Public Relations Program

The Eco-Education and Public Relations Program includes the following:

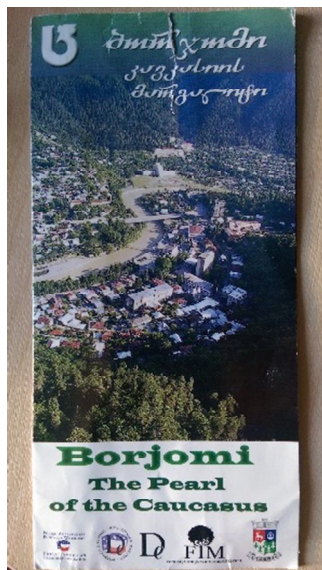
- raising stakeholders’ awareness about the importance and particular values of the protected areas. For that APA plans to select local NGOs having respective profile and experience and sign cooperation documents with them, but also draft a local involvement plan interactively with local partners.



- informing stakeholders on the goals and activities of the Protected Areas administration;
- conducting a social survey of the local population.
- creating respective products and supplying them to the population. For that APA plans regularly to provide information about the protected areas to regional, national and international media (publications, information on TV and radio, etc).

To achieve the goals, there are following challenges and opportunities:

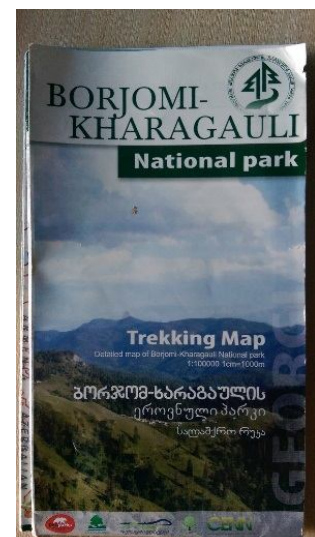
- Active work is necessary to increase stakeholders' awareness about the Protected Areas, their special values and goals as well as activities conducted by the Administration, to build their trust to the Administration;
- Eco-education and public relations materials and products need to be created for different groups of local stakeholders;
- Information products need to be created for broader public to raise awareness about the Javakheti PAs both regionally and nationally;
- There are NGOs in the region whose involvement in the program implementation would benefit the program itself as well as build partner relationships and trust to the PAs Administration.
- Local population can be involved in works conducted in the Protected Areas.



As it could be seen in the Borjomi-Kharagauli NP, in order to raise environmental awareness of school pupils and students, and for engaging them in environmental activities, the best way is to organise eco-educational tours in the protected areas, by means of which they will be able to access information materials, flora, fauna, ecosystems, obtain information about the role and importance of protected areas, and familiarise themselves with the rules of conduct in nature. Eco-educational activities in Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park are very popular among educational organizations. It is also an effective way to create a positive mood towards Borjomi - Kharagauli protected areas, which at the same time is consistent with the objectives of the administration in a field of public awareness.

The administration is planning to elaborate a special education programme - "A Day with a Ranger", which foresees the school children's trip together with a ranger on the protected area. The objective of the programme is to make the next generation feel closer to nature and to involve them in practical activity, and to introduce among rangers a proven method which is common in various European national parks; this includes training and their involvement in interpretation-educational activities.

It is also planned in Borjomi-Kharagauli management plan that it would be good to create a "friends association". It would facilitate involvement of the local population and local organisations more



in activities in the protected areas and help to attract funding for projects which the administration cannot finance from its core state budget funding. For example eco-educational projects, a “green calendar”, purchasing a mini-bus, updating the national park web-site, keeping the national park’s Facebook pages up-to-date, publishing leaflets, brochures and calendars, making T-shirts, caps and other accessories.

Since 2002 Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park has been using different ways of communicating with the public, such as the web site of the protected areas and national park, printing and disseminating brochures and leaflets, publishing articles about the national park in local and central papers. Also publishing the information in Georgian and international newspapers and magazines, broadcasting certain measures by local and central TV channels, publishing information on the national park in various guide books (Bradt Travel Guidebook, Lonely Planet, Walking in the Caucasus , etc), preparing thematic films and video clips about the national park, advertising in central TV channels. Placing information on PAN Park’s web sites, participating in tourist markets, meetings with local population, organizing introducing tours for representatives of media, educational institutions and tour operators, cooperation with educational organisations, cooperation with all partners existing in the region, planning various activities. The administration has a close cooperation with the local population and has permanent contact with regional and local mass-media.

