

The National Park Gesäuse Partnership: From resistance to cooperation

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Statutory Declaration

I, Christoph Gahbauer, hereby declare that this master thesis has been written independently and without assistance from third parties. Furthermore, I confirm that no sources have been used in the preparation of this thesis other than those indicated in the thesis itself.

Graz, December 12th, 2014

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the main reasons why the National Park Gesäuse Partnership was established and how it subsequently developed until today. I offer an ethnographic account of the creation and development of this organisation that currently establishes the cooperation between the National Park Gesäuse and a group of 87 local companies.

By using a combination of questionnaires and qualitative interviews, conducted with key-informants, and participant observations of events, I generated the data on the National Park Gesäuse Partnership, which I subsequently analysed by using key-concepts drawn from Michel Callon's idea of the cycle of translation. I used the four 'moments' that compose the cycle of translation as an analytical guide to look into some of the different kinds of interactions and power relations between many human and non-human actors involved in the genesis and evolution of the Partnership, which I broadly interpret as an actor-network.

The analysis I present in this thesis highlights that the Partnership was created in order to solve two specific problems, namely the resistance of local inhabitants to the establishment of the National Park and the weakness of the local economy in the Gesäuse area. My analysis shows that, despite some initial difficulties in the first stages of its formation, the Partnership eventually developed into a solid, but still evolving, actor-network that was successful in overcoming the scepticism of local people towards the park and to convince local companies to collaborate amongst themselves and with the National Park. Furthermore, my analysis points to how the Partnership was able to create a new social capital in the area and contributed to strengthening the local economy. My thesis broadly contributes to academic and policy-making debates on nature conservation and local socio-economic development by providing an analysis of some of the reasons why such partnerships are established and how they may develop.

Zusammenfassung

Die Nationalpark Gesäuse Partnerschaft: vom Widerstand zur Kooperation

In der vorliegenden Masterarbeit untersuche ich die Hauptgründe, warum die Nationalpark Gesäuse Partnerschaft ins Leben gerufen wurde und wie sie sich bis heute entwickelt hat. Ich beschreibe die Entstehung und Entwicklung dieser Organisation, in der zurzeit 87 ortsansässige Betriebe mit dem Nationalpark Gesäuse kooperieren.

Anhand von Fragebögen und qualitativen Interviews mit wichtigen Auskunftspersonen sowie teilnehmenden Beobachtungen von Veranstaltungen, habe ich Daten über die Nationalpark Gesäuse Partnerschaft generiert, die ich anschließend mit theoretischen Konzepten von Michel Callons Übersetzungsprozess analysiert habe. Ich habe die vier Phasen, aus denen der Übersetzungsprozess besteht, als einen analytischen Leitfaden verwendet und konnte dadurch verschiedene Arten von Wechselwirkungen und Machtverhältnissen zwischen menschlichen und nicht-menschlichen Akteuren untersuchen, die in der Entstehung der Partnerschaft – die ich als ein Akteurs-Netzwerk interpretiere – involviert waren.

Die Analyse, die ich in dieser Arbeit präsentiere, zeigt, dass die Partnerschaft gegründet wurde, um zwei bestimmte Probleme zu lösen, nämlich den Widerstand der lokalen Bevölkerung gegen die Errichtung des Nationalparks und die relativ schwache Wirtschaft im Gesäuse. Ich zeige auf, dass sich die Partnerschaft zu einem stabilen Akteurs-Netzwerk entwickelt hat, das die Skepsis der Einheimischen gegenüber den Nationalpark weitgehend überwunden hat, und heimische Betriebe überzeugt wurden, sowohl untereinander als auch mit dem Nationalpark zusammenzuarbeiten. Zudem hat die Partnerschaft ein neues Sozialkapital im Gesäuse hervorgebracht und zur Stärkung der lokalen Wirtschaft beigetragen. Im Großen und Ganzen leistet meine Masterarbeit einen Beitrag zu akademischen und politischen Debatten zum Thema Naturschutz und lokale sozio-ökonomische Entwicklung, indem ich eine Analyse zur Verfügung stelle, warum solche Partnerschaften gegründet werden und wie sie sich entwickeln.

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List of Abbreviations

ANT	Actor-Network Theory
ASL	Amt der Steirischen Landesregierung
CoT	Cycle of Translation
GmbH	Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LLC	Limited Liability Company
NPG	National Park Gesäuse
NPGP	National Park Gesäuse Partnership
ÖVP	Österreichische Volkspartei; Austrian People's Party
SPÖ	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs; Social Democratic Party of Austria

1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the aim of my thesis, entitled *The National Park Gesäuse Partnership: From Resistance to Cooperation*. I first offer a brief introduction to the National Park Gesäuse Partnership; I then present the research question that is at the core of my thesis and I outline the theoretical framework that has guided my analysis; namely, Michel Callon's cycle of translation. I then turn to discuss why I have chosen the creation of a partnership composed of local companies based in the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* as my case study. Finally, I offer an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 The National Park Gesäuse Partnership: towards an exploration of an actor-network

In this thesis I offer an ethnographic account of the creation and development of the National Park Gesäuse Partnership (NPGP), an organization that currently establishes the cooperation between the National Park Gesäuse (NPG) and a group of 87 local companies.¹ The NPGP is a project initiated by the National Park Gesäuse LLC (Limited Liability Company) two years after the creation of the NPG in 2002, and is based on the mutual cooperation between the 87 local companies and the National Park itself. On the one hand, the creation of the Partnership has been successful in bringing some local businesses together into a network to collaborate with the NPG and, on the other hand, it has encouraged these companies to cooperate one with another.

The aim of this thesis is to understand why the NPGP was established in the Gesäuse area and how it subsequently developed. The research question that has guided my study is: Why was the National Park Gesäuse Partnership established and how did it evolve from its genesis until today? Answering this research question is important for policy-making in the field of nature conservation. As the literature shows, the establishment of national parks frequently engenders local resistance/opposition because local inhabitants are often negatively affected by the establishment of protected areas (see Adams and Hutton 2007; Ghimire 1994; Holmes 2007; Stoll-Kleemann 2001;

¹ The 87 companies consist mainly of family businesses, but also of local schools, museums, one association and the *Steiermärkische Landesforste* (see section 5.5 for a detailed account). In addition, also the tourism association (*Tourismusverband Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse*) is involved in the Partnership.

West et al. 2006). Local resistance was also the main effect of the establishment of the National Park Gesäuse (see chapter 4). However, as the analysis I present in this thesis shows, the NPGP played an important role, especially in the first years after the establishment of the NPG, in appeasing oppositional voices and in creating local support and consent for the National Park. Therefore, as I will try to argue in the conclusion of this thesis, projects similar to the NPGP could be adapted and implemented elsewhere to solve conflicts, which could emerge when places are the target of nature conservation programmes.

The theoretical framework that guides my analysis is inspired by Michel Callon's cycle of translation (1986), which broadly focuses on the formation of actor-networks. I in fact understand the NPGP as an actor-network (see chapter 2). More precisely, I interpret Callon's cycle of translation as an analytical tool, which works as if it were a 'magnifying lens' for bringing into light, at least partially, how connections and disconnections between humans and non-humans form and dissolve in the process of the formation of an actor-network. As I explain more in detail in chapter 3 (methodology), I was interested in looking at how and why some NPG partner companies cooperate and other companies do not cooperate, and the four stages that compose the cycle of translation ('problematization', 'interessment', 'enrolment' and 'mobilisation') helped me to follow and focus on some of these connections and disconnections in specific moments, and helped me to try to make sense of them. Furthermore, as my case study touches upon issues of nature conservation – that is a practice which consists of a human intervention on 'nature' (a non-human actor) to protect it from potentially harmful human action – the cycle of translation, which originates in Actor-Network Theory (Latour 1996 and 2005), was considered as an appropriate theoretical guide to conceive the coming together of the NPGP not only as the outcome of forms of collaboration between human socio-economic actors. As one of the strengths of Actor-Network Theory, in general, and the cycle of translation, more in particular, concerns the theorization (albeit problematic) that non-humans do have agency, and therefore play a role in shaping the world we live in, this approach helped me to offer a more nuanced analysis of the ways in which the NPGP was formed. In other words, the cycle of translation helped me to go beyond an interpretation of this Partnership in the Gesäuse region as the outcome of the interactions between only human beings (i.e. managers and employees of the NPG and local entrepreneurs). It

helped me to bring into light some of the ways in which non-human actors interrelated with human actors in the formation of the NPGP.

From the analysis I present within this thesis, in fact, the NPGP emerges as an evolving actor-network taking shape through the interaction of a variety of human actors such as the NPG directors, the project managers of the NPGP, politicians, consultants, local associations of inhabitants and politicians, visitors and tourists; and non-human actors such as institutions, 'nature' (understood and constructed in different ways), natural resources, agro-food products, international and Austrian laws, local and institutional regulations, contracts, advertising materials and events. In this thesis I therefore discuss how some of these actors interacted in the coming together of the NPGP, that is a specific actor-network, which was created to counteract specific problems in the Gesäuse area (i.e. resistance to the foundation of the NPG and the necessity to trigger some strategies for sustainable local development).

1.2 Selection of the case study

I have decided to focus on the NPGP as a case study for three main reasons. First, according to my knowledge, there are not yet academic studies that focus specifically on this Partnership. Furthermore, as far as I know, there is no research on partnerships such as the NPGP, which do exist in other Austrian national parks. Therefore, my thesis represents a contribution to provide an understanding how these networks, which bring together public institutions such as national parks and private actors such as local companies, originate and develop in Austria. Second (as mentioned before and as I detail throughout the thesis), the NPGP is a project that originated in a context in which the conservation of 'nature' provides both the broader context of my case study and the 'trigger' that started the creation of the Partnership itself. Therefore, it represented a good case study to focus also on non-human actors and to investigate how they play a role in the creation of forms of organizations (such as the NPGP itself); namely, forms of organisations established to solve very human matters, such as socio-political conflicts and local economic development.

Finally, and importantly, I selected the NPGP as my case study for personal reasons and interests. In the last years I had the chance to get to know several NPG partner companies, which are all located in the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse*, an area where I spent a lot of my leisure time kayaking and hiking.



Figure 1: Location of the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* in the district of Liezen, northern Styria
Source: David Osebik (modified)

The *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* currently consists of 12 municipalities (Ardning, Admont, Hall, Weng im Gesäuse, Johnsbach, Hieflau, Landl, Gams bei Hieflau, Palfau, Altenmarkt bei St. Gallen, Weißenbach an der Enns and St. Gallen) with approximately 12.000 inhabitants.²

Furthermore, I am interested in nature conservation and national parks in general and, in 2009, I did an internship in the NPG. I also worked during some summers as a rafting and kayak guide in the Gesäuse area by being employed by a firm that recently became a NPG partner company (*Sportagentur Strobl GmbH*). Moreover, in the winter semester 2012/13, in the course of an interdisciplinary practical training at the University of Graz, I assisted in developing a soft-mobility project implemented in the Gesäuse area, called GSEISPUR.³ For this university course, we did an excursion to the Gesäuse, during which I gained my first practical insights into the network of NPG partner companies and how they collaborate with the NPG and with each other. It was then that I started to think that the Partnership project represented a successful initiative in terms of supporting the (sustainable) socio-economic development for this area, of which I am very fond, and to imagine writing a master thesis about the NPGP. I wanted to gain a better

² <http://www.gesaeuse.at/de/alpenregion-nationalpark-gesaeuse/ueberblick/die-gemeinden.html>

It is important to note that, with the beginning of 2015, the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* will include not 12 but 5 municipalities (Ardning, Admont, Altenmarkt bei St. Gallen, Landl and St. Gallen) as a result of the new *Gemeindestrukturreform* in Styria implemented by the federal state government of Styria (see also: <http://www.gemeindestrukturreform.steiermark.at/>).

³ GSEIS (also written Xeis) is the dialect term for Gesäuse and SPUR is the German word for track.

understanding of how this network of local companies works and what impact it has on the Gesäuse area. I therefore got in touch in the autumn of 2013 with the current project manager of the NPGP, Karoline Scheb, who showed an interest in my study, and I progressively developed my research.

My research therefore contributes to offering an understanding of how the Partnership developed so far, and I hope that it can also be used by the current project manager and the NPG LLC in order to develop the Partnership project further. In addition, I also hope that my study can be useful for other Austrian and international conservation areas, as I personally believe that the NPGP represents a successful project in terms of solving some of the conflicts that the establishment of official areas for the protection of nature might engender and in terms of promoting sustainable forms of local development.

I believe that this study contributes to shed some light on the often-unacknowledged – in policy-making arenas – role played by non-humans in forging forms of connections and disconnections. That is, in shaping forms of socio-economic cooperation, such as those that are at the core of the NPGP. Furthermore, my thesis offers an empirical investigation, which contributes to current academic debates that aim at unravelling the complicated and power-laden ways in which humans and non-humans interact in the world we live in. Finally, my work contributes to current academic and policy-making debates that focus on human-nature conflicts in nature protected areas by presenting an example, I think, of how these conflicts can be, at least partially, solved and can engender positive outcomes for the human-nature sphere of interaction.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

In the following chapter (2), I discuss the main theoretical framework that guides my analysis of the development of the NPGP: Michel Callon's idea of the cycle of translation, which can be seen as an analytical tool useful to explore the evolution of organisational processes (Brunori et al. 2006 and 2008; Esnault et al. 2006; Rivera González 2013; Voeten et al. 2013), such as the coming together of the NPGP. As the cycle of translation originates from Actor-Network Theory, in chapter 2, I first offer a very brief introduction to this approach. I then discuss the four moments that compose the cycle of translation, namely, 'problematisation', 'interessment', 'enrolment' and 'mobilisation', which guide

my analysis of the NPGP (see chapter 5). At the end of chapter 2, I discuss John Allen's idea of power as it provides a useful concept and a nuanced theoretical language that enabled me to bring into light how the connections and disconnection involved in the coming together of the NPGP are relationships which involve humans and non-humans and which are imbued with power.

Chapter 3 offers a discussion of how I employed ethnography as the method useful to generate data for my analysis. In this chapter I remind the reader of the research question that is at the core of my thesis and I illustrate in detail how my ethnographic study developed during my fieldwork. Finally, I offer a brief explanation of how I selected the data in order to focus my analysis.

Chapter 4 gives an account of the history of the establishment of the National Park Gesäuse, which provides the necessary background to understand why the Partnership subsequently emerged and developed. After illustrating the initial plans and efforts to establish a national park in the Gesäuse area, I offer an account of how and why local opposition to the designation of the NPG emerged, and I examine how the NPG was finally implemented. I conclude this chapter by highlighting the three conflicting ideas of nature that emerged from my account and I briefly describe the official status of the National Park.

Chapter 5 is the main analytical chapter of this thesis, in which I offer an account (guided by the four moments of Michel Callon's cycle of translation) which focuses on discussing why the NPGP was established and how it evolved from its genesis until today. I highlight the two initial problems that triggered the foundation of the Partnership, I discuss how the NPGP developed and I point to how the Partnership represents a solution to the initial problems (i.e. local resistance to the establishment of a national park in the Gesäuse area and a rather weak local economy) that triggered its creation.

Chapter 6 focuses on forms of cooperation and non-cooperation among the companies involved in the NPGP. Cooperation practices are in fact the main 'binding' practices that keep the NPGP together, whilst, rather obviously, forms of non-cooperation are seen by some NPGP members, and particularly by the NPGP project manager, as weakening the Partnership. I first highlight the main forms of cooperation between some of the companies in the Partnership and I offer some specific examples. Next, I highlight the social and economic incentives and benefits that the creation of the Partnership generated. I then discuss the non-cooperation in the NPGP and some

critiques to the Partnership, and I conclude this chapter by pointing to the fact that the Partnership was useful to generate a new ‘social capital’ in the Gesäuse area.

In chapter 7, the conclusion of the thesis, I argue that the NPGP can be seen as a successful project that achieved the solution of the two problems that triggered its emergence: the local resistance to the NPG and the weak local economy in the Gesäuse area. Thanks to the efforts made in the NPGP project, the local support for the NPG increased and the local economy is strengthened. Furthermore I also point out how three different ideas of nature (discussed in chapter 4) which were at the base of the conflicts that the establishment of the NPG generated, still coexist, but in a much less conflicting way. Finally, I highlight how my thesis has contributed to academic and policy-making debates on nature conservation and local socio-economic development.

2 Michel Callon’s Cycle of Translation

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the main theoretical framework that guides my analysis of the development of the National Park Gesäuse Partnership (NPGP): Michel Callon’s idea of the cycle of translation (CoT). I use the CoT as a theoretical guide to offer an account of the genesis and the evolution of the NPGP by focussing on how a variety of actors cooperated, or did not cooperate, in the coming together of this network. As the CoT originates from Actor-Network Theory (ANT), in the next section, 2.2, I offer a brief introduction of ANT in order to introduce the reader to part of its specific terminology, which I will use in my analysis, such as actants and actor-networks. In section 2.3, I discuss the four moments that compose Michel Callon’s CoT, namely ‘problematization’, ‘interestment’, ‘enrolment’, and ‘mobilisation’ that undergird the analysis of the NPGP, which I offer in chapter 5. Finally, in section 2.4, I discuss John Allen’s idea of power and I explain four specific ‘modalities of power’ as they assist my analysis of the NPG and the NPGP.

2.2 A short introduction to Actor-Network Theory

Actor-Network Theory originated from studies of the sociology of science and technology during the mid-1980s. It is primarily associated with the work of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law (Crawford 2004, p. 1 and Bosco 2006, p. 136). Originally, ANT offered a way of analysing critically the construction of scientific knowledge, but over the last three decades, many scholars, including human geographers, applied key-concepts of ANT in many different ways (Bosco 2006, p. 136 and Cressman 2009, p. 2). For example Brunori et al. (2008) use ANT to study alternative food supply chains and their impact on rural development processes; Rivera González (2013) applies an ANT framework to explore participation in online-communities; Voeten et al. (2013) use it to understand responsible innovation in small producers' clusters in Vietnam; and Middelveld (2012) looks at coral reefs in Wakatobi National Park in Indonesia through the theoretical lenses of ANT. Bosco (2006, p. 140) shows how there is a raising importance of ANT as an accepted and valuable approach in human geography and he reviews a number of research articles, well-established geographical journals and books, in which researchers applied ANT since 1995.

