

Participatory Processes and Participatory Research – A Tool for Conflict Identification and Development of Management Decisions

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Introduction

The targeted and farsighted management of conflicts is a basic task of any protected area management. This holds particularly true for Biosphere Reserves, which – being a non-typical category of protected area serving both conservation and sustainable development objectives – are subject to a comparatively weak regulatory regime in terms of legal restrictions and prescriptions for land use management. Instead, management of Biosphere Reserves has to rely to a large extent on governing a complex network of stakeholders with competing interests and conflicting goals. That includes taking a pro-active role in conflict situations, negotiating trade-offs, and canalizing conflicts in a productive way that serves the obligations and objectives of the protected area. Approaches to effective management of land use-related conflicts under these conditions must be responsive to the inherent complexity of those conflicts (Daniels & Walker 1997). Successful reconciliation of conflicts, compliance with decisions, acceptance of management measures and active commitment to their implementation on part of the stakeholders inevitably requires participatory processes.

In response to these requirements, the Austrian three-year research project “Integrated Sustainable Wildlife Management in the Biosphere Reserve Wienerwald - ISWI-MAB” is based on a participatory and collaborative research approach (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995). The project area “Wienerwald” is a forest-dominated, multiple-use landscape characterized by overlapping of various land use interests, including intense recreational uses and hunting activities. This causes a variety of conflict situations that threaten sustainable development. Overarching objectives of our research project are the analysis of antagonistic and (potentially) synergistic interactions between wildlife, wildlife management and other relevant forms of land use (e. g. recreation, forestry, agriculture, transport system, land development, nature conservation) on a regional scale. Cross-sector, integrated approaches to land use management shall be developed, including tools for assessment and monitoring of sustainable use. Since humans are the key-factor in understanding and controlling the relationship between wildlife resources and society (Kellert & Brown 1985), these research objectives required involvement of stakeholders from the very beginning.

Methods

Conflicts are defined by Conrad (1990) as “communicative interactions among people who are interdependent and who perceive that their interests are incompatible, inconsistent or in tension.” Participatory approaches provide an appropriate framework for identification and reduction of land use-related conflict potentials (Daniels & Walker 1997).

The project-related stakeholder process involves major stages of participation: (i) information, (ii) consultation, (iii) collaborative decision-making, and (iv) participation in implementation of actions (Umweltbundesamt 2006). Building on existent Biosphere Reserve-related consultancy fora and based on a social network analysis, relevant stakeholders were identified and a multi-sector and interdisciplinary stakeholder platform composed of representatives of different forms of land uses (hunting, recreation and tourism, forestry, etc.), landholders, local politicians, members of authorities, and NGOs was established (figure 2).

Different socio-empirical techniques were applied to gather information on regional wildlife-related conflicts and stakeholder opinions: in-depth expert interviews, questionnaires for key visitor and land user groups (mail survey, on site visitor interviews), and interactive discussions

within the participation panel. Data evaluation will be done by multivariate analysis. In parallel, a consultative technical work group representing a sub-set of the broader participation panel collaborated in development of an assessment set for sustainable hunting (practical field testing, interviews, review of draft products, workshops). Intermediate and final results are reviewed and discussed at regular meetings of the participation panel, which also provides guidance on further work steps. It is envisaged that the stakeholder process shall develop a self-sustaining dynamic and serve as a long-term panel for conflict management in the project follow-up phase.

Results

The presentation will focus on methodological issues of participation processes in a sustainable use research project within a Biosphere Reserve setting. Drawing references also to experiences from previous projects, the theoretical considerations underlying the participatory project design will be outlined (Umweltbundesamt 2006). The structure, organisation and functioning of the participation process will be characterised, and the collaborative and consultative research methods will be described. Based on the lessons learnt, the benefits as well as the problems and limitations of participation processes will be discussed. Quality