3.2.2. Advisory Board

The agency of protected areas (APA) has a close cooperation with the governmental institutions and nongovernmental organizations in the process of planning, projects implementation and management. For cooperation with the interdepartmental and domestic self-governmental bodies the separate scientific-advisory board is being created, the composition of which is being approved by the Minister. Rights and responsibilities, working rules and the agenda of the scientific-advisory board are defined by the typical regulations of the territorial administrations of the Protected Areas Agency.

APA cooperates with the governmental institutions and domestic self-governmental bodies via scientific-advisory board (SAB) a) in the management and controlling of Protected Landscapes, in the exceptional cases – in the management and controlling of Managed Nature Reserves, National Parks, Biosphere Reserves and the separate zones of the World Heritage Districts; b) in the regulation and controlling of Multiple Use Areas (Buffer Zones). According to the law, every PA has to have an advisory board. In practice it is becoming more and more common, starting from National Parks.

The scientific-advisory board can be established by local administrations, who invites the members. I had a meeting with the director of Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park advisory board. In Borjomi-Kharagauli there are 14 members in the advisory board – representative of local TV company, local NGO-s, groups linked to PA, tourism service, local municipality representatives, one APA member etc. They meet in every 4 months. Local administration makes the agenda of the meeting. When it is time to make management plan or look it through, then the agenda is mainly about the management plan. SAB also advises administration about nature resource usage and other topics. Local APA administration representative makes also protocol of the meeting.

It is very good to have media representative as a member of advisory board. In Borjomi-Kharagauli there is a representative from Borjomi TV company. When locals have dislikes regarding PA related issues, they tend to go to media, so it means that the information about conflict possibilities arrives very early to PA admin through advisory board and can be dealt better. There are no separate working groups, everyone takes part in the meeting.

In Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park the advisory board consisted of 14 members.

3.2.3. Support Zone Programs

One option to achieve the acceptance by locals of the rules and prohibitions of a PA, is to provide the locals with the alternatives which compensate the loss of the benefit of the natural resources use within PA. A support zone development plan in Javakheti was developed in 2010/11 with the aim of improving socio-economic conditions of the ten support zone villages surrounding the newly proclaimed Javakheti Protected Areas. There are 1732 households in



the villages with the total population of 4.750 people.

The population of all villages to a certain extent depends on PAs' resources, mainly pastures and haylands and partially on fish. Creation of PAs will offer new income generation opportunities for the local population, which first of all is linked with development of tourism and visitors' services sphere. Implementation of pilot projects in the support zone will promote improvement of community infrastructure.

Particular Support Zone Programs are made in order to decrease the pressure on the national park and to foster the acceptance of the population. The implementation of these programs in Georgia is often supported with the aid of donor organizations, particularly KfW and other partners.



Three specific objectives of the plan in Javakheti improve the living conditions and life quality of support zone residents, also assist in the search for alternative sources of income, promote responsible land- and resource use management, assist in infrastructure enhancement of support zone communities, mainstream capacity building and skill development into all proposed activities, raise level of environmental awareness and promote community self-help initiatives. Three components were selected within the participatory planning process - which are under implementation: 1.

Potable water system rehabilitation 2. Beekeeping development project 3. Tourism development project which means establishment of a horse rental point, three family based guesthouses, one market place for selling local products, one women enterprise for production of local souvenirs.

In Borjomi, the support to the local population includes supporting local guesthouses and traditional handicrafts, as well as ensuring the population with pastures and fuel wood in traditional use zone. The results of the annual socio-economic survey indicate on increasing number of the local population who state that they are using the protected areas and have some benefits from them.

3.2.3.1. Potable water system rehabilitation

The rehabilitation of the potable water systems has been identified as one of the top priorities of JPAS support zone community needs. The proposed interventions should primarily address rehabilitation of the existing water supply systems with assistance of the municipality.

The expected ecological impacts are positive since important springs will be protected against contamination and erosion caused by livestock. Socio-economic impacts will be significant as high quality drinking water will be provided to people and sufficient water will be supplied for livestock in winter; such water network is as well of utmost importance for the development of eco-tourism. In addition, the intervention will significantly reduce the workload of residents of the communities since currently considerable efforts have to be done to collect, transport and store water.



3.2.3.2. Alternative income by tourism

The establishment of the National Park is connected to some restriction on the use of natural resources from the side of the local population which may cause conflict between the Park and the residents, especially when the local population is dependent upon natural resources from the park. As a result and in consideration, the local population should be given the opportunity to have alternative sources of income. Worldwide, eco-tourism and its related services are one of the most important alternative sources of income and employment opportunities for people living near national parks.

That is why it is important to promote economic development and sustainable livelihoods for the population of a protected area and ensure the use of tourist recreation resources of the protected areas.