Schulz-Schaeffer (2000, p. 194) points out that Callon and Latour use a specific strategy in order to elaborate the terminology of ANT. They want to establish a 'symmetrical' vocabulary where all terms that are normally used for humans can be adopted to non-humans. For example, they use terms from the field of semiotics, like 'actants' or 'translation', in order to avoid the distinction between the 'social', the 'natural' and 'technical'. This refers to a particular aspect of ANT called generalised symmetry. This principle means that human and non-human actors play an 'equal' role in the construction of actor-networks (Cressman 2009, p. 4). Callon and Latour do not want to differentiate between the social and natural, but rather think about society and nature as a result of network building (Schulz-Schaeffer 2000, p. 197). Before discussing the CoT, two basic concepts that are characteristic in the terminology of ANT need to be explained as I use them throughout this thesis: 'actant' and 'actor-network'.

What ANT terms 'actors' or 'actants' are both human beings and also non-humans (e.g. objects, products, documents, natural elements, legislation, animals, etc.) that are considered as having agency in the world; namely, they are capable to act. This is one of the most controversial points advanced by the ANT and differs from the perspective of

social theory, which considers only human beings capable of acting (Bosco 2006, p. 137). However, according to Bruno Latour an actor is better defined as an 'actant',

something that acts or to which activity is granted by others ... (an actant) implies no special motivation of human individual actors, or of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of action (Latour 1996, p. 7).

In other words, in ANT, non-humans are not passive components of our world, but rather they affect all interaction (Jóhannesson and Baerenhold 2009, p. 15). In general, actors can also be considered as network effects that result from relations enacted through heterogeneous networks of humans and non-humans (Bosco 2006, p. 136). For instance actors can be institutions, organisations or society as a whole, which can be seen as an outcome of relational practices of networking processes (Bosco 2006, p. 136; Jóhannesson and Baerenhold 2009, p. 16).

ANT understands the concept of network differently from the conventional view, which considers networks as "a sort of channel between nodes stretched across Euclidian space" (Jóhannesson and Baerenholdt 2009, p. 15). In ANT, networks are always 'actor-networks' and they are neither just social nor just material, but always made up of series of heterogeneous (associations of) actants. Actor-networks necessarily emerge through series of transformative practices enacted by actants (Jóhannesson and Baerenholdt 2009, p. 16). The term actor-network is always hyphenated because actors are considered to be networks and vice versa (Bingham 2009, p. 7).

As Nick Bingham (2009, p. 7) argues, to establish and maintain actor-networks takes a lot of work and effort. Michel Callon (1986) calls this dense and laborious process the 'cycle of translation', which I describe in the next section of this chapter. Crawford (2004, p. 1) points out that ANT is interested in analysing:

- (1) the ways in which actor-networks 'overcome resistance' and 'gain coherence and consistence'; namely, how they get stabilized;
- (2) how network elements (actants) get 'converted' or 'translated' to follow specific interests and objectives;
- (3) how other actants are motivated and integrated into networks; namely 'enrolled', to anticipate a term I will explain in the next section; and

- (4) how actors become increasingly 'useful' in a network.

These four analytical points underpin the analysis of the National Park Gesäuse Partnership I offer in this thesis; a partnership that I interpret as an actor-network. I investigate the associations among a variety of actants involved in the formation of this specific actor-network in order to look at how they worked together and formed this alliance. In order to offer an account of the coming into being and evolution of this actor-network, I use as a theoretical guide Michel Callon's idea of the cycle of translation, to which I turn in the following section.

2.3 The Cycle of Translation

The cycle of translation (CoT) can be considered as the process through which an actor-network is composed. Michel Callon introduces this concept in his famous paper *Some elements of a sociology of translation: domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay* that was first published in 1986. In this paper, Callon illustrates and applies the CoT to analyse the progress and the difficulties encountered by a group of scientists who had the task to understand why the number of scallops declined in the area of St. Brieuc Bay in Brittany, France.

In general, the CoT refers to the relational practices through which actors come into being; that is, the work involved in the process of the composition of an actor-network. In other words, it is about how some actors work together and cooperate, and some other actors do not cooperate and opt out or are expelled, during the process that brings about the construction and coming together of an actor-network. Thus, importantly, the process of translation can be seen as a network-building process in which communications and connections between actants are established (Jóhannesson and Baerenhold 2009, p. 16), and other connections and links between other actors are dissolved. Callon describes the CoT as consisting of four stages that he calls respectively 'problematization', 'interessement', 'enrolment', and 'mobilisation'.⁴

'Problematization' is the first moment of the cycle of translation in which one (or more than one) actor recognises and identifies a specific problem and then starts to imagine and propose a solution to that problem (Callon 1986). However, just the

⁴ Section 2.3 is mainly based on the work of Belliger and Krieger (2006)

awareness of some actors that a problem exists does not necessarily lead to a network building process: other actors as well have to be aware of this specific problem and they have to experience it and recognise it as their own problem. The recognition that they are affected by the same problem opens up the possibility of working together and cooperating in order to solve it. According to Belliger and Krieger (2006, p. 40), the 'translator' – the main actor who identifies a problem that must be solved – plays a crucial role in the CoT. First, the translator identifies other actors that are affected by the same problem in order to potentially integrate them into the forming network. These actors may contribute to finding a solution to the problem. Then the translator tries to convince them that their problem will be solved by certain actions taken by the translator him/herself. The translator thus implements specific strategies to convince other actors that it is in their interest to solve that same problem.

'Interessement' is the second moment of the cycle of translation, in which specific actors are identified and selected in order to involve them in the process. They should get interested into finding a solution to the initial problem that was defined in the first moment of the cycle. These recently integrated actors start to propose aims and strategies that are necessary to solve the problem. By involving them into the process of translation, the associations between these actors get strengthened and the network starts getting stabilised. They are 'interested' actors because they show attention, interest and care for the problem that has to be solved. Furthermore, they start getting interested in taking up new specific roles and start accepting these new roles and functions within the network (a passage that gets consolidated in the third phase of the cycle of translation, the moment of 'enrolment'). If the interested actors align their previous roles to the new ones, then already existing networks to which they belonged begin to dissolve and a new network starts to evolve. Importantly for my analysis, not all actors get interested in new roles, but those who do may adjust to the new roles and get integrated into the new network. Thus, one key point of the moment of interessement is the transformation of selected actors into 'allies' and therefore the establishment of mutual alliances (*ibidem*, p. 40). Callon (1986, p. 1) defines the moment of interessement as a series of processes by which the translators seek to lock the other actors into the roles that are proposed to them (or that emerge as appropriate for them) in the programme.

'Enrolment' is the moment in which new roles and responsibilities are associated with specific actors in a network who accept to take these new roles. Acceptance is

essential for the formation of an actor-network. A network can only be formed if enrolment is reciprocal, which means that both the integrated actors in the network as well as the translating actors (translators) have to take up and accept new roles and responsibilities. However, some actors do not accept their new roles and resist in taking specific responsibilities. Yet, the associations of a network only stick together if the actors accept to take specific new roles, for example if they do not resist. Therefore enrolment is about actors that come to have specific roles and accept them. In this context, the main point in the phase of enrolment concerns the question of whether actors that got interested in solving the problem (interessement) actually accept the new roles ascribed to them by the translating actors, and whether they really align their actions and practices to these new roles and responsibilities. If they do so, these actors get recruited and transformed into allies within the actor-network. As allies they are enrolled into the network and their interests should coincide with the interests of the main translator (Belliger and Krieger 2006, pp. 40-41). According to Callon (1986, p. 1) enrolment is a moment that is very much based on a set of strategies through which the translator seeks to define and interconnect the various roles that the translator itself has allocated to others. These strategies – targeted to recruit actors and transform them into allies that work together to solve a common problem – are aimed at stabilising the actor-network. To stabilise and strengthen the network, specific roles, common and shared meanings, routines, practices and/or strategies are established. It is important to remember that enrolment is very much about how the different actors enrolled in a network share a common idea on how to solve their problem.

‘Mobilisation’ is the last moment of the process of translation in which a solid and stable actor-network is composed and starts to interact with the external world and with other actor-networks, which may help in finding a solution to the initial problem (Cannone 2008, pp. 117-119). Thus, it is about mobilising different external actors that should get enrolled into the existing actor-network in order to support the alliance to find a solution to the initial problem. Furthermore, the network operates as a single actor that can represent itself symbolically through specific signs (e.g. names, brands, images, logos), in order to be recognised.

It is important to note that throughout the cycle of translation actors usually tend to allocate roles and functions to other actors in order to align specific interests. So, translation can be seen as a constant effort of one or more than one actor to integrate other actors in the network by ‘translating’ them into specific roles and interests

(Belliger and Krieger 2006, pp. 38-39). If actors get integrated into networks, specific relations, associations and connections are established among actors. Through different processes these connections get fixed, transformed or dissolved and actors get introduced to, redefined or erased from the network (*ibidem* pp. 24, 40, 41).

In the next section I briefly introduce John Allen's (2003) idea of power and I discuss four "modalities of power" as they assist my analysis of the establishment of the NPG (chapter 4) and the subsequent creation and development of the NPGP (chapter 5).

2.4 John Allen's idea of power

Two common critiques made to ANT are that this theoretical approach underplays the influence of power in society (Bingham 2009, p. 7) and that it assumes that non-human actors have the same agency like human actors (Bosco 2006, p. 137). Rather than tackling these critiques, in this section I discuss John Allen's view of power as it provides a nuanced theoretical language that can be combined with Callon's cycle of translation and that can help me to analyse how connections and disconnections (that form and dissolve between different actors in the process of the coming together of an actor-network) take place, and how they are affected by what Allen (2003) calls specific "modalities of power".

In John Allen's famous book, *Lost Geographies of Power* (2003), the British geographer stresses that power must not be thought of something fixed that can be possessed by a few social actors or as something that is an attribute of things (*ibidem*, p. 8). People, corporations, institutions and organizations do not possess power in themselves. What actors possess, according to Allen, are different kinds of resources (e.g. money, objects, knowledge or ideas), which may be mobilised in order to exercise power and achieve specific goals. Hence, these resources are the means through which power is exercised and they may be used well, misused, incompletely applied or even wasted (*ibidem*, pp. 5, 96). Therefore, the exercise of power is a question of how people use the resources they have in order to achieve their goals.

More important for my thesis is the point that Allen makes about the different ways in which resources can be mobilised to exercise different modalities of power. Allen, in fact, argues that "power is never power in general, but always power of a particular kind" (*ibidem*, p. 2). In his words, power must be thought as a 'relational effect' that is the outcome of social interaction and that presents itself in various

modalities such as authority, domination, resistance, seduction, manipulation, coercion, negotiation and persuasion (*ibidem*, pp. 2, 4, 6). In his 2003 book, the British geographer discusses at length how these different modalities of power work. As the analysis which I present in this thesis brings into light that four main modalities of power played a key-role in the establishment of the NPG and in the subsequent creation of the NPGP, in the following paragraph I briefly define these modalities: domination (imposition), resistance (opposition), negotiation and persuasion.

Domination can be conceived as “an act exercised at someone else’s expense” (*ibidem*, p. 6) and as an act that “involves the imposition of a form of conduct according to a set of particular interests” (*ibidem*, p. 28), and that works to constrain a disparate population (*ibidem*, p. 9). It is rather obvious that, at some point, resistance to forms of domination may emerge and that people may organise themselves into a collective opposition that counteracts specific constraints (*ibidem*, p. 124; see also Anderson 2010a, pp. 60-63). Therefore, resistance (or opposition) can be seen as an act against domination or imposition exercised from a ‘centre’ (a person, an organisation, the state, etc.; see Allen 2004, pp. 21-22). Negotiation and persuasion, as Allen (2003, p. 6) highlights, can lead to a “less confrontational agenda of power”. The relationships in both modalities (negotiation and persuasion) require a “two-way process of communication to exercise the power to achieve shared outcomes” (*ibidem*, pp. 125-126). Negotiation can be seen as a “communicative model of interaction” that takes place between disparate groups (that possess different kinds of resources), which are directed to reach an agreement over common ends (*ibidem*, p. 125). Similarly to negotiation, acts of persuasion are “effective only in an atmosphere of reciprocity where all parties are prepared to listen and communicate” and it “works through a process of argumentation” (*ibidem*, p. 125). Argumentations in persuasive acts “may shape the expectations of individuals, serving to captivate and motivate people across a wide range of setting” (*ibidem*, p. 148). Hence, persuasion can be seen an act targeted to convince actors to follow specific interests.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the main theoretical framework that underpins my account of the NPGP, which, as I pointed out before, I interpret as an actor-network. The CoT is a process consisting of four ‘moments’ through which an actor-network can be

composed and some solutions to a specific problem might be found. Furthermore, it is a tool useful to understand how individual needs and/or objectives are transformed into shared aims and into common solutions to a problem (Brunori et al. 2008, p. 130). In this thesis, I use the CoT as if it were a ‘magnifying lens’ on the NPGP, that helped me to bring into light how some connections and disconnections formed and dissolved in the formation of this Partnership. As I was interested in looking how some NPG partner companies cooperate and other companies do not cooperate, the CoT helped me to focus on these kinds of connections/disconnections and to try to make sense of them. Therefore the CoT provides a good theoretical guide that helped me to look into the history of the NPGP to uncover some of the multiple and complicated links and relations among some of the many human and non-human actors that have connected or not connected, that have collaborated or not collaborated, throughout the coming together of this Partnership. Furthermore, Allen’s nuanced vocabulary of power complement to the CoT as it assists my analysis of the NPGP in pointing to how the connections and disconnections that were at the core of the formation of the Partnership are relations imbued with power. The next chapter provides an account of the methodology that undergirds my analysis of the evolution of the NPGP.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a discussion of the methodology I employed to investigate why the National Park Gesäuse Partnership was established and how it developed. The next section 3.2 focuses on the research question that is at the core of my study. Then, in section 3.3 I discuss the fieldwork in the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* and how I employed ethnography in order to generate the data, which I analysed using the four moments of the cycle of translation, as I briefly illustrate in section 3.4.

3.2 Research question

In this thesis I focus on the NPGP, which was established two years after the foundation of the National Park Gesäuse (which I discuss in chapter 4). My research was guided by the following research question: Why was the NPGP established and how did it evolve from its genesis until today?

Answering this question is important for policy-making in the field of nature conservation. As I mentioned in chapter 1, the literature shows that the establishment of national parks frequently engenders local resistance (see also Adams and Hutton 2007; Ghimire 1994; Holmes 2007; Stoll-Kleemann 2001; West et al. 2006), as in the case of the NPG (see section 4.3 for a detailed account). As I will illustrate in the following chapters, partnerships such as the NPGP have the potential to solve human-nature conflicts, which could emerge when places are the target of nature conservation programmes at different scales. In chapter 1, I also pointed out that I was familiar with the NPGP and I knew that it was a successful project able to bring local companies to work together with each other. Therefore, as I will try to argue in this thesis, projects similar to the NPGP could be adapted and implemented elsewhere to foster (sustainable) forms of socio-economic development.

In order to investigate the development of the NPGP, I conducted an ethnographic research which included participant observation of some of the events organised by the NPGP; 12 semi-structured interviews with key-actors working for the NPG, and with representatives of NPG partner companies; 22 questionnaires which I delivered to some of the actors that are part of the NPGP; and the collection of policy documents and promotional material related to the NPG and the NPGP. The data generated during my fieldwork were selected and then analysed through the lens of Michel Callon's cycle of translation, which I used as a guide to reconstruct the genesis and evolution of the Partnership. In the following section I discuss how the fieldwork in the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* developed and how I employed ethnography as the method useful to generate the data that helped me to answer to my research question.

3.3 Doing an ethnography of the National Park Gesäuse Partnership

It must be noted that, exception made for two promotional booklets (that informs the reader about the NPGP and the individual companies involved in the project) as well as some articles in the NPG magazine "*Im Gseis*", there are no publications on the NPGP. Considered the lack of written material on the NPGP, ethnography could provide the appropriate research method to investigate the evolution of the NPGP as it is a method able to generate rich data and materials. Ethnography can be seen as a way to generate data from a mix of research methods, namely "in-depth interviews, documentary analysis, social surveys and whatever other data collection devices add insight on the problem at hand" (Hoggart et al. 2002, pp. 308-309). In order to reconstruct the origins and evolution of the NPGP I did a fieldwork in the Gesäuse area which lasted approximately four months, from December 2013 to March 2014, and which included research strategies such as participant observation, structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and the collections of policy documents and promotional materials.

To prepare for my fieldwork in the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse*, I first got in touch with the current project manager of the NPGP, Karoline Scheb, one of the key-actors that I subsequently interviewed. I met her in September and October 2013 in the NPG headquarter in Weng in order to discuss my intention of writing a master thesis. It was easy to arrange meetings with her, as she was quite interested in the topic of my research project. She supported my project and was very cooperative as she helped me to gain access to the community of the people involved in the NPGP, namely the representatives of the NPG partner companies (NPG partners). For example, she invited me to participate in several events organised by the NPGP and she briefly introduced me to the NPG partners in the letter she wrote to invite them to participate to the first NPG partner workshop, which was held on 18th of February 2014. There were two other workshops, held on 13th of March and 26th of March 2014. During my fieldwork I could attend the first and the third workshop.

After the two preparatory meetings with Scheb, I participated in a presentation held on 11th of November 2013 and delivered by Josef Ober, a policy-maker from the *Steirische Vulkanland*, a region located in the southeast of Styria. During this event, which mainly dealt with the development process of the *Vulkanland* and which aimed at

motivating the NPG partner companies to cooperate with each other, I first got in touch with the community of the NPG partners. I started to communicate with them and to do my first observations, of which I took notes in a research diary. I also had the opportunity to take photos of the event, which I used as aides memoire that complemented the notes I took.



Figure 2: Presentation of Josef Ober at *Gasthof zur Ennsbrücke*, Admont
Photo: Christoph Gahbauer, November 11th, 2013

In December 2013, I conducted my first semi-structured interview with Scheb, in which I asked her precise questions about the evolution of the Partnership. I also asked her to evaluate each partner company involved in the Partnership (at that time there were about 85 companies) in relation to three aspects: cooperation among partner companies, participation in events, and communication with the project manager. I then classified the partner companies into two different groups: ‘cooperative partners’ and ‘non-cooperative partners’.