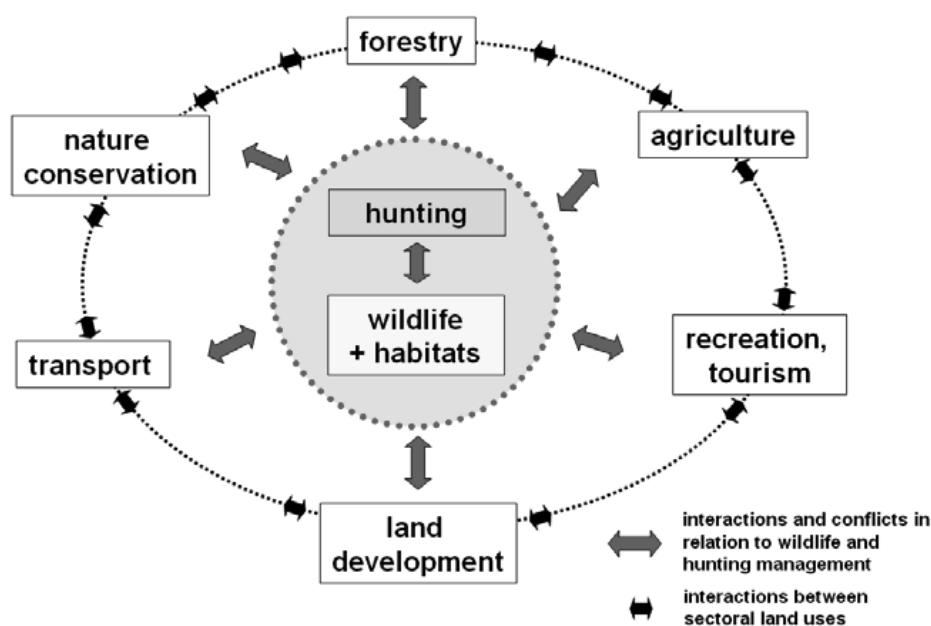


Figure 1: Simplified model of land use interactions and conflicts related to wildlife management.

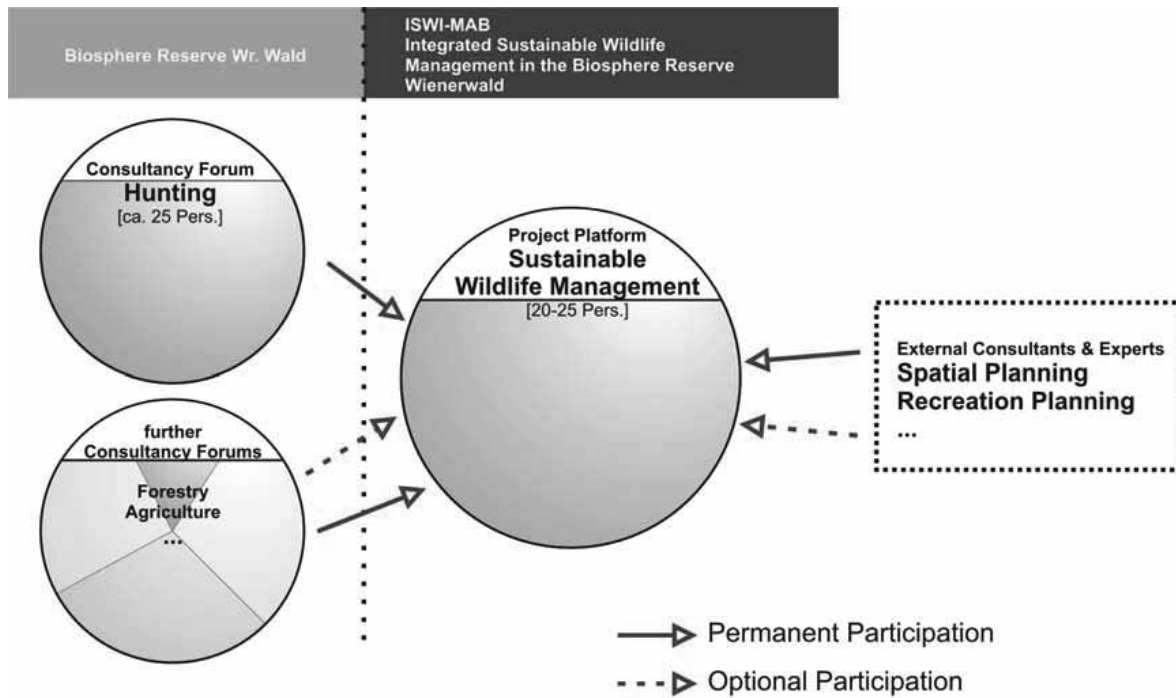


Figure 2: Organisation of the participation panel.

criteria for effective participation shall be identified, and selected key results of the expert and land user surveys will be presented.

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