The protected areas are a place where people can enjoy dramatic landscapes and wilderness and abundant and diverse wildlife in a close to natural setting. They offer a high quality tourist service to their visitors, which is harmonised with the protection of wild nature and sustainable development. Income from tourism makes a substantial contribution to paying for the running costs of the protected areas. The protected areas create an alternative source of income for local population.

The following objectives are set in Javakheti:

Support the local population of the Javakheti National Park Supporting Zone villages to

- establish guesthouses in a locally embedded style offering a real alternative to existing accommodation facilities.
- Support the local population of the Javakheti National Park Supporting Zone villages to establish horse rental points.
- Establish market places nearby the Javakheti National Park at the main highway.
- Establish women's social enterprise in the village of Dadeshi. Support can be extended for handicrafts production or food processing.
- Improve the skills of local residents in tourism business and marketing. Local residents involved in tourism will gain knowledge in running tourism businesses through a training package tailored to the need of the various population groups.
- Improve the skills of local residents in producing safe dairy products.

It is written in the Borjomi-Kharagauli NP management plan, that the population living next to the National park carry out significant traditional activities that are characteristic for certain regions. Making jam out of cones is a very unique traditional activity, that is used for medical treatment of lungs; by supporting the production of the mentioned product it is possible to create a tourist product; knitting and weaving of various things is also traditional in Kharagauli district. Watermills are also spread in Kharagauli district; they are very interesting sightseeing for tourists. It is possible to develop a special tour to see all traditional activities.



So tourism can be seen as a tool which helps locals to accept the restrictions set by the protected area, because they can have an alternative income. Tourism will create jobs in the local tourism sector as well as in related sectors. Tourism will contribute to facilitating its domestic sectors; guesthouses and accommodations, restaurants and catering facilities, transport systems, crafts, tours and informational centres, as examples. Tourism will attract investments in the region. It will also promote local economic diversification systems with income opportunities throughout the year. Sustainable tourism will contribute to the participatory decision-making process. This will contribute towards a harmony between tourism and resource users. Sustainable tourism means planning and zoning which will define a limited number of tourists in accordance with the eco-system. Tourism will facilitate local

infrastructure: transport means, telecommunications and other basic infrastructure parts. Ecologically sustainable tourism will underline the importance of the natural and cultural resources of the Javakheti Protected Areas in the economic and social development process of the region and contribute to their protection.



Housing in the project region is generally poor and will not meet basic expectations of visitors and tourists. Investments, therefore, are required to offer visitors a minimum standard of comfort. It is expected that overnight facilities will attract visitors to the villages with overall positive impact upon and for the communities.

3.2.3.3. Beekeeping project

The mission of the Beekeeping project in Javakheti is to promote the beekeeping as an alternative for the cattle breeding and to improve the professional and entrepreneurial skills of the beekeepers in the Project implementation zone as a way toward additional income generation and attainment of environmental sustainability. With this purpose, the following activities are considered:

- Establishing the Beekeepers' Association;
- Organising trainings for the beekeepers;
- Provision of the product processing and packaging technical equipment to the Beekeepers' Association
- Empowering marketing potential of the products;
- Introduction of a three-year business plan of Association operation.

These activities are derived from and contribute to the overall goal and objectives of the establishment of the national park and the strategy for support zone development such as sound economic growth, environmental awareness, promotion of the Park as such.

The goal of the Association is to develop successful production and sales of bee products, in order to support the development of apiculture in the support zone and ensure the involvement of local population in this business.

The Project will provide direct information (through the informational brochure, 1,500 copies) on the healthfulness of the apiculture products to the population of 7 villages – 4,074 persons (1,596 households). Promotion of this topic will presumably increase the consumption of the bee products by local population and this, in its turn, will improve their health conditions. With the view of increasing the local awareness on actual anthropogenic stresses and the

impacts caused by them in the environment, the brochure will also contain the information on these issues.

The planned trainings will be carried out in three stages during the 6 month period. Training schedule will be harmonised with the working schedule of local beekeepers. The trainings shall cover both theoretical and practical issues; for ensuring visualisation, the clips and short movies will be demonstrated.



The environmental indicators of the Project are: support to improvement of the background status and conservation of the biodiversity. With this view, the budget of the Project allocates funds for raising community awareness activities (printing and distributing the brochures). At the same time, the beekeepers will get the instructions on how to act in case of detection of the pollution facts and how to eliminate the problem.

The most important environmental sustainability factors are bees themselves, and support to their swarming. Bees are one of the most important links in biodiversity conservation process, since they perform pollination/fertilisation and initiates food chain, ensure reproduction and rehabilitation of the plants. Therefore, swarming the bee colonies, which is easy and quickly possible within the Association, is a step forward in itself from the environmental sustainability point of view.