At the beginning of my research project I wanted to focus on the reasons why the 16 companies identified by Scheb as ‘non-cooperative partners’ do not actually cooperate. I therefore conducted a pilot study (based on a short telephone survey) on these 16 businesses in order to find out the main reasons for non-cooperation. Those actors are viewed by Scheb as weakening the network because they do not collaborate

(enough) with other business partners and the project manager herself and they are not participating in the events organised in the Partnership (Scheb 2014; interview). However, it was difficult to reach these 16 specific partner companies. Finally, I succeeded in doing 6 structured interviews (questionnaires) on the phone. As I could not reach all the businesses and, because the 6 representatives of the companies, which I could talk to, argued that they were more or less collaborating with the Partnership, I decided to focus my research on the group of 'cooperative partners'. Hence, I could investigate the non-cooperation in the NPGP only partially and, I present my (limited) insights to non-cooperation at the end of chapter 6. In addition to the telephone surveys with the 'non-cooperative partners', additional data regarding non-cooperation were generated through qualitative interviews and questionnaires with the group of 'cooperative partners' as I included questions on non-cooperation.

Furthermore, I asked Scheb if she could tell me the names and the positions of the people who played an important role in the development of the NPGP. She mentioned the names of Werner Franek, the first director of the NPG; Herbert Wölger, the current NPG director; Gertraud Raggam, the first project manager of the NPGP; David Osebik, a former NPG employee who used to collaborate with some NPG partners in the context of a project about soft-mobility (GSEISPUR) that he implemented in the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse*; Christoph Pirafelner, owner and cook of the NPG partner company *Gasthaus zur Ennsbrücke*; Günter Planitzer, confectioner and owner of the partner company *Café Konditorei Stockhammer*; and Helga Traxler, representative of the partner company *Mödlingerhütte*. I then looked for the contact details of the people that Scheb mentioned, as I wanted to call them, inform them about my research project, and ask if they were willing to talk with me in person during an interview. I wanted to interview them because they could tell me from an insider point of view information about the origins and the evolution of the NPGP. Exception made for Werner Franek, whom I was not able to reach, and Gertraud Raggam, who preferred to answer the questions in a written form via E-mail, I succeeded in interviewing all the other key-informants that Scheb mentioned.

I was able to fix appointments for the interviews with other four people involved in the NPGP: Thomas Drechsler, who used to be the director of the tourism association

(*Tourismusverband Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse*) when I was doing my fieldwork.⁵ I considered him as a key-informant because he collaborated with some partner companies and knew the evolution of the NPGP since he became the director of the tourism association in 2008. I also interviewed three other representatives of partner companies which Scheb identified as 'cooperative'; namely, Albert Bacher, owner of the company *Gasthaus Kamper*, a NPG partner since the very beginning and whom I personally know since many years; Renate Baumann, representative of the company *Reiterhof Hofheuriger Laussabauer*, who is part of the NPGP since the beginning of the project and who is very committed to developing the Partnership itself; and, finally, Otmar Hoffman, owner of the company *Nah & Frisch Hoffmann*, who is part of the NPGP since five years, working in the sector of trade, and who promotes many products of other NPG partners in his grocery store (see subsection 6.2.3). All of them could tell me important information regarding the history of the NPGP.

Before I conducted the semi-structured interviews with these key-informants, I explored more in detail the specific roles of each interviewee in the Partnership and I created a list of questions for the interviews. The questions I prepared for the 'cooperative partners' are quite similar, but I adjusted those questions aimed at exploring the specific economic activities of each company. I also prepared individual lists of questions for the other key-actors I wanted to interview; namely, the four NPG employees and the director of the tourism association.

In preparing the structure of the interviews, I especially paid attention to construct a series of questions, which could contribute to generating a good and fruitful conversation between the interviewees and me. For example, I prepared simple questions at the beginning of the interview, and I ended with more controversial ones. Furthermore, I kept in mind that I had to be flexible and ready to ask further additional questions, in case the interviewees mentioned interesting information of which I did not think before the interview.

Altogether I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews between December 2013 and the beginning of March 2014 (see appendix 1), which included an average of 25 questions aimed at finding out information about the genesis and the evolution of the NPGP. The average length of each interview was a little more than one hour. I met ten

⁵ Drechsler recently resigned from his job. The current director of the tourism association is David Osebik, the former project manager of GSEISPU, who took up this role in November 2014.

interviewees in person, I interviewed the current project manager twice, and one interview took place in written form via E-mail (with Gertraud Raggam).

My interview partners can be classified into two different groups. The first group is composed of six representatives of NPG partner companies (working in different sectors) that Scheb evaluated as 'cooperative partners'; namely, people that are committed in the project. In addition, as I mentioned before, I interviewed the director of the tourism association that I also assign to this group. More specifically, I was able to interview the following seven informants (in brackets I indicate the name of the partner company and the sectors they belong to):

- Helga Traxler (*Mödlingerhütte*; alpine huts)
- Christoph Pirafelner (*Gasthof zur Ennsbrücke*; gastronomy)
- Günter Planitzer (*Café Konditorei Stockhammer*; gastronomy)
- Albert Bacher (*Gasthaus Kamper*; gastronomy)
- Renate Baumann (*Reiterhof Hofheuriger Laussabauer*; accommodation, direct sells, *Jausenstation*,⁶ and leisure and sport)
- Otmar Hoffmann (*Nah & Frisch Hoffmann*; trade)
- Thomas Drechsler (director of the tourism association *Tourismusverband Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse*)

The NPG employees belong to a second group of interviewees. I interviewed the current NPG director, the current project manager of the NPGP, the first project manager of the NPGP, and another NPG employee that manages a project about soft-mobility:

- Herbert Wölger (current director of the NPG)
- Karoline Scheb (current project manager of the NPGP)
- Gertraud Raggam (first project manager of the NPGP)
- David Osebik (project manager of GSEISPUR)

It is important here to highlight one limit of my thesis: namely, that I primarily interviewed people indicated to me by Scheb; that is people that may tend to share views which could be somehow similar to Scheb's own view. Furthermore, I interviewed

⁶ *Jausenstation* is a place where customers can eat small cold dishes.

four informants that I selected independently amongst the 'cooperative partners'; that is people who are supportive of the NPGP project. Therefore, my analysis is primarily based on the views of those actors who supported or support the NPG and the NPGP. In fact, I did not interview people who opposed (and oppose) the NPG and the NPGP. And, as I mentioned before, my pilot study, which aimed at exploring the views of those partners who were identified as 'non cooperative', was not exactly successful and I could explore their views only partially. However, oppositional voices are included in this thesis primarily through the historical discourse analysis conducted by Würflinger (2007), which I basically used to reconstruct the history of the NPG.

As for the key-actors I did interview, I asked them questions aimed at gathering information on the birth and development of the NPGP: the establishment and the development of the Partnership; the cooperation with other partner companies and the NPG; the participation in specific events; the representation of the Partnership; the impacts of the Partnership on the NPG area and benefits they perceived to have from being part of the Partnership. As the interviews were semi-structured, I was able to ask follow-up questions whenever necessary to ask clarifications or to invite the informant to give me more detail on something which sounded important. For example when the interviewees talked about the 'spokesperson' of an activity sector (*Gruppensprecher*), I asked them follow-up questions like: *"Which function has the spokesperson of your section?"* or *"Does each section has a spokesperson?"*

In order to establish rapport with my interviewees, I tried to arrange the meetings in places with a good atmosphere in which they felt comfortable and relaxed. Thus, I met them either at their office or in their home. At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself and the topic of my thesis, I asked if I was allowed to record the interview and to use the recording for my research. I also asked the interviewees if they wanted to remain anonymous. Except one participant, none of my interview partners wanted to remain anonymous.

During the interviews I listened carefully to their answers and I took notes of specific moments or statements that caught my attention. I recorded each interview with the integrated microphone of my laptop in order to listen subsequently to all the conversations and to take notes of the answers (I did not fully transcribe the interviews as it was not deemed to be necessary).

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I also delivered 22 questionnaires to the representatives of partner companies that participated in the first NPG partner

workshop I was invited to attend, and which took place on 18th of February 2014 in St. Gallen at *Gasthof Hensle*, a partner company working in the sector of gastronomy. This workshop was a good opportunity for me to briefly present my research project and to hand over some questionnaires to the participants in order to gather some information that helped me to understand how the Partnership works. More precisely, I wanted to find out how the NPG partners perceive the Partnership; why they entered into a partnership with the NPG; how and why they use promotional material such as the NPG partner logo; how they cooperate with other partner companies and what motivates them to cooperate; how they benefit from cooperation; why some partner companies do not cooperate; how NPG partners and the NPG benefit from the Partnership; and which impact the Partnership has on the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse*. The 22 workshop participants that filled out the questionnaires belong with their business to one or more than one of the eleven different activity sectors of the NPGP: most of them belong to the sector of accommodation and gastronomy (see appendix 2).⁷ After the workshop, I digitalized the handwritten answers of my research participants to improve the legibility of the data and to facilitate the analysis.

During the events and workshops in which I participated I had the chance to do some observations to try to understand something about the relationships between the members of the Partnership and other internal and external actors. Participating in these events was also very useful to get an idea of the current and future projects of the NPGP, and it was particularly useful to see how cooperation between the partners occurs. As I explain in chapters 5 and 6, these and other events are and were crucial moments that contributed to the strengthening of the NPGP. Therefore the events I attended offered me the opportunity to participate and observe in practice one of the ways in which the Partnership was evolving. During these events I took notes in a notebook that I always carried with me during my fieldwork and I also had the possibility of taking some photos which I used to complement my notes.

⁷ In the appendix 2 I attached the German questionnaire I handed over to the workshop participants. In brackets next to the response options (activity sectors) of the first question I highlighted how many of the research participants marked a specific sector.



Figure 3: National Park Gesäuse partner workshops at *Gasthof Hensle*, St. Gallen

Left: The first workshop on February 18th, 2014; Photo: Christoph Gahbauer
 Right: The third workshop on March 26th, 2014; Photo: Christoph Gahbauer

In addition to the interviews, questionnaires and participant observations, I also gathered relevant documentation of the NPG and the Partnership, which I subsequently considered for my analysis. For example, I collected informational booklets that present the Partnership and the individual NPG partner companies; some contracts between the partner companies and the NPG LLC (Limited Liability Company); the NPG magazine “*Im Gseis*” and two videos about the Partnership.

During my fieldwork I took several photos of important human and non-human actors that emerged to be important for my research. For example, I took photos of the people that participated in events (see figures 2 and 3); places where the NPG partner logo was displayed (see figure 7); local products produced and promoted by NPG partner companies (see figures 14 and 15); and several promotional material used to advertise the Partnership and the events they organise (e.g. the “Dirndlball” – the ball of the NPG partners – explained in section 6.2.4).

In the next section, I briefly explain how I used the cycle of translation in order to analyse the data that I generated during my fieldwork.

3.4 Analysis

My fieldwork generated a rather large amount of data, which I had to select in order to focus my analysis. I selected only those materials relevant to answer my research question. In order to reduce and organize the data and to analyze or interpret them, I used analytical codes, which reflect the four moments of Michel Callon’s cycle of

translation (see section 2.3). In practice, I highlighted with different colours specific words or statements in the text (e.g. answers to the interviews and questionnaires) that emerged to be relevant for a particular moment of the cycle of translation. For example the word “acceptance” turned out to be crucial for answering the first part of my research question (why was the Partnership established) and was important for the ‘problematization’ phase. Other words and statements that I associated with the ‘interestment’ phase (e.g. “*the NPG introduced us to the project idea*”), the ‘enrolment’ phase (e.g. “spokesperson”), and with the ‘mobilisation’ phase (e.g. “excursion to other national parks” or “NPG partner logo”) were important to answer the second part of my research question; namely, how the Partnership developed.

During my analysis, some of the actors involved in the formation of the Partnership emerged as playing an important role, crucially shaping the coming into being of the Partnership itself. I identified some of the multiple human and non-human actors that played a role in the process of translation of the NPGP and I tried to reconstruct their interactions and the outcome of their interactions. For example, in the following chapters I have highlighted how some human actors such as the current project manager and other specific members of the NPGP were (and are) particularly influential in shaping the evolution and strengthening of the Partnership; how others (i.e. the ‘non-cooperative partners’) are perceived as weakening the NPGP; and how other non-human actors such as contracts, promotional materials, and local products have differently contributed to strengthen and/or weakening of the coming into being of the NPGP.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have illustrated the methods I employed in order to explore why the NPGP was established and how it developed from its genesis until today. After I discussed the research question that is at the core of my study, I explained how I started my fieldwork in the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* and how I went deeper into the field in order to conduct my ethnographic study to generate the data for my analysis. The information and data that I generated during my fieldwork enabled me to reconstruct the history of the establishment of the NPG and of the genesis and evolution of the NPGP. The analysis I present in the following chapters is structured into three main parts. In the next chapter, I offer an account of the history of the establishment of

the NPG. In chapter 5, based primarily but not exclusively on the semi-structured interviews, I discuss why the NPGP was established and how it evolved from its genesis until today. This chapter is basically structured according to the four ‘moments’ of Michel Callon’s cycle of translation that guided my analysis. In chapter 6, my analysis focuses on how specific actors cooperated and cooperate in the NPGP, I also point out the socio-economic incentives and benefits from cooperation, and I finally present my insights about ‘non-cooperation’ in the Partnership.

4 The establishment of the National Park Gesäuse

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I offer an account of the history of the establishment of the National Park Gesäuse (NPG), which provides the necessary background useful to explain why the project of the National Park Gesäuse Partnership (NPGP) subsequently originated and developed. The NPG, located in the Ennstal Alps in the district of Liezen, northern Styria (see figure 1), was officially inaugurated in October 2002 and internationally recognised by the International Union for Conservation and Nature (IUCN) as a category II protected area⁸ in December 2003. The evolution of how the Gesäuse area became recognised as a national park is examined in this chapter. In section 4.2, I begin to explain the initial plans and efforts of establishing a national park in the Gesäuse area. Section 4.3 describes how opposition to the designation of the NPG emerged, and compares two conflicting parties, the NPG opponents with the proponents. In section 4.4, I highlight the execution and results of three public opinion surveys and one referendum on the possible establishment of the National Park. After I examine, in section 4.5, how the NPG project was finally implemented, I discuss in section 4.6, three conflicting ideas of ‘nature’ that emerged from my account. Finally, in the conclusion, I

⁸ The IUCN (International Union for Conservation and Nature) developed a specific system of categories in which conservation areas throughout the world can be classified. Category II protected areas (national parks) are areas that are primarily managed to protect ecosystems.

briefly describe the official status of the NPG and I point out primary and secondary objectives of a national park in general.

4.2 The initial plans to establish a national park in the Gesäuse area

The idea of protecting nature in the Gesäuse area has a long history and goes back to the beginning of the 20th century. Peter Rosegger, a very famous Austrian author and poet, was already impressed of the Gesäuse Mountains (*Gesäuseberge*) and strongly advocated its protection (ASL 2002, p. 240). In 1958 the Gesäuse became the first conservation area in Styria (*ibidem*, p. 233). Since the 1970s, there had been many plans and efforts to establish conservation areas in Styria with the title 'national park'. In Styria, there were plans to implement national parks in four different areas that are all located in the northwest of the federal state: *Schladminger Tauern*, *Totes Gebirge*, *Dachstein-Osthänge* and *Gesäuseberge*. In all of these (and other Austrian) projects for establishing national parks opposition has arisen because local inhabitants felt negatively affected and therefore tried to prevent their implementations (Würflinger 2007, p. 9). However, today, all of the four regions mentioned above are European conservation areas, but the Gesäuse is the only 'national park' in Styria (*ibidem*, p. 239).



Figure 4: Location of the six Austrian national parks (category II protected areas)

Source: <http://www.donauauen.at/?area=nationalparks>

In 1976 Helmut Stoiber, a national park expert from Linz, had the idea of establishing a national park in the Gesäuse region. However, the *Naturschutzbund* (Austria's oldest nature conservation organisation) preferred to plan a national park in the area of *Schladminger Tauern*. The Gesäuse could be designed as a special conservation area of Europe, but not a national park (ASL 2002, p. 240).

The idea to establish a national park in the Gesäuse region was at first made public in a regional fact sheet, in 1987 (*ibidem*, p. 241). This project was published by the so-called *Plattform zum Schutz des Gesäuses*, a citizens' initiative created in 1986 by Franz Maunz, a businessman from Weng, who is today the owner of the *Wengerwirt*,⁹ a NPG partner company active in the accommodation sector. The *Plattform zum Schutz des Gesäuses* called for the establishment of a national park in order to prevent a hydroelectric power plant that was planned to be built by the *Benediktinerstift Admont*¹⁰ on the river *Enns* in the area of *Gesäuseeingang*. The people that supported the *Plattform zum Schutz des Gesäuses* did not yet achieve the establishment of a national park, but rather the protection of the *Gesäuseeingang*. In 1988, the *Gesäuseeingang*, a cataract of the river *Enns*, was in fact declared as a natural monument (Würflinger 2007, p. 115 and Maunz 2014, p. 10).

The first official application to establish a national park in the Gesäuse area (formerly called *Nationalpark Gesäuseberge*) was proposed by Johannes Gepp, the former vice president of the Austrian *Naturschutzbund*, on the 4th of December 1990 to the then governor Josef Krainer. This application was approved and advocated by Jörg Steinbach (*Landesnaturschutzbeauftragter*) in 1991, but the project was put aside until 1995 due to another national park project in the area of *Totes Gebirge*. In 1995, the Institute of Nature Conservation in Graz presented the project of establishing a national park in the Gesäuse area to the new minister of environment, Martin Bartenstein, and to Gerhard Hirschmann (*Naturschutzlandesrat*), who both had a positive attitude towards this idea. In autumn 1996, the federal state government of Styria started to work on the project for establishing the NPG, which was eventually established six years later (ASL 2002, p. 242 and Würflinger 2007, pp. 116-117).

