

## **An emerging paradigm for sustainably managing conservation areas: examples from Europe and the US.**

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Parks, protected areas and other conserved lands are important for societal well-being in many western countries. Continuous urbanization, detachment from nature and demographic changes are among the main reasons fostering political discussions about strengthening the social and cultural processes embedded in sustainable and multifunctional land use planning and management. However, planning and management schemes differ in their ability to cope with the complexities and subtleties of incorporating new conservation objectives, like outdoor recreation, into existing governmental contexts. This is especially true when focused at a regional or local level. In this paper, planning and management problems in conservation areas are explored and a set of governance principles are presented in a comparison of ways to deal with them.

One promising idea in conservation area planning is to incorporate decision-making that is closer to its point of application and emphasize partnerships, strategic alliances and broader consultation with those who are likely to be responsible for, or experience impacts from, policy decisions. Coordinated, community-based approaches may be useful in addressing challenges according to potential problems of conservation area planning and management. Analytically, these may be gauged against a set of governance principles like (a) the type of institutional structure, (b) political embedding, (c) area-related conflict and (d) sustainability. This offers flexibility to resource management through adaptive governance, and may provide a dynamic, tailored result that is specific to place and institutional context (cf. Borrini-Feyerabend 2003, Folke et al. 2005). However, planning and management of conserved areas stays a complex task. These areas are often characterized by large-scale diverse ecosystems, multiple levels of policy implementation, different perceptions of problems or policy objectives, and different preferences for strategies and instruments.

Two case studies illustrate this sort of analysis for outdoor recreation and present two distinct governance approaches that incorporate user demands and management solutions into their institutional contexts. One case study is from the Black Forest Nature Park, Germany and the other from a national forest in California. Both case studies focus on the analysis of recreation conflict but differ in their conceptual approaches. In the Black Forest, 800 organized recreationists have been quantitatively asked about their conflict perceptions, which have been qualitatively evaluated by representatives of different organizations within the park. By means of a future workshop, recreation management principles were developed jointly at local or user group level, which in turn led to, suggested shifts in conflict management objectives, permanent participative planning approaches, communication strategies and an assessment of institutional fit for policy decisions. In the Californian case, recreational uses are addressed as one of many resource issues within a broad forest plan, which has been approved by professional staff who followed the many, varied federal laws that reflect the public demand for resource benefits. Users are engaged through public comment on, and reactions to, proposed directions prepared by forest staff. A focused literature review and qualitative content analysis of the USFS forest plan revealed the ways that recreation demands were incorporated in area planning and management. Here, specific recreation conflict potentials are left to emerge in later, more specific programmatic plans. The examples show how the suggested governance principles for conservation areas are addressed in

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practice and how they might contribute to a better scientific understanding of the social functions of conserved areas.

There is no single blueprint and set of fixed rules for conservation area planning and management. The examples presented are like bookends that address institutional and governance issues quite differently. The key finding is that interventions must be adapted to the institutional context in which they will be implemented. Generally, participatory capacity cannot be built quickly and must be developed. Therefore, permanent communication platforms could be established by local authorities to create partnerships between individuals and between individuals and authorities. These would allow local actors interested in the quality of the living environment to participate in a common visioning and consensus building in their region with shared interests (Masschelein & Quaghebeur 2006).

There are various reasons to foster new forms of governance like coordinated, community-based approaches for recreation planning and management. Besides questions of natural resource allocation, people should have opportunities to experience environmental quality in times of growing urbanization and health problems. Knowing more about use preferences and conflict perceptions, together with the provision of a platform for mutual exchange and participatory decision making, helps to facilitate the design and management of sustainable future conservation areas (Sievänen et al. 2008).

The two case studies suggest a sociologically robust paradigm that balances between bottom-up approaches and more traditional top-down planning and management systems, so that conserved areas might achieve greater success through attention to values at local, regional and national levels.

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