In Borjomi-Kharagauli NP people living adjacent to the national park in Kharagauli district are already involved in bee-keeping and they use open areas of chestnut forests for locating bee hives. The existing practice of bee-keeping does not damage the territories of Borjomi-Kharagauli protected areas.

3.2.4. The Ecotourism Program

The Ecotourism Program in Javakheti includes ecotourism services in the Protected Areas, which implies manufacture and supply of tourist products, also creation of information materials having different forms and contents and targeting different groups of tourists and visitors. Tourism is one of the best ways for locals to benefit from the PA.

There are the following challenges and opportunities:

- Low demand on tours to Javakheti among international and local tourists, also international tour-operators;
- Lack of adequate tourist infrastructure in the Javakheti region;
- The Javakheti PAs and adjacent area are not yet adequately reflected in tourist proposals;



- The Javakheti PAs are currently being established, and the infrastructure and products for the Eco-Tourism Program are also being created now;
- There are opportunities for involving the region's population in tourist services.

The goals of the Eco-Tourism Program are the following:

- Creation of conditions for eco-tourism development in the Javakheti PAs (infrastructure etc)
- Raising awareness about the Javakheti Protected Areas and attracting visitors and providing visitor services. For that they plan to open an information centre in October 2014.
- New income generation for local population resulting from visitors services. For that APA plans the training and involving of local population in the visitor services. Traditional livestock breeding practices and livestock products can be attractive for tourists and create additional income generation source for the local population.
- Training and involving of local population in the visitor services. For that APA plans to identify and agree with interested people; train people involved in visitor services; establish transboundary cooperation; identify possible cooperation options, including research and monitoring, PAs management and improving service provision to foreign tourists; exchange information in the identified fields and implement specific activities.



The Borjomi-Kharagauli national park has also the potential to attract a wider array of visitor groups through diversified tourist product offers and appropriate information dissemination. One potential new group is a local uniqueness experiencers. People in this group are foreign visitors, individual or organized, who are interested in experiencing exotic local traditions and culture, to explore the unique characteristics of the region by staying longer in the park and its support zone and participating in cultural, traditional and educational activities. Potential offers include traditional local produce tours and workshops, degustation tours, sales of local produce, folk performance events.

4. AUSTRIA

Austria has a federal system of government. The Republic is made up of nine federal states. The division of legislative and executive powers between the federation and the state is set out in the federal constitution. Since 1985, comprehensive protection of the environment has been an important state objective and has constitutional status in Austria¹.

Around 27% of the territory of Austria is protected under nature conservation legislation: 16% is strictly protected as Natura 2000 sites, national parks or nature conservation areas, while 11% comprises less strictly protected sites, such as landscape conservation areas.

4.1. Sites visited in Austria

4.1.1. Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park

The Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park was founded in 1993. The Fertő-Hanság Nemzeti Park in Hungary was established already in 1991. The protected area now covers about 300km². This National Park is