⁹ <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/de/nationalpark-partner/beherbergung/197-wengerwirt>

¹⁰ The *Benediktinerstift Admont* is a monastery that also incorporates some companies, museums, a secondary school, and a famous library that attracts many tourists. It is the main economic actor in the Gesäuse; see <http://www.stiftadmont.at/english/>

In August 1996, a first meeting in Johnsbach (a village in the heart of the Gesäuse area) took place, in which representatives of the *Landesnaturschutzamt* (the department of nature conservation of Styria) and the *Steiermärkische Landesforste* (the Styrian department of forestry) discussed how to establish the National Park in the area. They had two main objectives. First, the National Park area should be established only on the properties of the *Steiermärkische Landesforste*. This idea aimed at minimizing the risk of a potential resistance of local landowners to the establishment of the park (Würflinger 2007, p. 127). Second, the National Park should become an IUCN-category II protected area in future, so that it could be co-financed by the federal government. After this meeting, the plan of establishing a national park in the Gesäuse region was made public (Würflinger 2007, p. 125).

In September 1996, the project of the NPG was presented to the mayors of the potentially affected communities who all supported the plan. According to the mayor of Admont, Günter Posch, the mayors supported the national park project because they saw an opportunity for the development of tourism in the region. Also the parties governing the local municipalities of the Gesäuse area (SPÖ and ÖVP)¹¹ officially supported the establishment of the NPG. In December 1996, representatives of both parties made an application to the federal state government of Styria for the establishment of the NPG. This application was approved in June 1997 (*ibidem*, p. 125).

One of the crucial points of this application was that the NPG could only be realised if the local population and policy-makers supported the project (*ibidem*, p. 126). However, when the application was written, key-actors among the local population (i.e. farmers, hunters and forest rangers of the *Benediktinerstift Admont*) were not informed about the initiation of this project. This lack of information generated the feeling amongst local people that decisions were taken without asking them about their opinion. As a consequence organised opposition against the NPG project started in the beginning of 1997 (*ibidem*, p. 128).

¹¹ SPÖ (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs) is the Social Democratic Party of Austria and ÖVP (Österreichische Volkspartei) is the Austrian People's Party.

4.3 Opposition to the establishment of the National Park Gesäuse

In February 1997, Johann Resch (the main actor that prevented the national park project of *Niedere Tauern*) invited the farmers affected by the potential establishment of the NPG to an information event in Liezen, in which he suggested them to create an association to oppose the national park project: those who were affected negatively by the NPG project – particularly farmers, hunters, forest rangers and landowners – created then the so-called *Schutzgemeinschaft der vom Nationalpark Betroffenen* (Würflinger 2007, p. 127). The main objective of the representatives of this group was to prevent the designation of an IUCN-category II protected area (national park) and to establish the Gesäuse as an IUCN-category V (protected landscape) because in such a category they would not be affected by restrictions on the use of the land (*ibidem*, p. 128). In fact, the representatives of the *Schutzgemeinschaft* were afraid that a national park as an IUCN-category II might lead to the implementation of specific regulations that could limit their activities. For example, many farmers feared the end of alpine farming; hunters were afraid of the end of trophy hunting; some forest rangers were preoccupied that the forests could go ‘too wild’; and other local people were afraid that the expected large amount of tourists could generate a lot of waste and traffic (*ibidem*, p. 135). Generally, the bad image of the NPG as an IUCN-category II and the associated fears of local people were fuelled by the *Schutzgemeinschaft* in several events in which they informed the local population about the negative effects that might have a national park by being designated as a category II protected area. The opposition group also published a local newspaper entitled *Heimat Gesäuse*, first published in 1997, in which several critical articles about the establishment of the NPG were published (*ibidem*, p. 135).

The proponents of the NPG were therefore put under high pressure by the opponents group and its propaganda. To counteract the resistance of the *Schutzgemeinschaft*, the proponents also created a group in January 1998, the so-called *Trägerverein*, which organised public information events and released a club newspaper called “*Xeis*” (*ibidem*, p. 131). In general, between 1997 and 2002 there were many controversial and harsh discussions about the implementation of a national park in the Gesäuse area, which were evident especially during public information events and in local media.

It has to be mentioned that in March 1998 the company E.C.O. (Institute of Ecology)¹² started to conduct a feasibility study of the NPG on behalf of the federal state government of Styria. Employees from E.C.O. investigated, for example, possible conflict-scenarios or the acceptance rate of the people potentially affected in the area by the establishment of the National Park (*ibidem*, p. 134). In June 1999 the *Trägerverein* presented the feasibility study, which was evaluated positively by E.C.O., to the public. The main point of the study was that the Gesäuse area was qualified for an IUCN-category II. But this study also revealed that the acceptance of the local people was low and resistance had to be expected, especially by hunters and forest rangers. Furthermore this study declared that trophy hunting had to be prohibited and that the alpine pastures of the farmers were not affected by the establishment of a national park in the Gesäuse area (*ibidem*, p. 143).

4.4 Opinion surveys and referendum

Between 1998 and 2001 the opinions of a sample of the local inhabitants on the establishment of the NPG was examined through three opinion surveys and one referendum. The first survey was conducted in 1998 by the Gallup-Institute¹³ that asked 100 inhabitants of Admont if they supported a national park, no matter which category. 70 per cent answered negatively. To the question if they would support a national park with the category II, 91 per cent answered negatively again (Würflinger 2007, p. 140). After this survey, the mayor of Admont, Günther Posch, a proponent of the NPG, conducted the second survey in 1999. He sent the survey to 2.513 households of five potentially affected national park communities (Admont, Ardning, Hall, Johnsbach and Weng) and received 578 answers. 46,5 per cent had the opinion that the NPG was 'very important' for the region, 45,5 per cent answered it was 'not important' (*ibidem*, p. 142). In 2000, the third survey was conducted by the *Sozialistische Jugend Steiermark*¹⁴ and involved teenagers from Admont. The result was that 71 per cent of the teenagers from Admont were in favour of the NPG project (*ibidem*, p. 146). Finally, in October 2001, the local council of Admont conducted a referendum with the citizens of Admont (*ibidem*, p.

¹² <http://www.e-c-o.at/>

¹³ <http://www.gallup.at/de/>

¹⁴ <http://www.sj-stmk.at/>

147). Both groups, the *Trägerverein* (proponents) and *Schutzgemeinschaft* (opponents) sent letters of information to the inhabitants of Admont as a form of their propaganda.



Figure 5: Propaganda documents sent by the *Schutzgemeinschaft* (left) and the *Trägerverein* (right) in October 2001; Source: Würflinger 2007, pp. 151-152

The question of the referendum launched in October 2001 was:

Shall the council and the mayor of the municipality of Admont commit to the implementation of the National Park Gesäuse as an IUCN-category II, with the national park information centre located in Admont? (*ibidem*, p. 153).

The result was positive for the NPG opponents because 60 per cent of the voters¹⁵ decided against an IUCN-category II and the establishment of the information centre of the National Park in Admont (*ibidem*, p. 153). However, both the NPG and the national park information centre were established in Admont. Therefore, this referendum did not influence the decision by the federal state government of Styria of establishing the NPG. The federal state government of Styria in fact had already unanimously decided on the 10th of July in 2001 (before the referendum) that the NPG had to be created. From this account, it is obvious that the foundation of the NPG was imposed from the 'above' on the area and its population.

¹⁵ There was a voter participation of 44 per cent.

4.5 The establishment of the National Park Gesäuse

On March the 12th, 2002, the law establishing the NPG was enacted by the Styrian parliament (*Landtag*). Shortly after, in April, the *NPG Planungs-GmbH* was created in order to plan and realise the NPG (Würflinger 2007, p. 157). To zone the national park area and draw its boundaries, the *NPG Planungs-GmbH*, the *Landesforste* and the federal state government cooperated. Hans-Peter Scheb (who is today spokesperson of the *Alpiner Rettungsdienst Gesäuse*¹⁶ and a key-actor in the NPGP) and Robert Riemelmoser, who was the director of the *NPG Planungs-GmbH* (*ibidem*, p. 106), initially managed the *NPG Planungs-GmbH* and intensively negotiated with the local farmers about the incorporation of their property in the national park area (*ibidem*, p. 158). Then, in May of the same year, delegates of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation and Nature) visited the Gesäuse region and determined that the NPG area was suitable for being designated as a category II protected area (*ibidem*, p. 158 and Kalhs 2003, p. 5). After the Austrian Government granted the funding of the NPG in July, the national park law became effective in August 2002 (*ibidem*, p. 158).

Finally, the NPG was officially inaugurated on the 26th of October 2002 in the library of the *Benediktinerstift Admont*. On this day an agreement (15a federal constitutional law) was signed between the former governor Waltraud Klasnic and the then environment minister Wilhelm Molterer (*ibidem*, p. 159 and ASL 2002, p. 233). It has to be mentioned that the NPG was not legally established until the contracts between the *NPG Planungs-GmbH*, the *Landesforste* and the local farmers were signed. This happened on the 25th of April in 2003 after intense negotiations with the local landowners (*ibidem*, p. 160). The only actor that decided to integrate parts of his private property into the NPG territory was Ludwig Wolf, the mayor of Johnsbach. All the other local farmers refused to include their properties in the NPG.¹⁷

On the 1st of March 2003, Werner Franek became the first director of the NPG LLC (Limited Liability Company), the headquarter and administrative centre of the NPG (ASL 2002, p. 237). Together with other employees of the NPG LLC he prepared the application documents necessary for the official recognition of the NPG as an IUCN-category II protected area. After the submitted documents were proved by the IUCN, the

¹⁶ The *Alpiner Rettungsdienst Gesäuse* is an association that became recently a NPG partner company and belongs to the activity sector of associations.

¹⁷ Based on a conversation I had with Gerhard Lieb (professor at the Department of Geography and Regional Science at the University of Graz), who is well informed about the history of the establishment of the NPG, December the 4th, 2014.

NPG was internationally recognised as a category II protected area on 5th of December 2003. Figure 6 shows the certificate of this recognition.

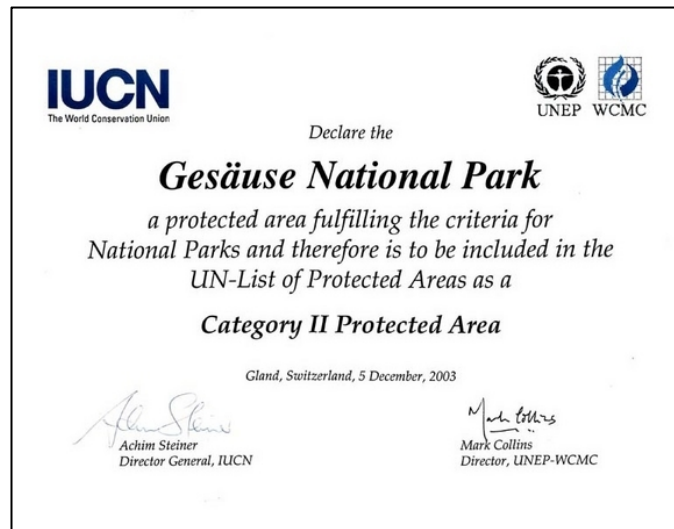


Figure 6: Recognition for the National Park Gesäuse as an IUCN-category II protected area

Signed in Gland, Switzerland on December 5th, 2003;
Source: <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/de/philosophie>

In the next section I discuss three conflicting ideas of ‘nature’ that emerged from my account presented in the previous sections of this chapter.

4.6 Conflicting natures in the National Park Gesäuse

To come close to the conclusion of this chapter, I want to highlight how from my account of the history of the NPG three coexisting ideas of nature emerged and affected the contested process that brought about the establishment of the NPG. In contemporary social sciences, ‘nature’ is often understood as a social construction; that is something, which does not exist in a pure and essential state, but is imbued with different meanings and ideological discourses (Whatmore 1999, pp. 4-11 and Anderson 2010b, pp. 89-103). In other words, there is not just one universal (idea of) nature, but there are different ‘natures’. Different social actors understand and approach nature in different ways, accordingly to their social positions. Some groups of people seek to ‘protect’ nature, others to ‘control’ nature, and some to ‘exploit’ it. These three different ideas of nature are dominant in the Western perspective (Anderson 2010b, p. 91), and also emerged from my account of the history of the establishment of the NPG.

Basically, a national park incorporates the idea that intact nature has to be protected from human intervention, even if in specific zones some human activities are deemed appropriate (e.g. mild recreation or education). The group of proponents of the NPG (e.g. the *Trägerverein* and *Plattform zum Schutz des Gesäuses*) supported and promoted this idea of nature conservation, which however was opposed to the idea of nature adopted by the NPG opponents (e.g. the *Schutzgemeinschaft*), which looked at nature differently. Some people belonging to this latter group looked at nature as uncontrolled, wild and a threat to human beings, and as something that had to be controlled or tamed (e.g. avalanches, floods or the so-called *Borkenkäferplage*¹⁸). Other NPG opponents understood nature neither as something that should be protected nor controlled, but rather exploited. This latter idea of nature underpinned e.g. *Benediktinerstift Admont's* plan to build a hydroelectric power plant on the river Enns that was finally prevented by the *Plattform zum Schutz des Gesäuses* in 1998.¹⁹ More importantly, this idea of nature as something to be exploited and as a 'place', which is the source of income for some people, also informed the actions of those who, like hunters, forest rangers and farmers, opposed the establishment of the NPG. Many inhabitants that made/make their living from the exploitation of nature started to resist to the establishment of the park because the idea of nature protection crucially impacted on their nature, which they understood as their 'home' and source of income. Hence, the three conflicting ideas of nature exploitation (for making a living), nature protection (to conserve nature from harmful human intervention) and nature control (to protect humans from wild nature) were at the core of the opposition between those who wanted to establish the NPG and those who tried to resist it. As I will point out in the following two chapters and in the conclusion of this thesis, the creation of the NPGP harmonised these three conflicting views of nature.

¹⁸ This plague of insects was used by the local opponents (especially by the forest rangers) as a good reason to resist the establishment of the National Park. Their logic was as follows: if a national park was to be established in the Gesäuse, nature would be protected and 'left untouched'. The consequence of this would be that also the insects would have been left free of acting and destroying the forests. This was why, according to the opponents, a national park in the Gesäuse area had not to be established (see also Traxler 2014; interview and Würflinger 2007, pp. 134, 182).

¹⁹ Würflinger (2007, p. 138) highlights another example: a project that was planned by the company *Knauf*, in which people wanted to mine gypsum in Johnsbach. This project also encountered resistance by the *Plattform zum Schutz des Gesäuses* and the inhabitants of Johnsbach and could not be realised.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I offered an account of the history of the establishment of the NPG. I highlighted the initial efforts and plans to establish a national park in the Gesäuse area; the emerging conflicts between opponents and proponents; the participation of local people in three public surveys and a referendum; and I commented on the three intersecting and conflicting ideas of 'nature', which underpinned the contested process of the establishment of the NPG. In this last section, I want to briefly describe the official status of the NPG in order to introduce the next chapter, which focuses on the birth and development of the NPGP. Basically, the NPG is a protected area that is:

a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values (Dudley 2008, p. 8).

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the IUCN uses a specific system of categorization through which protected areas worldwide can be classified. National parks belong to the category II protected areas and are defined by the IUCN as:

large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities (*ibidem*, p. 16).

A category II protected area is also characterized by an area in which 75 per cent of the total area must be kept free from commercial exploitation.²⁰ In other words, the NPG is a protected area mainly used for the protection of ecosystems as well as for recreational purposes.²¹

According to the IUCN, the primary objective of a category II protected area is: "to protect natural biodiversity along with its underlying ecological structure and supporting environmental processes, and to promote education and recreation."²² In addition to the primary objective, the IUCN defines other objectives for category II protected areas; for example "to take into account the needs of indigenous people and

²⁰ <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/short-sweet?lang=en#weiterlesen>

²¹ <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/philosophy?lang=en#weiterlesen>

²² http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home/gpap_quality/gpap_pacategories/gpap_pacategory2/

local communities...” and “to contribute to local economies through tourism” (*ibidem*, p. 16). In other words, the NPG was not only established in order to protect nature but also to support compatible economic development that can contribute to local economies and communities. As I point out in the next chapter, the NPGP was established as an instrument to comply with some of these objectives and to harmonize the different ideas of nature that the establishment of protected areas involve (nature as something which must be preserved and protected from harmful human intervention; nature as a resource for the production of goods (e.g. through agriculture); and nature as an economic resource for (sustainable) forms of tourism).

In the following chapter I turn to discuss the emergence and the development of the NPGP, which is the main focus of my thesis. I will show that the NPGP emerged as a project to solve two specific problems; one is the resistance/opposition to the establishment of the NPG that I have discussed in this chapter.

5 The National Park Gesäuse Partnership

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I offer an account of the foundation and development of the National Park Gesäuse Partnership, which is guided by Michel Callon’s cycle of translation (see chapter 2). In section 5.2 (‘problematization’), I illustrate why and when the NPGP was created by focusing on the two specific problems that triggered the foundation of the Partnership itself. In discussing the phase of ‘interestment’ (section 5.3), I highlight, how the first project manager awoke the interest of some local companies to participate in the project and how she collaborated with them. Then, in section 5.4, I focus on the ‘enrolment’ phase and I describe how the project manager had been successful in enrolling the first actors (local businesses) in the NPGP project, and how today the current project manager operates in order to enrol and/or expel other actors. In addition, I discuss how people from the network took up and accepted specific roles within the Partnership. Finally, in section 5.5, I turn to discuss the ‘mobilisation’ phase, and I offer an account of the NPGP as it works today. I explain how the initial problems that triggered the emergence of the NPGP itself could be solved; how the Partnership

represents itself symbolically; and how the Partnership interacted and interacts with the external world (e.g. with actors from the *Steirische Vulkanland* region or from other European national parks).

5.2 Problematisation

Werner Franek, the first director of the NPG, identified two problems that affected the newly established National Park: the low rate of local acceptance (see 5.2.1) and a rather weak local economy (see 5.2.2). To solve them, he tried to develop a strategy, which entailed the creation of a partnership based on mutual cooperation between the NPG and some local companies. Franek named this strategy 'National Park Gesäuse Partnership', a project that had the objective of connecting local businesses amongst themselves and with the NPG (Raggam 2005, p. 32). In Raggam's words (the first project manager of the NPGP), Franek wanted to "form a network of local partner businesses that cooperate closely among themselves and also with the National Park Gesäuse" (Raggam 2014; interview).

