

# Conflict Strategies as a Task for the Management of Protected Areas – Shown at the National Park Donau-Auen

Christiane Brandenburg<sup>1</sup> & Karen Ziener<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Austria  
christiane.brandenburg@boku.ac.at

<sup>2</sup>University of Klagenfurt, Austria  
karen.ziener@uni-klu.ac.at

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## Introduction

The establishment and management of a protected area can rarely be put into practice without conflicts. As early as in the planning phase, conflicts with individual user groups, owners, residents, communities and regional businesses become apparent. Protected area management is confronted with a number of conflicts concerning interests, targets and spatial use, which interact with each other, last for a long period of time, and can create complex conflict situations. The targeted and farsighted handling of conflicts is a basic task of protected area managements. This includes taking an active position in conflict processes, as well as avoiding unnecessary confrontations, and canalising conflicts with the aim of fulfilling the duties and goals of a protected area. In this case, conflict strategy means taking a complex approach to a complex problem. This conflict strategy should focus on a complex regional view of conflict, including potential conflicts and their effects on planning and management and, at the same time, making it possible to act flexibly in conflict situations.

From the viewpoint of social sciences, a conflict is regarded as a confrontation between at least two parties (conflict as process of interaction). Before this, only a potential for conflict exists, consisting of the conflict subject and the, still peaceful, conflicting parties (Berkel 1997). Unlike a problem, there can not be a one-sided solution to a conflict, as it is often thought by management. Besides information and communication deficits, conflicts in protected areas result from spatio-structural con-

flict potentials. From the ecological viewpoint, this means that an unfortunate relationship exists between the sensitivity of a landscape and the intensity of its use (e.g. visitor frequencies, overlapping of various uses like agriculture, forestry, leisure and recreation use, settlement activities). Resultant environmental protection derives measures to limit use and to set legally binding restrictions and regulations. Their implementation is usually accompanied by conflicts. From the point of view of the users, a potential for conflict exists when their own demands are hindered by restrictions from environmental protection and regulations in the protected area. This users' perspective was underestimated by the management of protected areas for a long time (Ziener 2003).

## Methods

In the Lobau, the Viennese part of Danube Floodplains National Park, the authors accomplished a comprehensive analysis of conflict potentials and conflicts, as well as the conflict management strategy of the park management. Diverse methods were used like video monitoring, interviews of visitors, in-depth interviews with local experts as well as structure and process analysis.

## Results

In the Upper Lobau a conflict potential exists due to the high level of fragmentation of the wildlife's habitat through a dense network of paths as

well as the high intensity of use by various user groups. The conflict potential in the Lower Lobau is characterized by a large number of very sensitive phytotypes. In reaction to this situation the park management provided maps of bike and hiking paths in the Lobau which did not show the entire network of paths. However, the hoped for (gentle) steering effect did not occur. The management was forced to realize that, in the recreational area, to a large extent, by people living nearby (Arnberger et al. 2001), all paths continued to be used and that, therefore, that kind of method would not lead to easing the situation in sensitive areas. There is another conflict with dog owners who, in spite of the regulation that dogs be kept on the leash in National Parks, let their animals run free. Of the estimated 50,000 dogs, per annum, in the entire Lobau, only 34% are leashed (Arnberger et al. 2005). A conflict not only exists with the park management because the wildlife is unsettled, but also with visitors without dogs who feel disturbed and endangered. In both conflicts it is necessary to deal with certain user groups and individual users. The conflict strategy combines steering measures and land use concepts with a broad spectrum of communicative, cooperative and consensus-oriented activities.

## Conclusion

A conflict solution is made up of two components linked with each other. On one hand, a broad spectrum of communicative, cooperative and consensus-oriented activities relies on the immediate settlement of the conflict. On the other hand, a reduction of the conflict potential between sensitivity and intensity of use requires seeking a solution within the framework of steering measures, sustainability approaches and integrated use concepts.

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