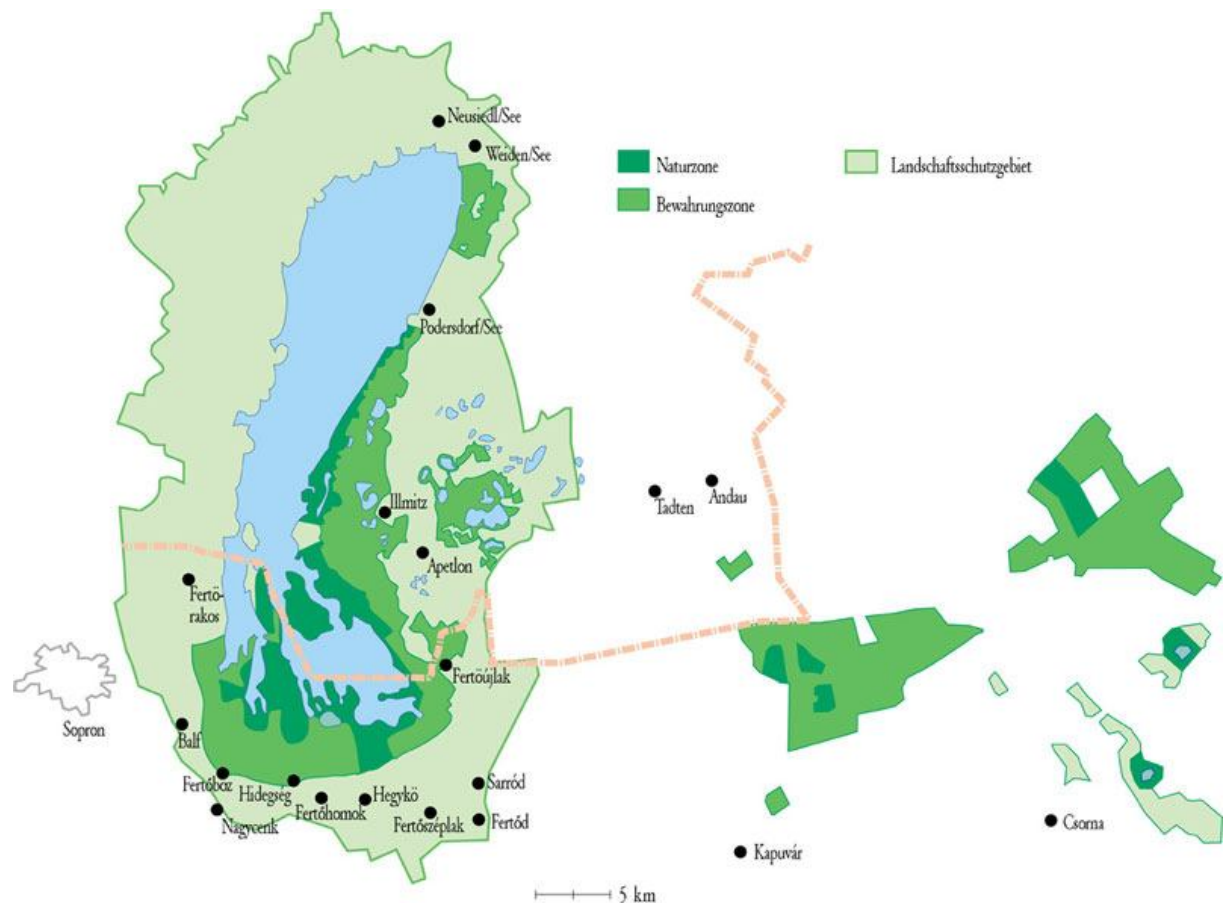


the first cross-border National Park in Austria and the first Austrian National Park that was recognised by the IUCN. The National Park is financed equally by the Land Burgenland and the Republic of Austria.

The National Park covers parts of the territory of 7 communities (Andau, Apetlon, Illmitz, Neusiedl/See, Podersdorf, Tadtén and Weiden/See). About 100 km² of the National Park are located on Austrian territory and are still owned by about 1200 local landowners. The National Park has long-term lease contracts, based on annual compensation payments, with the landowners.

About 50% of the area is a Nature Zone (Core Zone), which remains untouched by human activities like fishing, tourism, hunting and reed harvesting. The Conservation Zones are mainly cultural landscapes with ca 35 periodic soda lakes, and require permanent landscape conservation measures.

¹ http://www.umweltbundesamt.at/en/soer/soer2010_partc/soer2010_intro/



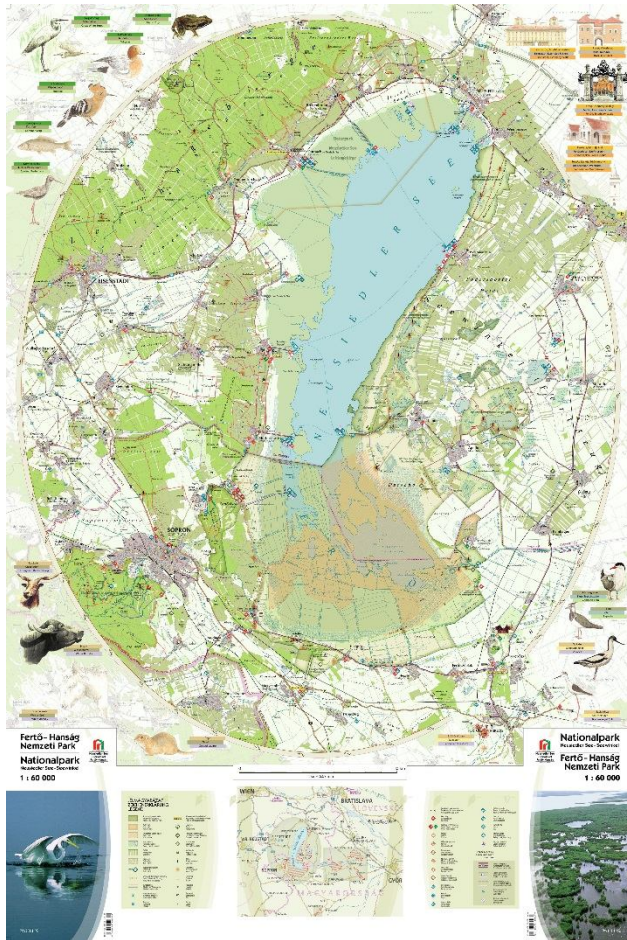
The Conservation Zone of the Park is divided into six different areas: Apetlon - Lange Lacke (app. 1750 ha), Illmitz-Hölle (app. 1550 ha), Podersdorf-Karmazik (app. 160 ha), Sandeck-Neudegg (app. 460ha), Waasen-Hanság (app. 140 ha) and Zitzmannsdorfer Wiesen (appr. 650 ha).