From the very beginning of the project there were three central objectives: mutual marketing, environmental protection and the strengthening of the *regionale Wertschöpfung*²³ (Raggam 2005, p. 32). In other words, the Partnership had to be based on a common aim for all project participants: to strengthen the region economically, to preserve the "Gesäuse jewel", and to exploit its touristic potential (Raggam 2004, p. 39 and Jungmaier et. al 2008, p. 123). The project was also created to offer a common strategy to the local businesses for their development and to provide to both tourists and local people clear contact points where gather information about the NPG (Jungmaier et. al 2008, p. 123 and Wölger 2014; interview).

The NPGP project was officially established in the spring of 2004 to foster the creation of a strong connection between the NPG and the communities living in the two small regions formerly called *Gesäuse-Eisenwurzen*, which in 2006 were merged into the so-called *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* (Scheb, Drechsler, Pirafelner; interviews 2014). Until 2006 the project was financed by *Leader+*, namely, a development programme of the European Union, which provides structurally weak rural regions with

²³ In this thesis the term *regionale Wertschöpfung* refers to the total economic benefits generated by all economic actors based in the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* and it is broadly understood as a factor that positively contributes to the economic development in the region.

funds to help actors in developing the long-term potential of their region (Raggam 2005, p. 35 and Scheb 2014; interview).²⁴ It is important to notice that *Leader+* was a programme that promoted the implementation of strategies for sustainable development, focusing on partnerships and networks for the exchange of experiences.²⁵

In the following two subsections, I offer some details about the two main problems that Franek wanted to solve with the formation of the NPGP.

5.2.1 Low acceptance rate of the National Park Gesäuse

As illustrated in chapter 4, when the NPG was established, there was a weak connection between the NPG and the local communities as many inhabitants had a sceptical or even critical view towards the new conservation area in the region (see also Scheb and Osebik; interviews 2014).

It must be recalled that there were some fierce opponents to the NPG as their activities were threatened by the establishment of the category II protected area (see also Bacher, Scheb, Planitzer; interviews 2014). It can also be speculated that opposition to the NPG grew stronger as the park was established by ignoring the results of the 2001 referendum, which clearly indicated that local inhabitants (citizens of Admont) were against the establishment of the park (see section 4.4). Furthermore, as suggested by some of my interviewees (e.g. Traxler), the fact that many employees of the NPG team (e.g. national park rangers) were not local, but came from other parts of Austria (mostly Vienna), was a problem for some inhabitants of the area. This was seen as an external interference: some inhabitants perceived the new employees of the NPG as “outsiders” telling them how to behave in nature (that is, their ‘home’).

One objective of Franek’s project of creating the NPGP was to discourage scepticism and opposition and increase support for the NPG and to establish a strong cooperation between the NPG and the local businesses of the surrounding communities (see also Scheb and Pirafelner; interviews 2014).

²⁴ *Leader* is a French acronym and stands for *liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale* (links between actions for the development of the rural economy).
See: <http://www.leader.at/leader%20methode.htm>

²⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/index_de.htm

5.2.2 Weak local economy

Werner Franek, the director of the National Park, soon identified another set of problems: the local economy was perceived as being weak and very few local businesses worked together. There were many individual businesses that, according to the words of some of my interviewees, “cooked their own soup”, which means that they tended to see each other as competitors and did not want to collaborate with others: “*jeder einzelne Betrieb hat sein eigenes Süppchen gekocht und es gab viele Einzelkämpfer*” (see also Bacher, Baumann, Traxler, Pirafelner; interviews 2014).

One of the main objectives of the project was to connect the local businesses and encourage them to work together for a common goal: to strengthen the local economy and increase the *regionale Wertschöpfung* (Raggam 2004, p. 38). To achieve this objective, local companies had to be motivated to collaborate among themselves. To give a simple example, in the course of the Partnership project, the innkeepers working in the gastronomy sector were encouraged to buy more products from local farmers (Raggam 2014; interview). Franek expected that the *regionale Wertschöpfung* could be increased in the Gesäuse area if the products produced by local actors were sold to other local economic actors, rather than sold to external firms located outside the area.

Franek also believed that, the *regionale Wertschöpfung* could be increased if the National Park and the local businesses worked together to attract more tourists and visitors. In the region of *Gesäuse-Eisenwurzen*, tourism was (and still is) in fact the main source of income for the local economy (Mitterbäck 2007, p. 7). To attract more visitors, Franek and Raggam decided to strengthen the tourist potential by taking measures in marketing and advertisement (Raggam 2005, p. 35).

As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the promotion of tourism and recreation and the subsequent contribution to develop local economies are objectives in the management of national parks in general. Place promotion and the advertising of the local companies (including their products and/or services) were included as important actions in the Partnership project. In particular, the basic idea was to implement forms of co-marketing: the NPG and the local businesses had to promote each other via several marketing material and strategies (e.g. brochures, the Internet, logos, and/or word-of-mouth marketing).

In brief, the NPGP was therefore established in order to increase local support for the NPG and hence counteract the opposition to the National Park; to create cooperation

between the NPG and local businesses; to increase tourism; and to encourage local companies to work together in order to strengthen the local economy.

In the next section I point out how the first project manager awoke the interest of some local companies to participate in the project and how she collaborated with them in order to establish specific requirements and formulate cooperation agreements (contracts).

5.3 Interestment

Werner Franek already imagined the Partnership project after he took up the role as the national park director in 2003 and, in order to implement it, he hired Gertraud Raggam, the first project manager (Scheb 2013; interview). Her task was to research, identify and select potential partner companies, convince them to participate in the project and work in collaboration with some key-actors in order to form an initial network of local business partners (Raggam 2014; interview). These key-actors were primarily proponents of the NPG who supported the project from the very beginning as they saw in it an opportunity to strengthen their own businesses and the local economy more in general. This group of actors who were initially interested included, for example, Christoph Pirafelner and Albert Bacher who were already part of the so-called *Xeis Wirte*,²⁶ a network of local innkeepers who were already cooperating locally; Günter Planitzer, the only confectioner in the area; and Renate Baumann who manages with her husband a horse-riding centre in Altenmarkt, produces regional products and offers accommodation. According to Scheb, one important key-actor, who however was at the beginning very sceptical towards the NPG and who was later interested in the Partnership, was Helga Traxler, an important representative of the *Mödlingerhütte*, active in the alpine huts sector (Scheb 2013 and Traxler 2014; interviews). In the phase of interestment, she played a key role in forming the initial network of local alpine huts and in defining the specific environmental and quality standards (requirements) to which the partner companies had to comply in this sector (Scheb 2013; interview).

Gertraud Raggam adopted a specific strategy, which I describe in the following paragraphs, to awaken the interest of the potential local businesses and to encourage them to participate in the project. She initially did a research on the local companies in

²⁶ <http://www.xeисwite.at/>

the *Gesäuse-Eisenwurz* region to clearly identify the potential partner businesses and to divide them into different sectors according to their activities: gastronomy, alpine huts, farm holidays, direct sellers, *Jausenstationen*,²⁷ arts and crafts, trade and mixed activities. Raggam then got in touch with each company to explain the project, to catch their attention and to interest and persuade them to participate in the project. She highlighted the positive aspects and benefits that a collaboration would have for the businesses willing to be part of the Partnership. For example, she explained how mutual collaboration and networking between local businesses could increase the *regionale Wertschöpfung*, and she highlighted how the companies could benefit by being promoted by the NPG to a wider audience (Raggam 2014; interview).

Raggam then organized meetings between the potential partner companies working in the same activity sector, the so-called *brancheninterne Sitzungen* (also called *Arbeitskreissitzungen*). These meetings were workshops in which the participants elaborated together with the project manager specific environmental and quality standards (*Qualitätskriterien*); namely, requirements to which the potential partner companies had to comply in conducting their activities, if they wanted to be part of the Partnership. In gastronomy, for example, the main criteria to be adopted included the offer of a high range of local products produced by other partner companies (e.g. honey, sheep cheese, venison, juice or schnapps); the purchase (wherever possible) of unpacked fresh produce to avoid big amounts of waste; the use of the NPG partner logo (e.g. as a ceramic plate at the entrance of the company building, on the website or on the first page of the menu card); and to provide to customers and guests information about the NPG (e.g. the national park activity program) and the NPGP project.²⁸

It must be noted that the establishment of the requirements/quality criteria was not a straightforward process, but it required a series of negotiations between the NPG and the companies. In fact, during the first rounds of workshops, Raggam proposed a set of specific requirements, which, however, could not be fulfilled by all participants. For example, she wanted the alpine huts to offer regional fish and sheep cheese during the entire summer season. Yet, the storage of these products for a long period was not possible (Traxler 2014; interview). Thus, Raggam had to accommodate her ideas to the interests and necessities of the participants in order to achieve a common agreement

²⁷ A *Jausenstation* is a specific hut or house in which cold products that originate from the own bio-certificated farm are sold and served to customers.

²⁸ National Park Gesäuse GmbH 2012a, pp. 4-6; and National Park Gesäuse GmbH 2005, pp. 8-9

over the requirements that had to be respected by all the businesses within their own activity sector. Hence, the agreement on the quality criteria was a process that required intense negotiations during several workshops between the project manager and the representatives of the local businesses, but also between the companies themselves.

After the *brancheninterne Sitzungen* with the potential partner companies, Raggam elaborated contracts for each activity sector, in which a list of the established requirements/quality criteria was written down. These contracts are basically cooperation agreements (between the NPG LLC and each company, which is part of the NPGP); they form the basis of the Partnership and were used by the NPG LLC to establish a formal cooperation. The contracts also include specific obligations to which the NPG LLC has to comply. For example, to advertise the other partner companies; to prefer partner companies and not other local businesses in guest mediations (e.g. if tourists ask for accommodation at the NPG information centre in Admont), and to lend the NPG partners gadgets such as the 'prospectus trees' (*Prospektbaum*) and ceramic plates for promotional purposes (see figures 7).²⁹ Such cost-free services – especially the advertisement via a printed brooklet, the NPG website, and the NPG magazine – which the NPG LLC offered to the potential partner companies, were very important for awakening the interest of local entrepreneurs and motivated some potentially interested actors to start to consider to (actively) participate in the project.

²⁹ National Park Gesäuse GmbH 2012b, pp. 2-3



Figure 7: Gadgets for promotional purposes, Admont, February 5th, 2014

Left: prospectus tree at *Gasthaus Kamper*

Right: ceramic plates at the entrance of *Gasthaus Kamper*

Photos: Christoph Gahbauer

In addition to the *brancheninterne Sitzungen*, the so-called *Vernetzungstreffen* played an important role in the building of the Partnership. During these workshops, partner companies belonging to different sectors, were invited to exchange ideas about how they could collaborate in the future in order to strengthen the Partnership. During the *Vernetzungstreffen* the participants worked on the publication of the first booklet that introduced the NPGP to the general public (Raggam 2014; interview), and which was later presented during an official ceremony at the castle *Gallenstein* (see next section).

It is important to highlight that, in the phase of interestment, some specific actors working in the sectors of gastronomy and alpine huts played a major role in the building of the Partnership as they participated actively in the meetings with Raggam and contributed to establish the requirements (*Qualitätskriterien*) that were subsequently implemented. Such key-actors were for example Christoph Pirafelner, owner of *Gasthof zur Ennsbrücke* and Helga Traxler, representative of *Mödlingerhütte* (Scheb 2013; interview).

The reason for their major involvement originates in the history of some companies working in these two sectors. As I mentioned before, the key-actors involved

in the sector of gastronomy evolved from the so-called *Xeis Wirte*, a former network launched in 1992 consisting of seven local innkeepers. Today all of them are partner companies and some played (and still play) a very active role in the Partnership. The fact that a relatively small network of partners was already present in the gastronomy sector facilitated the collaborations between these companies and the project manager (Pirafelner 2014; interview). Similarly, some representatives of the alpine huts sector had been actively involved from the very beginning of the NPGP and worked well with the project manager to support the development of the project (see also Scheb and Traxler; interviews 2014).

It must be noted, however, that not all potential partner companies were so supportive at the very beginning of the project. Some actors contacted by Raggam were very sceptical or even held an ironic attitude towards this initiative. Especially at the very beginning of the project, a major challenge for Raggam was to overcome scepticism and convince and persuade the potential partner companies to participate in the Partnership. In order to take further the project, Raggam benefitted from the advice of people working on similar projects in other Austrian national parks, and largely relied on the help and the support of several actors already interested or even involved in the Partnership, such as Werner Franek and Karoline Scheb (the current project manager of the NPGP); some mayors of local villages (e.g. Admont's mayor Günter Posch who conducted an opinion survey on the establishment of the NPG; see section 4.4); and the representatives of those companies that actively participated in the project from the very beginning (Raggam 2014; interview).

In the next section I discuss how Raggam had been successful in enrolling the first local companies in the Partnership project. I also highlight the roles of the two subsequent project managers; and how today the current project manager, Karoline Scheb, operates in order to enrol and/or expel other actors from the Partnership. I also discuss how key-actors from the network took up and accepted specific roles within the Partnership.

5.4 Enrolling and expelling companies

Once the mutual requirements were established for each activity sector and the contracts (cooperation agreements) formulated, the interested partner companies decided on a voluntary basis whether to enter into the Partnership with the NPG or opt

out. Those who decided in favour of the project signed the contract and got officially 'enrolled' into the NPGP, the network of NPG partner companies.

Gertraud Raggam, the first project manager, succeeded into enrolling 55 partner companies, who were officially presented to the public in May 2005 in St. Gallen, at *Burg Gallenstein* as the initial cluster of the emerging NPG partner network, which, as I mentioned in the previous section, were divided into the seven different sectors (see also Reiter 2011). During this event, the partner companies received certificates and a ceramic plate with the NPG partner logo (see figure 7), thus officialising their belonging to the Partnership.



Figure 8: First official presentation of the National Park Gesäuse Partnership at *Burg Gallenstein*, St. Gallen, May 2005

Source: The National Park Gesäuse Archive

The ceremony represented a stage for promoting the project and also for performing the first collaboration between the NPG partner businesses: companies working in gastronomy catered the food and displayed their products; other partner companies provided the drinks and worked to prepare the event (see also Scheb 2013; interview and Reiter 2011). This event also marked the end of the initial phase of the project that

was managed by Gertraud Raggam.³⁰ From June until December 2005 there was no project manager and the main supporter of the Partnership was Werner Franek.

The second project manager was Sybille Dracka, who came from a local community called Weng im Gesäuse. However, she managed the project only for six months, from January until July 2006, because she was only employed for 10 hours a week and, in that limited amount of time, she was not able at developing a solid and constant relationship with the people involved in the project (Scheb 2013; interview). However, she took the project further by contributing, for example, to the creation of the first website for the partner companies.³¹ Furthermore, with Franek, she initiated in 2006 what became a constant activity for the Partnership: the organization of excursions (*Frühjahrsexkursionen*) to other conservation areas or regions, both in Austria and other European countries, which have projects similar to the NPGP (Scheb 2014; interview; see also next section).

In July 2006 Sybille Dracka quit her job, which introduced the next gap in the project management, which was temporary filled again by Franek, the national park director. However, the lack of a fixed project manager damaged the Partnership: the collaboration between the partner companies got weakened and some people lost confidence in the NPGP. A fixed project manager was really felt as necessary for coordinating the Partnership. Karoline Scheb, who was already involved in the project, was hired as the new project leader and took up this role in October 2006 (Scheb 2013; interview).

Her enrolment in the project represents a turning point for the building of the Partnership. She in fact nearly literally ‘incorporates’ some specific key-characteristics that strengthened the project: she was born in the area of Gesäuse (and therefore she was not perceived as an outsider by the inhabitants and local businesses); she knows well many partner companies, and has a personal connection to many people involved in the project. By building on her local knowledge and commitment to the project, she developed an efficient strategy for communicating with the partner companies to establish a basis of mutual trust between the local people and the NPG LLC, and to

³⁰ Raggam left the NPG LLC after this event because her contract expired (see also Scheb 2013; interview and Reiter 2011). Some of my research participants pointed out that, although she did important pioneer work in the project, she was not the right person for this role because she originally did not come from the region (e.g. Traxler 2014; interview).

³¹ The former web-link was: <http://www.nationalpark-partner.at/> - Today the website of the partner companies is integrated in the website of the National Park Gesäuse, see: <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/de/nationalpark-partner>

overcome the scepticism and opposition to the NPG, which I discussed in the previous chapter.

Lack of trust and scepticism for the Partnership were not, however, the only problems that the project manager had to face. New more practical, mundane and everyday issues emerged during the coming together of the NPGP. For example, some partner companies resisted to the mandatory installation of the prospectus trees (see figure 7) to present promotional materials of the NPG to visitors and local inhabitants. Some partner companies did not like the aesthetics of the prospectus trees and felt that their installation was an imposition of the NPG. This apparently simple fact had a negative impact on the image of the NPG and, as a consequence, several companies withdrew from the Partnership and this withdrawing weakened it (Scheb 2014; interview).

Scheb's work at this time was to re-establish trust in the NPGP and to re-tie the connections with the partner companies. One of the strategies she adopted was to organise a team-building workshop in which several partner companies participated (Scheb 2014; interview).



Figure 9: Team building workshop at *Gasthof Hensle*, St. Gallen, January 2008

Source: The National Park Gesäuse Archive

As many of my research participants ³² highlighted, today, Scheb's work and commitment to develop the project and strengthen the collaboration with the partner companies is highly appreciated and valued locally. She assists many individual companies, organizes all events, communicates regularly with the people or initiates forms of cooperation between the partner companies, and she evaluates approximately once a year if the partner companies comply or not with the requirements stipulated in the contracts (see previous section). If partner companies do not cooperate (enough) with other companies and with the NPGP in general they are expelled from the network.

There is a specific standardised process before an inactive partner already enrolled in the network is officially excluded. When inactivity is detected (e.g. a partner company does not collaborate for 12 months), the project manager talks at first to the partner about the reason of inactiveness. It is often the case that representatives of partner companies promise to Scheb a positive change, but this change occurs rarely. The company then receives a reminder. If there is no answer and the partner does not start to collaborate, the company is immediately excluded from the Partnership (Scheb 2013; interview).³³ From 2006 until today approximately 30 partner companies were excluded from the network for various reasons, such as lack of cooperation and participation; lack of understanding of the meaning of the project; relocation; changes in ownership of a company; end of a business; personal reasons; and/or even death (Scheb 2014; interview).

Also the process through which new companies are 'interested' and want to be 'enrolled' is now standardised: today, those businesses who want to become part of the Partnership get in touch with the project manager to inquire about the possibility of becoming a partner company. Then Scheb meets the representative of the potential partner company, listens to their business philosophy and checks if the company fulfils all requirements. It is important that the company understands the aims of the project, that it is motivated to participate in events and workshops, and to cooperate with other partner companies, to represent the national park philosophy³⁴ and communicate it to their visitors and clients. Normally, Scheb decides on her own which local companies are appropriate to be included into the Partnership. However, it must be noted that the

³² Bacher, Baumann, Osebik, Pirafelner, Planitzer, Traxler, and Wölger

³³ It has to be mentioned that, according to Scheb, she sometimes has to consider personal problems of the NPG partners. In this case, the partner company is not excluded immediately.

³⁴ The national park philosophy is to protect and conserve unique natural sites and the dynamic processes in nature together with its specific diversity of species.

companies active in the gastronomy and in the alpine huts sectors take part in the decision-making process when a new business wants to become part of the network. My analysis highlighted that many NPG partners belonging to the two sectors of gastronomy and alpine huts are committed actors in the network, there is a strong cohesion of the partners in those sectors, and most of them have an overall good connection to the project manager. In my view that is why they, and not companies from the other sectors, take part in the decision-making process of enrolling new actors. However, the official enrolment and the presentation of new partner companies always take place during the end-of-year ceremony in December, an event, in which the most partner companies participate (Scheb 2014; interview).

Coming close to the end of this section, it is important to emphasise the role played within the NPGP by the so-called *Gruppensprecher*, that is the spokesperson of a specific activity sector who has to be present in the *brancheninterne Sitzungen* (see previous section). The *Gruppensprecher* represents the interests of the other companies active in the same sector and has the task to motivate the others to actively participate and integrate ideas to develop the Partnership project further. In addition to the *brancheninterne Sitzungen*, there are also other events, in which the spokespersons of the different sectors come together and discuss how the project can be advanced. These are called *Gruppensprechersitzungen* and take place two-three times a year, during which both the project manager and the NPG director are present, to discuss the latest developments and future plans of the project. According to some of my interviewees (e.g. Pirafelner, Bauman, Traxler), today, there are three sectors in which a fixed spokesperson is present.³⁵ In the other sectors there are no fixed spokespersons, but the business owners agree on who will represent the others in the next *Gruppensprechersitzung* (Scheb 2013; interview). Christoph Pirafelner, for example, voluntarily took up and accepted his role as a spokesperson for the gastronomy sector as he was very active since the beginning of the project and his colleagues wanted him to take up this role thanks to his long experience and commitment (Pirafelner and Planitzer 2014; interview).

In the next section I first discuss the NPGP as it is today. I offer an account of how today the NPGP is composed of many enrolled actors that work in different activity sectors. Then I discuss some of the ways in which the Partnership today interacts as a

³⁵ Karl Völkl (*Ardning Alm*) for the alpine huts; Christoph Pirafelner (*Gasthof zur Ennsbrücke*) for gastronomy; and Renate Bauman (*Reiterhof Hofheuriger Laussabauer*) representing direct sellers.

solid network with the external world, namely through the organization of excursions outside the Gesäuse region and via the use of the NPG partner logo to present itself to the external world. Finally, in the conclusion of this chapter (section 5.6), I point out how the NPGP represented a solution to the two initial problems identified by the first director of the NPG (as I explained in section 5.2).

5.5 Mobilisation

Today, the NPGP can be seen as a stable, but always expanding and shrinking, actor-network, consisting of a group of 87 local partner companies that are all scattered throughout the 12 municipalities of the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* (see figure 1), and that are assigned to the 11 different activity sectors, which I briefly illustrate in the following paragraph.³⁶

Partner companies in the accommodation sector (20)³⁷ offer self-catering apartments, farm holidays, a camping site and two hotels. The sector of education, art and culture (9) comprise the five NPG partner schools, a national park ranger that offers guided tours about the geology and the history of the NPG area, two museums and a painter. The NPG partners in the sector of direct sellers (13) are mainly organic (bio-certified) farms that produce and sell products such as herbs, *Styria Beef*³⁸, cheese or schnapps from resources of their own farm; two beekeepers and the *Steiermärkische Landesforste* that offers in cooperation with two other NPG partners (*Grabnerhof* and *Metzgerei Robert Pfeiler*) fresh venison meat from the Gesäuse area (see section 6.2.4). Partner companies in the sector of leisure and sports (6) offer (environmental friendly) leisure activities such as horseback riding, climbing, rafting, hiking or snowshoeing. The sector of gastronomy (17) involves primarily local restaurants, three hotels and a confectioner; all of them offer specific local specialities that are prepared mainly with regional products. NPG partners in the sector of trade/commerce (9) are businesses that trade in a variety of local products, e.g. meat products, bakery products, fruit beverages or flowers. In the handcraft and trade (14) sector there are businesses that use local

³⁶ Based on Scheb (2013; interview) and <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/de/nationalpark-partner> last retrieved on 13.7.2014 - Please note that some new partner companies are missing on the website, some old partner companies that were excluded from the network are still visible on the website, and some partner companies belong to more than one sector.

³⁷ The amount of partner companies currently assigned to the respective sector is highlighted in brackets.

³⁸ *Styria Beef* is a premium brand for beef of bio-certificated farms in Styria; see also <http://www.styria-beef.at/>

resources to produce goods according to traditional handicraft, e.g. sheep wool and felt products, embroideries or furniture; there is also an artist blacksmith and various service provider, e.g. a painting contractor. The sector of *Jausenstationen* (4) incorporates two huts and two other houses in which (mostly cold) products and drinks are served that originate from the owners' own bio-certificated farms. The two NPG partners in the mobility sector (2) offer transportation within the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* and are the main actors that execute the GSEISPUR: a project that aims to offer to the visitors and local people a flexible mobility without using their own car.³⁹ The sector of alpine huts (8) consists of eight huts that are all located in the Gesäuse area (*Ennstal Alps*); they endeavour to provide and cook with lots of local products and also to offer accommodation for hikers and climbers. Finally, there is one association called *Alpiner Rettungsdienst Gesäuse* that forms the most recently established activity sector of associations (1); namely, an association that aims to help people that gets lost in the mountains in the area.

According to Jungmaier et al. (2008),⁴⁰ the NPGP is today a “unique” network as the NPG is the only national park in Austria that has succeeded into mingling such a diverse business community, which seems to cooperate well (the next chapter provides a discussion of how the partner companies collaborated and collaborate in the network). This same argument also made by some of my interviewees (e.g. Wölger and Scheb). Jungmaier et al. (2008, p. 123) evaluated the NPGP project as an “innovative” one in Austria, as an “exemplary” project that offers benefits both to the NPG and to the partner companies it involves (see section 6.3).

I now turn to discuss some examples of how the Partnership interacts today as a solid actor-network with the external world. I specifically focus on describing how the NPGP interacts with other similar partnerships in other areas of Austria and Europe through the organisation of events such as excursions; and how the Partnership identifies and visually presents itself through the use of a specific logo.

³⁹ <http://www.gseispur.at/project.php>

⁴⁰ Jungmaier et al. are part of the institute of ecology (E.C.O.), which evaluated the National Park Gesäuse five years after its establishment.

As I mentioned in the previous section, the second project manager of the NPGP, Sybille Dracka, organised in 2006 the first project excursion (*Frühjahrsexkursion*), in which some of the first members of the Partnership travelled with her to the National Park Hohe Tauern.



Figure 10: First National Park Gesäuse Partnership project excursion,
National Park Hohe Tauern, 2006

Source: The National Park Gesäuse Archive

This was one of the first attempts to interact with the external world and to mobilise the emerging network composed of the NPG and the partner companies. Since 2006, the current project manager, Scheb, has annually organised such an excursion with the NPG partners, either in other European national parks or regions that have similar projects like the NPGP (see figure 11).



Figure 11: National Park Gesäuse Partnership project excursions

Clockwise starting from top left: National Park Wattenmeer, Germany, 2007; National Park Bayerischer Wald, Germany, 2008; National Park Doñana, Spain, 2014; Steirisches Vulkanland, Austria, 2013

During these events, the participants can experience how the projects work there and how the partner companies cooperate (Planitzer 2014; interview). According to my interviewees (e.g. Scheb, Pirafelner, Planitzer), these excursions seem to definitely strengthen the cohesion amongst partner companies by contributing to build a sense of community in the network (which I explore in the next chapter). These journeys can even have a positive effect on inactive people involved in the network, as they get motivated and become more active (Pirafelner 2014; interview). Recently, in the spring of 2014, a group of 35 project partners travelled to National Park Doñana, in Spain, 100 km south of Sevilla (see figure 11).⁴¹

⁴¹ <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/de/news/newsarchiv/news-2014/3316-nationalpark-partner-besuchen-donana>; In addition to the project excursions, the Partnership also interacted and interacts with external consultants that supported and supports the alliance, for example, with Martin Krejcarek during the team-building workshop in 2008 (see figure 9) and with experts for regional development such as Josef Ober (see figure 2) and Roman Schmid from the *Steirische Vulkanland* region who guided the NPG partner workshops, in which I participated (see figure 3).

Another important way in which the NPGP interacts with the external world is by representing itself symbolically through a logo, which visualises and communicates the collective identity of the partner companies and the NPG.



Figure 12: The National Park Gesäuse partner logo

Source: The National Park Gesäuse Archive

The logo represents the Partnership since May 2005, when the NPGP and the first enrolled partner companies were officially presented in St. Gallen (see previous section).⁴²

In general, the partner companies use the logo in many different ways. According to my research participants, the NPG partners use the logo printed on ceramic plates at the entrance of their company (see figure 7); on their homepage, menu cards, promotional and informative booklets; on envelopes, letters, bills, and business cards; on work uniforms and to brand their products more broadly. All of my research participants think that it is important to use this logo. They consider it as a sign that represents their belonging to the Partnership and also as a kind of certification that indicates the good quality of their products and services. In other words, they think of the logo as a regional brand tool and as an object for the promotion of their activities able to attract visitors by making visible their identity. It must be noted that many of my research participants pointed out that they are proud to be part of this network and the logo works as a device that visually demarcates their membership to the Partnership.

⁴² It is interesting to notice that the six NPG municipalities (Admont, Weng, Johnsbach, St. Gallen, Hieflau and Landl) also use the same logo (with the name of the municipality in place of the term 'Partner') as a sign, which indicates that these six villages are also 'partners' of the NPG.

In the next section, the conclusion of this chapter, I discuss how the creation and stabilisation of the Partnership solved the two problems that triggered its emergence: the low rate of local acceptance and the weak local economy.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed why the NPGP was established and how it evolved from its genesis until today. My analysis highlighted that the Partnership was created in order to solve two specific problems that triggered the emergence of the Partnership itself, namely: the low acceptance rate amongst the local population of the establishment of the NPG and the weakness of the local economy. To conclude this chapter, I focus in this section on how the NPGP represented a solution to the two problems initially identified by Franek, the first director of the NPG (see section 5.2).

5.6.1 Increased local acceptance towards the National Park Gesäuse

My fieldwork has highlighted that today several local companies want to collaborate with, rather than oppose, the NPG and participate in the Partnership. It is clear that many inhabitants and local businesses changed their attitude towards the NPG, as they are becoming aware of the benefits of the Partnership, such as the publicity that the NPG makes also on behalf of the companies (see also Scheb, Planitzer, Pirafelner, Baumann; interviews 2014). Many of my research participants (those who I interviewed and also those who filled out the questionnaire) highlighted that the main benefit they have from the Partnership is related to the visibility they achieve through the promotional activities enacted by the NPG, (e.g. the NPG constantly advertises the partner companies by distributing promotional materials at trade fairs in Austria); a visibility which is translated into a larger number of visitors and customers to their business. Jungmaier et al. (2008, p. 123) also stressed the synergy effects (as a result of cooperation) and the competitive advantages as benefits for the partner companies. During my fieldwork, various research participants confirmed the arguments that Jungmaier et al. (2008) highlighted in their study which evaluated the NPG after five years since its establishment.

However, not only the partner companies, but also the NPG LLC benefits from the Partnership. According to Jungmaier et al. (2008, p. 123) these are, for example, an

increased knowledge about the NPG inside and outside the Gesäuse area; an increased degree of popularity and (external) visibility of the NPG; and also the increased acceptance of the NPG itself amongst the local population. Some of my research participants (e.g. Drechsler; Bacher; Planitzer) confirmed these arguments and frequently pointed out that today, contrary to the past, a larger number of inhabitants accept, rather than oppose, the establishment of the NPG. They also mentioned that today many inhabitants perceive the benefits that the National Park brought to the area, through for example the attraction of a higher number of visitors that come to visit the region. Thomas Drechsler, the former director of *Tourismusverband Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse*, also highlighted the rise of visitor arrivals (mainly single-day visitors and not so many overnight stays) in the area since the NPG was established, and estimated an overall increase of 20 per cent (Drechsler 2014; interview).

Jungmaier et al. (2008) evaluated the local acceptance towards the NPG after five years of existence of the National Park. Their study is based on a qualitative analysis of public statements, workshops and personal conversations with people coming from inside and outside the region. The outcome of their study highlights that the local acceptance towards the NPG increased and that many local people have a positive opinion towards the National Park (Jungmaier et al. 2008, p. 100). Many of my interviewees (e.g. Osebik; Bacher; Planitzer; Scheb) also confirmed the fact that the NPG is now much more accepted than in the past. For example, according to Scheb, today the problem of the low rate of local acceptance is definitely solved because, compared with the initial situation, many local people, who before had a neutral or sceptical attitude, now think of the NPG as a positive actor in the region (Scheb 2014; interview).

This change in local perceptions can be seen as an effect of the Partnership project: the partner companies became crucial actors, which improved the communication between the NPG and the local population. The current NPG director, Herbert Wölger, emphasised that the partner companies were and still are very important actors that communicate the national park philosophy (and therefore promote the idea of nature conservation; see section 4.6) to the local communities as well as to their visitors and clients (see also Jungmaier et al. 2008, p. 123; Raggam 2005, p. 32; Osebik and Wölger; interviews 2014). Therefore, the Partnership actively contributed to overcome scepticism to the NPG and increase the local support for the NPG.

My study has highlighted that the initial problems that Franek identified when he took up the role as the national park director can be considered as solved today because the rate of local acceptance of the NPG has increased and the National Park has an overall good image now. It must be noted, however, that, rather obviously, not all inhabitants of the area have a positive attitude towards the NPG. During my fieldwork I found out that some people, such as hunters and forest rangers still have a negative attitude towards the NPG. The main problem for the people that still oppose the NPG is the fact that the establishment of the park and the implemented national park law provoked negative consequences for them (such as land use restrictions/constraints), and which to date affect their lives and/or work (e.g. hunters had to stop trophy hunting; some forest rangers were restricted in their activities; and inhabitants were told by park rangers that they are not allowed to enter specific core areas which are the target of nature conservation measures).

However, it must be noted that the actions implemented to increase the local acceptance of the NPG were strengthened by the NPG partner school project. At the present moment there are five NPG partner schools located in Admont, Hall, Weng, and Hieflau which are enrolled in the network and belong to the sector of education, art and culture. In these schools, the NPG wants to communicate a positive image of the concept of national parks and to offer to the students a basic understanding of the idea of nature conservation. The NPG has therefore succeeded to reach out to the youngest generation of the local communities in order to raise their 'environmental awareness', try to eradicate opposition to the National Park and create consensus, and to establish a positive image of the NPG itself (see also Jungmaier et al. 2008, p. 122).



Figure 13: National Park Gesäuse partner school excursion,
National Park Gesäuse, 2007

Source: The National Park Gesäuse Archive

5.6.2 Strengthening the local economy

The Partnership contributed also to strengthening the local economy and to increase the *regionale Wertschöpfung*. Compared to when “each local business cooked its own soup” (see section 5.2.2), today many partner companies cooperate one with the other; and not just between those who operate within the same activity sector, but also with other NPG partners doing different activities. These diverse forms of cooperation (that I discuss in the next chapter) contribute to strengthening the local economy, as the local businesses support each other and stimulate an internal market that focuses on the production and circulation of local products and services. In addition, these forms of cooperation contribute to offering more environmental compatible services to the external visitors coming to do recreational activities in the area.⁴³ For example, trekking tourists that want to experience the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* without a car have now the possibility to use the transport services of the GSEISPUR, a soft-mobility project, that brought two local transportation companies to collaborate.

Furthermore, as I discuss more in detail in the next chapter, the NPG actively supports the business of its partner companies (Scheb 2014; interview and Jungmaier et al. 2008, p. 139). For example, if a tourist asks for transportation or leisure activities, the NPG promotes and recommends the services of the partner companies to the visitors. Or if the NPG organises an event, a partner company that owns an adequate venue and good catering is asked to provide its services (Raggam 2005, p. 32 and Scheb 2013; interview). For example, the workshops in which I participated took place at *Gasthof Hensle* in St. Gallen, a NPG partner active in the gastronomy sector that offered a venue and catering that was convenient for this event (see chapter 3). To put it shortly, local companies can increase their business and revenues thanks to the Partnership.

Hence, from my account of the NPGP, it should be clear that the creation and stabilisation of the Partnership solved the two main problems that triggered its emergence: the low acceptance rate amongst the local population of the establishment of the National Park and the weakness of the local economy. In the next chapter I offer an account of how the partner companies cooperate among themselves in practice and I also comment on non-cooperation and critiques to the Partnership.

⁴³ It is interesting to note that many NPG partner companies were encouraged by the NPG LLC to operate their business in a more sustainable way, and some even received the *Umweltzeichen* certificate, i.e. a label for environmentally compatible products and services that is granted by the *Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Umwelt und Wasserwirtschaft*. See: <https://www.umweltzeichen.at/cms/de/home/vision/content.html>

6 Cooperation and non-cooperation in the National Park Gesäuse Partnership

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the cooperation and non-cooperation among the companies involved in the NPGP. In section 6.2, I focus on the main cooperation practices that emerge out of the development of the NPGP, namely: events that function as initiators for cooperation (6.2.1); the purchasing and selling of local products and services from/to cooperation partners (6.2.2); and the mutual advertisement between actors (6.2.3). I then offer a specific example of cross-sectorial cooperation in the Partnership and I discuss the emergence of some branded products, which emerged thanks to the cooperation established between companies (6.2.4). After I highlight in section 6.3 the socio-economic incentives and benefits that originate from cooperation, in section 6.4, I discuss non-cooperation in the NPGP and I point out some critiques to the Partnership that emerged during my fieldwork. Finally, in the conclusion of this chapter, I mention how the Partnership was useful to generate what scholars like Robert Putnam notably termed a 'social capital' in the Gesäuse area.