There are the following habitats:

- Neusiedler See and its reed belt
- saline lakes that dry out periodically
- hay meadows
- pasture land
- small sand habitats



There are 30 permanent employees working in the National Park and about another 30 contractors, mainly to guide visitors. The work of the Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park Authority includes habitat management, public relations and visitor service. Research is outsourced to various institutes and organisations, as the National Park itself does not employ any scientific personnel. Approval procedures are carried through by the provincial government of Burgenland, and the Park's Commission (with members from the MoE and other ministries), and not by the National Park administration.



The National Park is a public body, the members of the board of directors (7 members and 7 substitute members) are appointed by the provincial government of Burgenland. This board makes all strategic decisions and appoints the Director of the National as well as the scientific director. Other authorities are the National Park Commission (with three representatives each from the federal and provincial levels and their respective deputies), the National Park Forum (made up of representatives of regional interest groups such as agriculture, land owners, tourism, nature conservation) and finally the Scientific Council (experts from various fields relevant to the National Park).

The department of public relations and eco-tourism is responsible for the Information Centre in Illmitz, putting out information material and the National Park's own newspaper called "Geschnatter" (engl. *cackling*). The fourth department is

dealing with the duties of education and visitor programs and is located in the Education Centre in Illmitz.

It is the responsibility of the national park to preserve precious habitats for animals and plants by means of active care. Accompanying scientific research is essential for the protective and preserving measures. It is not only recommended, but it is a responsibility to create a unique experience for visitors: hiking trails, infrastructure, information points and adequate programmes for all visitors are part of the National Park's tasks.²

In Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park I had several meetings with the head of the Public Relations and Ecotourism department and with many local stakeholders.



² http://www.nationalpark-neusiedlersee-seewinkel.at/nationalpark_en.html

4.1.2. Gesäuse National Park

The Gesäuse National Park covers an area including both the Gesäuse, i.e. the deep gorge formed by the raging wild waters of the River Enns between Admont and Hieflau, as well as the surrounding Gesäuse mountains, which rise up as craggy, strikingly high mountain peaks with rocky, light-coloured limestone faces and strangely formed ridges.



The pristine forests, a very natural dynamic, natural mountain areas as well as the great diversity of flora and fauna have always been decisive factors in ensuring that the exceptional landscape of the Gesäuse National Park has enjoyed such an excellent international reputation since it was first opened on 26 October 2002.



The Gesäuse National Park is the third largest national park in Austria. It is set among the Ennstal Alps in the Gesäuse region and largely encompasses two mountain massifs: Buchsteinstock and Hochtorn range.

Total area: 11,306 ha (86% Nature Zone). Altitude: 490 m to 2370 m (height difference 1880m).

Environment: forest 52%, shrubland 13%, alpine pastures, grassland 9%, rock/scree 24%, waters < 1%, infrastructure < 1%.

99.3 % of the national park belongs to the province of Styria (Styrian Forestry Commission), 0.5 % are public waters and only 0.2 % are private landowners.

On 5 December 2003, the Gesäuse National Park was officially added to the IUCN list of internationally recognised protected areas and continues to fulfil the strict criteria for Category II, which demand that 75% of the total area must be kept free from commercial exploitation. Within this core area ("natural area"), natural processes are protected, i.e. there is no long-term intervention in the natural dynamic. A wilderness area is now developing in the Gesäuse National Park. During the transitional period, intervention is only permitted in areas of forest that have been subject to stronger anthropogenic influences and where the aim is to expedite the return to natural forest development.



The key purpose of national parks all over the world – and thus indeed of Gesäuse National Park – is the protection and preservation of unique natural landscapes as well as the preservation of dynamic processes in all their landscape-specific diversity.

The significance of the Gesäuse as an area of outstanding natural beauty was reflected in its designation as a national park and its classification as an internationally recognised strictly controlled protected area. This status requires adherence to a range of specific legal provisions and effective implementation of nature conservation legislation also applicable beyond the National Park borders. The protective regulations relevant to the Gesäuse National Park are not only found in the National Park regulations themselves (15a State Treaty, National Park Act, National Park Declaration, National Park Plan), but are also replicated in numerous general standards at federal and regional level.