6.2 Cooperation among the National Park Gesäuse partner companies

As I previously argued, I understand the NPGP as an actor-network that is mainly composed of the NPG and the 87 enrolled partner companies. I also pointed out that the tourism association (*Tourismusverband Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse*) is involved in the Partnership, as well as many other human and non-human actors, which are tied together by everyday practices that entail mutual cooperation and support between the business partners. In this section I discuss some of the main ways in which the partner companies collaborate with each other. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Partnership is a network that was planned and developed in order to establish an integrated cooperation amongst businesses located in the Gesäuse area; a cooperation that was functional to achieve three interrelated aims: 1) to generate and strengthen local support for the National Park, whose establishment was initially resisted by many

of the inhabitants; 2) to create a solid base for the socio-economic development of the local community; 3) to increase the visibility of the Gesäuse area to attract more visitors. The forms of cooperation that I discuss in this section represent therefore important collaborative interactions that sustain the cohesion of the partner companies involved in the Partnership and strengthen the actor-network.

6.2.1 Events as initiators for cooperation

Throughout the evolution of the NPGP, the project managers have devised a number of activities to keep the Partnership constantly working and encourage on-going collaboration amongst the partner companies: *brancheninterne Sitzungen (Arbeitskreissitzungen)*, *Gruppensprechersitzungen*, *Jahresabschlussfeier*, workshops and excursions; all provide the concrete contexts for the enactment of the Partnership through direct and personal interaction and collaboration. According to my research participants, these events were (and are) important as they enabled the generation of a strong cohesion between some of the companies enrolled in the NPGP (e.g. a team spirit developed that did not exist in the past), and they functioned as a ‘platform’ to exchange ideas about how to advance the Partnership project by collaborating with others.

Basically, these events work as occasions during which representatives of partner companies come together, get to know to each other and their respective economic activities, and talk about possibilities of future cooperation. For example, in the *brancheninterne Sitzungen*, the conversations that the NPG partners have focus particularly on possible ways of inter-sectorial cooperation. In the following paragraphs I offer an example of how the communication between representatives of partner companies initiated forms of cooperation.

In the gastronomy sector, the innkeepers decided jointly to start buying in bulk for all of them a number of products which they frequently use, such as T-shirts, aprons, napkins, glasses and hats – all of which were subsequently branded with the NPG partner logo (see figure 12). Also the so-called *Xeis-Wein* is annually purchased in bulk after excursions organised during the *brancheninterne Sitzungen* to the *Südsteirische Weinland* in order to taste different sorts of wine and decide together which one to buy. The purchased wine is then re-labelled and branded as *Xeis-Wein* and then sold to the innkeepers’ guests (Bacher and Pirafelner; interviews 2014). In fact, through this cooperation, the innkeepers benefit both economically, as they save money from buying

in bulk, and also socially, as they establish and maintain social contacts and strengthen group solidarity.

It has to be highlighted that many of my interviewees stressed that one of the main reasons why the partner companies cooperate is because they “trust” each other. Generally, trust in cooperation-partners is one of the main factors that bring people to collaborate and that generate possibilities for joint action (Bauer-Wolf 2008, p. 26). The emergence of trust amongst the partner companies is an outcome of the coming together of the Partnership and, in my view it was specifically the result of the frequent events attended by the business representatives. Furthermore, trust was also created because the enrolled partner companies aligned themselves to specific practices, rules and regulations which were established during the coming together of the Partnership, especially in the enrolment phase. Every enrolled actor decided to act along the rules that they established together. By acting according to the rules, it can be speculated, that trust was built amongst the companies.

One of the main forms of cooperation within the Partnership is represented by the buying and selling of products and services amongst the partner companies, which I discuss in the next subsection.

6.2.2 Circulation of local products and services

Today many NPG partner companies purchase products from each other, and some partners sell products to other partners, who then process them. In general, the products and services of the partner companies represent important resources for the activities of other partner businesses. For example, cattle farmers (e.g. *Bio-Landwirtschaft Oberpfanner* and *Siglhof*) or hunters from the *Steiermärkische Landesforste* provide animals to butchers (*Grabnerhof* and *Metzgerei Robert Pfeiler*) who, in turn, provide fresh meat for cooks in the gastronomy sector (see section 6.2.4); or bee-keepers (e.g. *Kaurzinek* and *Weissensteiner*) sell their honey to NPG partners working in the accommodation sector who, in turn, offer it at breakfast to their guests. Another purchaser of locally produced honey is Günter Planitzer (*Café Konditorei Stockhammer*), the owner of the only confectionery in the Gesäuse area, who needs large amounts of honey in order to bake pastries (Planitzer 2014; interview).

It must be pointed out, again, that many of my research participants highlighted that they cooperate with other partner companies because they “trust” other NPG

partners as they can count on the “high quality” of their products and services. Some NPG partners repeatedly argued that the high quality is a very important factor for the success of their business as it is crucial for their customers’ satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, several partner companies tend to perceive cooperation as a “win-win-situation” for all who work together. Some of my research participants stressed that cooperation does not only strengthen their own business but also the business of their cooperation-partners and the whole local economy. From their perspective, it is more logical and fruitful to purchase and/or sell products from/to local (and not external) actors as “the money” is seen as “staying” within the region, and local businesses seem to thrive better. The current project manager highlighted that before the foundation of the Partnership many local businesses tended to buy the products and services they needed from outside the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* because they were not aware of the high range of local products and services available in the Gesäuse area and/or they did not want to collaborate with other local companies because they saw competitors in them (Scheb 2014; interview).

To conclude this subsection it can be argued that the creation of the NPGP fostered an increased knowledge of the availability of local products and services in the Gesäuse area, and many local people started to be aware of the social and economic benefits and thus, started to collaborate with other local companies. In the next subsection I illustrate another important form of cooperation among the companies: the mutual advertisement (of products and services) between NPG partners.

6.2.3 Mutual advertisement between the partners

As I already mentioned, mutual advertisement is another important cooperation practice that is enacted within the Partnership in two different ways: the visual promotion of products produced by other partner companies and the mutual (verbal) recommendation of partner products and services to visitors and clients.

According to the first point, it can be argued that thanks to the Partnership project many local companies started to promote and sell the manufactured goods of their partners. For example, *Nah & Frisch Hoffmann*, a grocery in Admont, has a specific corner where many local products from partner companies are displayed and sold; and Albert Bacher, an innkeeper from Admont, offers to his guests many partner products for sale in his restaurant.



Figure 14: Promotion of National Park Gesäuse partner products, Admont, 2014

Left: Otmar Hoffmann presenting the partner products he sells in his grocery;

Source: <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/de/nationalpark-partner/handel/1734-nah-frisch-hoffmann>

Middle: Product table of Albert Bacher at *Gasthaus Kamper*; Photo: Christoph Gahbauer

Right: The *Nationalpark Gesäuse Informationsbüro*; Source: The National Park Gesäuse Archive

Another place where many NPG partner products are displayed and sold is the NPG information centre (*Nationalpark Gesäuse Informationsbüro*), a facility inaugurated in October 2004 in the centre of Admont (see section 4.4), in which employees of both the NPG LLC and the tourism association work.⁴⁴ Amongst other things, this building, in which a variety partner products are promoted to the visitors that can buy these products, functions as an information centre for national park visitors and tourists.

In addition, my analysis has highlighted that most of the partner companies recommend verbally to their clients to buy products and services from other businesses part of the NPGP. In practice, when visitors ask to a partner company where they can get specific products or services (e.g. transportation or accommodation), usually the NPG partners tend to recommend each others' services (see also Baumann and Scheb; interviews 2014). This mutual recommendation is a way of sustaining each other and is today an established practice, a sort of 'code of conduct', in the Partnership, which definitely strengthens the network. It is interesting to notice that before the NPGP was established, very few local businesses supported each other as each company "cooked its own soup" and considered the other businesses as competitors (see also chapter 5). It must be noted, however, that, as exemplified by those companies, which were identified as 'non-cooperative' by the current project manager of the NPGP, there are still some companies that do not exactly adhere to this 'code of conduct' (see also section 6.4).

Finally, it is important to highlight that mutual advertisement is not only a cooperation practice enacted among the NPG partners, but also between partner

⁴⁴ <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/de/besucherzentren/infobuero-admont>

companies and the NPG itself. On the one hand, the NPG LLC constantly advertises its partner companies (e.g. in the Internet, by distributing promotional materials at trade fairs in Austria or by recommending to its visitors to buy partner products and services). On the other hand, the NPG partner companies actively and personally promote the National Park: they provide their guests and clients with several marketing material of the NPG (e.g. with booklets of the NPG activity program in the prospectus tree; see figure 7), offer information about the conservation area and, in trying to provide high quality services to tourists and visitors, they act as “ambassadors” for the National Park and the area more in general (see also Osebik, Wölger, Scheb; interviews 2014).

In the next section I offer an example of cross-sectorial cooperation in the Partnership in order to show how, in practice, partner companies active in different sectors collaborate. I also discuss the emergence of some new branded products, which emerged thanks to the cooperation in the Partnership.

6.2.4 Cross-sectoral cooperation and emergence of new branded products

This subsection illustrates a specific example of cross-sectorial cooperation enacted by a group of partner businesses working in the sectors of gastronomy, direct sellers and education. The main actor in this collaboration is Christoph Pirafelner, the owner and cook of the *Gasthof zur Ennsbrücke*. He is also the spokesperson (*Gruppensprecher*) of the gastronomy sector and is very active in fostering collaborations and initiating activities and events (Scheb and Planitzer; interviews 2014). In the following paragraphs I describe how Pirafelner works together with other partner companies that belong to different activity sectors.

Pirafelner purchases for his restaurant a wide range of local products. For example, he buys the so-called *Styria-Beef*⁴⁵ from the Leitner family, representative of the partner company *Bio-Landwirtschaft Oberpfanner*, a group of farmers specialised in breeding cattle, which is branded as *Styria-Beef* (see also section 5.5). In this cooperation, *Grabnerhof*⁴⁶ is the butcher charged by *Bio-Landwirtschaft Oberpfanner* with the task of slaughtering the animals of their associated farms. As soon as

⁴⁵ *Styria Beef* is a premium brand for beef of the bio-certificated farms in Styria; see also <http://www.styria-beef.at/>

⁴⁶ A farm that also includes a slaughterhouse, farm shop and a agricultural school, see also: <http://www.nationalpark.co.at/de/nationalpark-partner/direktvermarkter/211-grabnerhof>

Grabnerhof has slaughtered the cattle and transformed it into fresh meat, Pirafelner collects the beef from *Grabnerhof* and he also purchases from this farm products such as potatoes and cheese. Pirafelner also works with the agricultural school of *Grabnerhof*, a NPG partner school, as he hosts teachers and students in his restaurants where they can practise ‘sales conversations’ (they establish an artificial situation in which the students perform the role of a salesperson with the task of highlighting the good quality of the products they want to sale). Pirafelner also serves to the guests of his inn a wide range of other local products, such as the locally well-known *Gesäuse-Perle*, a local fruit beverage, produced by a NPG partner company specialised in processing fruits growing within the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse* (Pirafelner 2014; interview).

In addition, Pirafelner orders and purchases during the hunting season (May-October) fresh venison from the *Steiermärkische Landesforste*, a NPG partner classified as a direct seller, who employs eight professional hunters who hunt, in the *Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse*, annually approx. 1000 red deers, roe deers, and chamois.⁴⁷ The hunters then bring the venison to two local butchers, either to *Grabnerhof* or to *Metzgerei Robert Pfeiler*; the latter slaughters and processes the meat into specific products (e.g. deer salamis and sausages or venison pies) which are then branded as *Xeis-Edelwild* – a brand which was specifically created to give visibility to these venison products (considered and marketed as high-quality products) and to establish the so-called *Genußregion Gesäuse Wild* in 2008 (see figure 16); namely, one of the seventeen *Genußregionen* in Styria that focus on specific local gourmet food that is processed in a traditional way from regional resources.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ <http://www.landesforste.at/index.php?id=50> It must be noted that it is mainly the function of the *Steiermärkische Landesforste* (an important cooperation-partner of the NPG in general) to manage venison-population in the Gesäuse area.

⁴⁸ <http://www.genuss-region.at/genussregionen/steiermark/genussregionen-in-der-steiermark.html>



Figure 15: *Xeiss-Edelwild* and *Genußregion Gesäuse Wild*, 2014

Left: *Hirsch-Punkerl* (a specific venison product of the *Xeiss-Edelwild* brand)

Right: Image representing the *Genußregion Gesäuse Wild*

Source: <http://www.metzgerhandwerk.at/xeis-edelwild.html>

It is important to point out that the *Genußregion Gesäuse Wild* emerged thanks to the cooperation between four actors of the NPGP that belong to different sectors: Christoph Pirafelner (*Gasthof zur Ennsbrücke*), Andreas Holzinger (the director of the *Steiermärkische Landesforste*), Robert Pfeiler (owner and butcher of *Metzgerei Robert Pfeiler*) and Christian Forstner (employee of *Grabnerhof*) (Pirafelner 2014; interview).

Another famous product that emerged out of the cooperation in the NPGP is a local costume that was first presented to the public in May 2007, the so-called *Xeiss-Dirndl*, a specific dress for women. The presentation of this costume took place at the *Schloss Röthelstein* and was an important event that contributed to strengthening the formation of the network in the first years of its existence (Scheb 2014; interview). Many representatives of NPG partner companies participated in performing a “funny skit” together with some NPG employees, for example the project manager, Scheb, who highlighted that this skit was very well perceived by the NPG partners and the rest of the audience. Since 2010, every year in February, at *Schloss Röthelstein*, the now very famous and locally appreciated *Dirndlball* of the NPG partner companies takes place; a ball, which has not been taken place in this manner for many decades as the former balls all disappeared in the area (Pirafelner and Planitzer 2014; interviews). To organise the *Dirndlball*, many partners collaborate, and during the event the partner companies have the opportunity to present their products and services (e.g. there is a raffle, in which the partner companies provide their products and/or services).



Figure 16: Presentation of the *Xeis-Dirndl*, Admont, 2007

Left: Group of local women dressed in the *Xeis-Dirndl* and
 Right: Skit during the first presentation of the *Xeis-Dirndl*

Source: The National Park Gesäuse Archive

The establishment of the NPGP, therefore, succeeded in offering the opportunity to local actors to work together and also creating new branded products (such as the *Xeis-Edelwild* products or the *Xeis-Dirndl*) and of promoting the area through the creation of new brands for their place (i.e. *Genußregion Gesäuse Wild*) and of new events (i.e. *Dirndlball*). The next section deals with the main social and economic incentives and benefits that the creation of the Partnership generated.

6.3 Socio-economic incentives and benefits

My analysis of the qualitative interviews and questionnaires has highlighted a wide range of socio-economic incentives and benefits that encourage the NPG partners to cooperate. Many of my research participants pointed out that they are motivated to work together with other partner companies because they can: 1) sell a larger variety and quantity of local products than before the establishment of the Partnership; 2) satisfy their guests by selling them the “high quality” of the NPG partner products and services; 3) cut down transport costs due to the proximity of the local products; 4) increase sales and strengthen their own business (particularly thanks to mutual advertisements) which, in turn, contributes to the economic development of the Gesäuse and; 5) have a better image as their belonging to NPGP enhances their reputation.

It must be noted that many of my research participants argued that they are not only motivated to cooperate with other companies just because of the economic advantages the NPGP engenders, but also because of other benefits, which can be seen as

being more 'social', rather than strictly 'economic'. Such 'social benefits' that emerge from the establishment of this cooperation are: 1) good teamwork, camaraderie and group solidarity existing with the representatives of the partner companies who share similar values and support one another; 2) the generation of new ideas and projects that emerge from the communication with other NPG partners; 3) the good atmosphere amongst the people involved in the Partnership, including enjoying the events organised by the NPGP; and 4) the mutual appreciation of the products and services of the other NPG companies. In addition, the NPG partners also benefit from the personal connections they have with their local suppliers as they can gain a good knowledge about the origin of the products they purchase and sell. In selling local partners' products, many businesses (especially those active in the sectors of gastronomy and alpine huts) take care to give precise information to their customers about the origins of the products they are purchasing.

In the next section I discuss the non-cooperation in the NPGP and some critiques to the Partnership. More specifically, I discuss the results of my analysis of the group of 'non-cooperative' partner companies, I highlight the possible reasons for non-cooperation, and I offer some suggestions on how the inactive NPG partners could be motivated to cooperate in future.

6.4 Non-cooperation and critiques to the Partnership

As I explained in section 3.3, at the beginning of my research project, I wanted to find out the main reasons why the companies that were evaluated by the project manager as 'non-cooperative partners' do not collaborate. In this section, I present my (limited) investigation on 'non-cooperation' in the NPGP and I point out some critiques to the Partnership; I discuss the main reasons for what is perceived by the project manager as 'non-cooperation' and, at the end of this section, I offer some suggestions of how NPG partners could be, in my view, motivated to cooperate in future.

Four of the six representatives of the 'non-cooperative partners' that I could talk to argued that they were (more or less) collaborating in the Partnership, for example by recommending other NPG partners or by buying products from partner companies. They also added that they were willing to cooperate in future. My telephone surveys also highlighted that two of the 'non-cooperative partners' do actually work together with other partner businesses, but they are simply not aware that they are indeed

cooperating with other partner businesses. For example, they do not know that some specific goods they purchase are produced by companies that also belong to the Partnership. Furthermore, the 'non-cooperative partners' primarily perceive the Partnership as a medium that advertises their business and enhances the image of their company; but they are not effectively communicating the national park philosophy to their clients, as stipulated in the contracts; and they rarely participate in the organised events.