National Park officers are certified support staff from the Styrian Conservation Authority and undertake tasks in the Gesäuse National Park previously (prior to the founding of the National Park) carried out by mountain and nature guards. It is their duty to inform, educate and supervise but they are also authorised to perform official acts such as confiscating goods or imposing fines.

In Gesäuse National park I had a meeting with the head of the Communication Department and with an assistant under the department of nature and environmental education.

4.2. Techniques to deliver important conservation messages

4.2.1. Membership in other fields

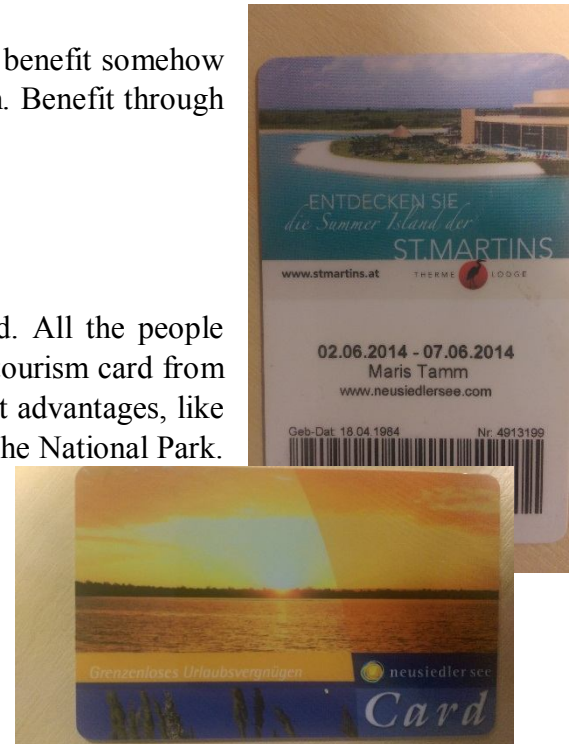
The main aspect is that nature protection shouldn't be separated from other sectors. The question is not how to involve more people to nature protection, but where can nature protection get actively involved. For example, some PA staff could be member in a tourism association. That way can he/she spread the word and explain the necessity of PA to people who know more about tourism and less about nature protection. Also that way other members of tourism association can find different aspects where protected area could be useful for tourism as well. PA staff could also be a member of forestry or fishing associations – for the same reasons, to explain more the necessity of PA.



4.2.2. Benefits for locals

To achieve local's satisfaction with PA, locals should benefit somehow from the PA. One option is to benefit through tourism. Benefit through tourism can be in different ways:

- Locals offer accommodation.
- Locals offer catering
- Locals offer transportation service
- In Neusiedler See area a tourism card is used. All the people who stay at least a night in the area, receive a tourism card from the tourist office. The card gives them different advantages, like free public transport and free excursions from the National Park. That way tourists see the point of spending a night in a region and get the card. Most of the accommodations in Neusiedler See area are small homestays, so with every tourist who spends a night in the area, locals benefit.



The longer tourist stays in the region, the more locals benefit from it. Tourists need food, accommodation and transport and all this should be offered by locals. There are different ways to keep a tourist longer in the area:

- Start an excursion in PA very early morning or late in the evening, so that people should spend a night in the region;
- When constructing a track in PA, there should be many information boards about the area and species, which would



keep people longer in the track and then also in the region. This gives multiple benefit – after spending many hours on the trail, tourists want to eat something and that could be offered by a local. But also that way people get to know more about the nature and that way understand the necessity of protecting the nature.



- When using a transportation to drive to the end of the trail for those who don't like to walk, also many stops near the information board should be made – this gives the same result as walking through it, because people spend all together more time in the area and want to eat later in the area etc.

4.2.3. Soft mobility

In Gesäuse National Park the park had established a local taxi line GSEISPUR (soft mobility) which would help visitors to reach the national park and also help local labour market. The necessity of soft mobility project raised from the massive reduction of public transport offers, long distances due to peripheral location, insufficient bike infrastructure and rough climate and steep topography.



The park coordinated centrally several soft-mobile offers and developed step-by-step a functioning network of soft-mobile offers. The park purchased the taxi buses through a project and educated locals to establish a taxi company. The result was Door2Door transport system for guests and partner-network with regional cofinancing. GSEISPUR consists of a shuttle service to/from the main railway station, a door-to-door taxi service and an e-scooter rental.

The objectives of the mobility platform in terms of awareness rising, PR and spreading of information were multifaceted:

- Increase the knowledge and awareness of the mobility topic in the region
- Spread the brand, develop a green brand
- Regularly inform audiences and users about the project and the mobility offers
- Inform regular visitors (through newsletters etc.)
- Get people to use the mobility platform
- Convince guests of the benefits to arrive without a car

As a primary audience tourists arriving in the region by train or plane, respectively tourists who use public transport or tourists who could want to use it in the future. This target group is mainly arriving from urban areas like Graz or Vienna. The tourists stay at least over one night and thus need a transport service in the region in order to be able to enjoy all offers. An additional main target group is people who spend their free time in the region for recreation on day trips. The daytrip tourists spread the word in their regions and can possibly attract more overnight-stay guests.

Further sustainable mobility options are to be introduced over time, including a car sharing facility and "funmobility" products. In order to make services and tourism packages more generally accessible, a website and smart phone app with an order and dispatch system have been introduced.

4.2.4. National park partner

Gesäuse national park has established a group of “national park partner”. The keywords of the partners are following - committed to quality, environmental awareness and local sourcing. The Gesäuse National Park partners have established stringent quality criteria which are evaluated at regular intervals. Regular meetings and events are used to drive the project forward.



The partner companies maintain close links with each other and with the National Park, representing a network of unique diversity. They are spread across the region and are divided into 11 different categories. In case someone asks some service from national park area, then all the members always suggest another member of the partner-group. Also, when national park needs some service, they always use the partner or suggest and recommend partner. The national park benefits from such a group in a way that all the members of the partner-group always advertise the park and share the information about the benefits from and information about the park. So it is a win-win group. As the members of the partner-group are locals, who that way benefit from the national park, they see the good side of the park and spread the word.

In Neusiedler See- Seewinkel has also the principle that the national park uses local products where possible. For example when organizing an excursion in NP, food is ordered from local company.

4.2.5. Communication with locals when creating a protected area

As I learned from Neusiedler See-Seewinkel NP, when creating a PA, there is always communication with local stakeholder groups, but not with individual people. Most of the locals in the area belong to some stakeholder group – like winemakers, hunters, tourism association members etc. When NP was established, locals had an option to make a contract with NP. With that contract landowners gave away the rights to use their land, as a return they get compensation regularly. NP administration mapped territories which are necessary for NP to use – areas, where regular usage would harm



NP. The compensation is given to the association that unites the landowners, not separately to all the individuals, and the compensation amount raises with the inflation rate.



When updating a management plan, there are discussion with each stakeholder group who is connected to the area.

4.2.6. National Park Newspaper

A good way to share information about national park and its values and necessity, is national park newsletter. In Neusiedler See-Seewinkel the newspaper is issued 4 times per year. There were covered main management works which are done in NP. When choosing, what information should be put to the newspaper, NP prefers the ones that would explain the locals why some things are done in NP.

Newspaper is sent to all the people who live in NP and also shared in tourism office and NP visitor centre.



5. Conclusion

During my study trips I learned that there are some tools that might help local people to understand better the importance of protected areas and to see how they can benefit from the protected areas. As in examples of Georgian as well as Austrian PAs I can conclude that besides the environmental benefits, PAs provide significant economic benefits to the local people and contribute to the socio-economic development of the adjacent areas. It is important that the people living adjacent to the PAs are aware of and value such benefits.

In the studied cases the benefit from the protected area can be much related to the tourism development in the area or around. Visitors are attracted to the beautiful nature and there are different ways to keep them in the area and to get economic benefit from it (local accommodation, food, transport). Moreover, visitors are usually interested in local products. Of course protected areas must map carefully which areas are suitable for visitors and direct the people in the area.

In many protected areas local people are dependent on natural resources (like timber, hay, pastures etc.). In case they are not allowed to use it as before, they could be offered an alternative income generation option like bee-keeping, accommodation and transport for tourists, food, handicraft etc. Promotion of such kind of alternatives as well as awareness raising and partnership development can be facilitated by the PA management staff. In some cases there are options for common fundraising from which locals as well as PAs could benefit.

I believe that involvement of locals into the PA establishment process as well as management planning process (arrangement of zoning, agreeing on allowed activities etc.) is a crucial tool for successful operating of a PA and avoiding conflicts in future. Since we often deal with problems regarding already established PAs, I think the participatory mechanisms like “Advisory Board” or “PA Friends” are very suitable. Also opposite is beneficial – when PA staff is a member of the local stakeholder groups (tourism board, hunting association etc). These mechanisms are good tools for PA management staff to start speaking common language with locals and other stakeholders. It contributes to awareness raising as well as better understanding of each others concerns. By involving locals also protected area benefits, because the message from the PA spreads widely.

Of course public broadcasting about the necessity of protected areas and what currently is taking place or is active topic in a certain PA, is never enough!

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