Some of my research participants (e.g. Scheb, Traxler) pointed out that, especially at the beginning of the project, some newly enrolled partner companies did not understand the sense of the Partnership: they just took advantage of the Partnership (i.e. advertisement) but did not "give something back" (e.g. no participation in the events, no cooperation) to the Partnership. Most of these companies have already been expelled from the network, but some of them are still present (Scheb 2014; interview). My fieldwork has highlighted that today there are some partner companies that are perceived by the 'cooperative partners' as being rather inactive and unmotivated to cooperate and, (from their point of view) there is a need of further motivating those inactive partners to collaborate more in future (see also Traxler and Baumann; interviews 2014). Basically, the project manager wants to expel those unmotivated partners in future as she thinks that this expulsion might strengthen the remaining group of partner companies. But it is not an easy task for the Scheb because she often has to consider personal and familiar problems of the representatives of the businesses and, obviously, she wants to avoid conflicts between the enrolled companies and the NPG LLC that might be caused by expulsions of people from the network (Scheb 2014; interview).

My analysis of the interviews and questionnaires also highlighted a variety of possible reasons why some partner companies do not cooperate in the NPGP: 1) some people might be jealous of others and their success ("enviousness" was mentioned quite often); 2) some business owners might not be open-minded about cooperation (as they look at other companies as competitors and/or do not trust them; or they are simply shy and/or afraid of cooperation); 3) some might still not be aware of the high variety and quality of local products they could purchase in the area; 4) others might not be aware of how they can (socially and economically) benefit from cooperation; 5) some other companies do simply not communicate with partners (e.g. through lack of participation in the events); 6) some representatives of partner companies are perceived as "loners"

that are not able to work in a team; 7) some companies simply do not comply with the regulations stipulated in the contracts; 8) or personal reasons (e.g. lack of time) might prevent a fruitful collaboration.

During my fieldwork it turned out that the ‘non-cooperative partners’ could be motivated to collaborate with others, if they would participate more often in the events and start to talk personally (in a face-to-face communication) to potential cooperation partners. This might provoke a raising awareness of the many advantages and benefits of cooperation and a starting point for collaboration. According to the current director of the NPG, Herbert Wölger, it is very important that the actors involved in the Partnership generate a higher “team spirit” (*Wir-Gefühl*) and cooperate more among themselves. To achieve this, it is crucial that the NPG partners regularly communicate with each other during the events in order to lose their “timidity” in working together with others and stop to see others as competitors (Wölger 2014; interview).

Furthermore, in my view, a good strategy to motivate partners to collaborate would be, to communicate to them ‘best practice examples’ in an efficient way, for example via a simple presentation during the *Jahresabschlussfeier*, in which the potential benefits from cooperation (that I discussed in the previous section) are illustrated to the participants of the event. I also believe that cooperation could be stimulated in the Partnership, if more of the ‘non-cooperative partners’ started to appreciate the other partners products and services. However, perhaps a different strategy of communication, specifically targeted to the ‘non-cooperative partners’, could be adopted to investigate the actual possibilities of ‘better’ enrolling them into the Partnership network, before excluding them.

To conclude, although there are some inactive partner companies that seems to be less motivated to cooperate than other companies, the NPGP can be seen as an network that consists of a solid, and evolving, cluster of active and motivated socio-economic actors that collaborate among themselves in a fruitful way.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I first discussed some of the main ways in which the partner companies collaborate with each other. I stressed the significance of organised events that work as initiators for cooperation; I illustrated how NPG partners bring local products and services in circulation within the Gesäuse area; I discussed the main ways in which

partner companies mutually advertise themselves (and their products or services) and I explained a specific example of cross-sectorial cooperation within the Partnership as well as the emergence of some new branded products. In addition, I discussed the social and economic incentives and benefits perceived by the NPG partners; I presented my analysis of 'non-cooperation' in the Partnership and mentioned some critiques to the NPGP that emerged out of my research.

To conclude this chapter, I want to highlight that my analysis has emphasised that the Partnership was useful and functional to generate in the Gesäuse area what scholars such as Twigg and Mohan (2009, p. 171) call 'social capital' and define as:

the social organisation of neighbourhoods and communities and in particular the formal and informal patterns of associational life and community interaction through which relationships of trust are (or are not) established.

In general, social capital can be seen as a concept that points to how relationships of trust and mutual recognition amongst social actors can be of benefit to the establishment of a good context for the generation of fruitful and durable economic relationships (see Gidwani 2009). In the case of the Partnership that is at the core of my thesis, my analysis has emphasised that the creation of the NPGP was useful to counteract the resistance that the establishment of the NPG engendered, and also to generate new relationships between some socio-economic actors in the Gesäuse area; namely, the NPG and the companies now belonging to the NPGP. It can be argued that the Partnership project generated a new social capital; that is, according to Robert Putnam, a 'property' of communities, in which many (fruitful) social interactions among individuals (e.g. the representatives of partner companies) are established through the participation in relatively non-hierarchical associational activities (e.g. the events which I discussed in section 6.2.1 and chapter 5), and through the establishment of trust and reciprocity (see Twigg and Mohan 2009, p. 171), which, in turn contributed to the economic development in the Gesäuse area.

7 Conclusion

In this chapter I begin by recalling the usefulness of Michel Callon's cycle of translation as the theoretical framework that guided my analysis of the NPGP, the empirical focus of my thesis. I then point out the main problems that triggered the creation of the NPGP and I emphasise how the Partnership evolved from a rather weak project and network into a solid but still evolving actor-network. I finally point to the five main contributions that this thesis makes to academic and policy-making debates on nature conservation and local socio-economic development.

My analysis was guided by Michel Callon's cycle of translation, which I used as if it were a 'magnifying lens' able to cast light on some of the different kinds of interactions and power relations between human and non-human actors, involved in the genesis and evolution of the NPGP. The cycle of translation enabled me to point to how the NPGP is an actor-network composed of a heterogeneity of actants, human and non-human, such as, for example, the NPG directors, the NPGP project managers, policy-makers, consultants, local associations of inhabitants and politicians, visitors and tourists; institutions, nature, natural resources, agro-food products, international and Austrian laws, local and institutional regulations, contracts, advertising materials and events. I have highlighted that the interactions of all these actants contributed to the formation and evolution of the Partnership. The cycle of translation has therefore represented a useful theoretical framework for focusing on some of the connections and disconnections that were formed and dissolved between some of the main actants involved in the creation of the Partnership. In supporting an interpretation of the NPGP as an actor-network and as a process made of four specific phases ('problematization', 'interessment', 'enrolment' and 'mobilisation'), the cycle of translation was useful to analyse the development of an organisation such as the NPGP, which was created to solve socio-cultural, political and economic problems, as I point out in the next paragraphs. Importantly, this framework offered the analytical language and the theoretical support that helped me to point to a neglected issue in common, everyday, policy-making: namely, that institutions such as the NPGP are not simply the outcome of forms of collaborations between human socio-economic actors. These forms of organisations are also shaped by non-human actors, which do play a role in forming, strengthening and weakening actor-networks.

My analysis has shown that the NPGP was a project that emerged to solve two main socio-economic problems: the low rate of local acceptance of the NPG and the weakness of the economy in the Gesäuse area. The protection of nature through the establishment of the National Park was locally supported by an initially small group of inhabitants and policy-makers, who held a positive attitude towards nature conservation and saw in the establishment of the NPG an opportunity for local socio-economic development. However, many of the Gesäuse inhabitants felt negatively affected by the National Park as its establishment came with new rules, regulations and restrictions on the use of the land and local natural resources. The (state-regulated) protection of nature, therefore, clashed with how many residents understood (and understand) nature. Namely, as something to be used and exploited to make a living and/or as something to be tamed. In particular farmers, hunters and forest rangers, who work in strict contact with the land and its resources felt that the state-imposed conservation of nature in the area clashed with their everyday needs and work. This, in turn, engendered the emergence of resistance to the establishment of the National Park, which was subsequently softened and overcome thanks to the creation of the NPGP.

The NPGP in fact has contributed to promote a positive image of the National Park amongst the inhabitants, who today have a positive attitude towards the park. It can be argued that the creation of the NPGP harmonised the three conflicting views of 'nature' – as something to be 'preserved' from harmful human intervention; as a resource to be 'exploited' for tourism and for making a living from cultivating the land, hunting and breeding animals; and as something that must be 'tamed' in order to protect humans from nature's own interventions (e.g. avalanches and floods) – that clashed when the NPG was established. My analysis suggests that, today, these three ideas of nature keep coexisting in local understanding and perceptions of the NPG area, but in a less conflicting way than when the NPG was established.

Besides the problem of the low acceptance rate of Gesäuse inhabitants towards the NPG, two further interrelated reasons that triggered the creation of the Partnership were the weakness of the local economy and the fact that very few local businesses worked together. According to the initiators of the NPGP, promoting the collaborations between local companies would have fostered the economic development in the Gesäuse area. My thesis has shown that the Partnership was a very important actor that succeeded in bringing local companies to cooperate together and that this collaboration, in turn, generated a positive impact on the local economy.

I have in fact highlighted that, despite initial difficulties during the first stages of its formation, the NPGP eventually evolved into a solid, and rather stable, actor-network able to overcome the scepticism of local people towards the National Park and to convince local companies to collaborate amongst themselves and with the National Park. The NPGP succeeded into transforming scepticism and competition between companies into 'social capital', which was (and still is) functional to generate socio-economic benefits for the area.

Importantly, my analysis has highlighted that today there is a stable cluster of active partners that collaborate one with another and with the NPG, as epitomised by the slogan that formulated throughout the development of the project: "together we are stronger than alone" (*Gemeinsam sind wir stärker als alleine*). However, I have shown that within the NPGP there is also an inactive group of businesses that are not exactly and fully 'enrolled' in the NPGP. In fact, even if they are part of the Partnership, these non-collaborative businesses run the risk of being pushed out of the NPGP. This, in turn, shows that despite the fact that the NPGP appears now as a solid actor-network, it is still evolving and changing, as any other actor-network.

To conclude, my thesis has contributed to five main issues. First as, according to my knowledge, there are no existing academic studies of national park partnerships in Austria, this thesis has contributed to provide an understanding of some of the reasons why such partnerships are established and how they may develop. Second, and subsequently, my analysis of the NPGP can make a contribution to local policy-making as it can be used by the current project manager in order to gain a better understanding of the genesis and evolution of the Partnership and, therefore, to further develop the project. Third, as my analysis highlighted that the NPGP was successful in minimizing local resistance to the NPG and creating local support for the National Park, eventually contributing to strengthening the local economy, I believe that this thesis can provide useful information for other policy-makers working in other areas that can be targeted by nature protection initiatives, and that may struggle with similar problems that NPG had to tackle since the beginning of its establishment. Projects similar to the NPGP could be adopted and implemented in other rural areas to foster sustainable local development and forms of socio-economic cooperation because such 'cooperative partnerships' seem to have a potential to engender several (social, economic and environmental) benefits. Fourth, and subsequently, my account of the NPGP has offered an empirical investigation that contributes to current academic and policy-making

debates that focus on human-nature conflicts in nature protected areas. Fifth, and finally, with this thesis, I have shed some light on the often unacknowledged – in policy-making arenas – role played by non-humans in the creation of forms of socio-economic cooperation.

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Appendix 1: List of interviewees

Name of interviewee	Role of interviewee	Date of interview	Length of interview
Bacher Albert	Owner of the company <i>Gasthaus Kamper</i> (sector: gastronomy)	February 5 th , 2014	51 min
Baumann Renate	Representative of the company <i>Reiterhof Hofheuriger Laussabauer</i> (associated with multiple sectors: direct sells, <i>Jausenstation</i> , accommodation, leisure and sport)	February 13 th , 2014	59 min
Drechsler Thomas	Director of the tourism association <i>Tourismusverband Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse</i>	February 6 th , 2014	64 min
Hoffmann Otmar	Owner of the company <i>Nah & Frisch Hoffmann</i> (sector: trade)	February 14 th , 2014	47 min
Osebik David	Employee of the NPG and project manager of GSEISPUR	January 28 th , 2014	36 min
Pirafelner Christoph	Owner of the company <i>Gasthaus zur Ennsbrücke</i> (sector: gastronomy)	January 29 th , 2014	85 min
Planitzer Günter	Owner of the company <i>Café Konditorei Stockhammer</i> (sector: gastronomy)	February 5 th , 2014	75 min
Raggam Gertraud	First project manager of the NPGP	March 4 th , 2014	E-mail interview
Scheb Karoline	Current project manager of the NPGP	December 18 th , 2013 February 28 th , 2014	113 min 124 min
Traxler Helga	Owner of the company <i>Mödlingerhütte</i> (sector: alpine huts)	January 29 th , 2014	79 min
Wölger Herbert	Current director of the National Park Gesäuse	February 28 th , 2014	31 min

Appendix 2: Questionnaire (Fragebogen)

Lieber Nationalpark Gesäuse Partner!

Mein Name ist Christoph Gahbauer. Ich komme ursprünglich aus Liezen und studiere Umweltsystemwissenschaften mit Schwerpunkt Geographie (Nachhaltige Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung) an der Karl-Franzens Universität in Graz. Ich schreibe zurzeit an meiner Masterarbeit über die Nationalpark Gesäuse Partnerschaft und möchte Sie höflich darum bitten, meine Forschungsarbeit zu unterstützen, in dem Sie den vorliegenden Fragebogen ausfüllen. Dies wird etwa 15-20 Minuten in Anspruch nehmen.

Ich danke Ihnen herzlich für Ihre Unterstützung!

**1. Als Nationalpark Partner sind Sie einer bestimmten Kategorie zugeteilt.
Zu welcher der folgenden 11 Kategorien gehören Sie?**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beherbergung (10) | <input type="checkbox"/> Handwerk und Gewerbe (4) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gastronomie (7) | <input type="checkbox"/> Jausenstation (1) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bildung, Kunst und Kultur (1) | <input type="checkbox"/> Schutzhütten (1) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Direktvermarkter (3) | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobilität (0) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Freizeit und Sport (3) | <input type="checkbox"/> Vereine (1) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handel (1) | |

2. Was ist für Sie die Nationalpark Gesäuse Partnerschaft?

3. War es Ihrer Meinung nach eine gute Idee diese Partnerschaft zu gründen?

- ☐ JA
- ☐ NEIN

4. Warum?

5. Warum sind Sie ursprünglich eine Partnerschaft mit dem Nationalpark Gesäuse eingegangen?

6. Verwenden Sie das Logo der Nationalpark Gesäuse Partner?

- ☐ JA
☐ NEIN



7. Wie verwenden Sie das Logo der Nationalpark Gesäuse Partner?

- ☐ als Schild (Plakette) an der Hausmauer
☐ für die Homepage
☐ in der Menükarte
☐ in Broschüren
☐ zur Kennzeichnung von Produkten
☐ sonstige:

8. Denken Sie, dass es wichtig ist, dieses Logo zu verwenden?

- ☐ JA
☐ NEIN

9. Warum?

10. Arbeiten Sie mit anderen Nationalpark Partnern zusammen?

- ☐ JA
☐ NEIN

*Wenn Sie JA angekreuzt haben, gehen Sie bitte zur nächsten Frage.
Wenn Sie NEIN angekreuzt haben, gehen Sie bitte zur Frage Nummer 25 auf Seite 7.*

11. Mit welchen Nationalpark Partnern arbeiten Sie zusammen?

12. Wie arbeiten Sie mit diesen Partnern zusammen?

13. Was motiviert Sie, mit diesen Partnern zusammenzuarbeiten?

14. Wie profitieren Sie, wenn Sie mit anderen NP Partnern zusammenarbeiten?

15. Warum glauben Sie, kooperieren einige NP Partner nicht mit anderen Partnern?

16. Wie könnte man Ihrer Meinung diese Partner motivieren, mit anderen Partnern zusammenzuarbeiten?

17. Mit welchen Partnern können Sie sich eine Zusammenarbeit in Zukunft vorstellen?

18. Warum genau mit diesen Partnern?

19. Wie profitiert Ihrer Meinung nach der Nationalpark Gesäuse von Ihrer Tätigkeit als Partner?

20. Wie profitieren Sie als Partner vom Nationalpark Gesäuse?

21. Welchen Einfluss hat das Projekt der NP Partner Ihrer Meinung auf die Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse?

- ☐ Sehr positiv
- ☐ Positiv
- ☐ Positiv und Negativ
- ☐ Negativ
- ☐ Sehr Negativ

22. Warum denken Sie so?

23. Haben Sie als NP Partner irgendwelche Wünsche oder Anregungen für die Zukunft des Projektes?

24. Wären Sie bereit, diese Themen mit mir in einem persönlichen Interview zu diskutieren?

☐ JA

☐ NEIN

*Wenn Ja, füllen Sie bitte unten die Kontaktdaten aus!
Wenn Nein, lassen Sie die Kontaktdaten frei!*

Kontaktdaten

Name:

Name des Partnerbetriebes:

Ich habe Zeit am:

E-Mail:

Telefonnummer:

Vielen herzlichen Dank für Ihre Unterstützung!



Christoph Gahbauer

Karl-Franzens Universität Graz
Institut für Geographie und Raumforschung



25. Gibt es einen bestimmten Grund, warum Sie nicht mit anderen Partnern zusammenarbeiten?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> persönliche Gründe | <input type="checkbox"/> Konflikte |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mangel an Zeit | <input type="checkbox"/> Missverständnisse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vertrauen | <input type="checkbox"/> sonstige: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> in meiner Kategorie ist es schwierig zu kooperieren | |

26. Haben Sie in der Vergangenheit mit Partnern zusammengearbeitet?

- ☐ JA
- ☐ NEIN

Wenn Sie Ja angekreuzt haben, gehen Sie bitte zur nächsten Frage.

Wenn Sie Nein angekreuzt haben, gehen Sie bitte zur Frage Nummer 29.

27. Wie haben Sie damals zusammengearbeitet?

28. Warum ist diese Kooperation zu Ende gegangen?

29. Wären Sie bereit, in Zukunft mit anderen NP Partnern zu kooperieren?

- ☐ JA
- ☐ NEIN

30. Was würde Sie besonders motivieren, um in Zukunft neue Kooperationen mit NP Partnern einzugehen?

31. Mit welchen NP Partnern können Sie sich eine Zusammenarbeit in Zukunft vorstellen?

32. Warum genau diese Partnerbetriebe?

33. Wie profitiert Ihrer Meinung nach der Nationalpark Gesäuse von Ihrer Tätigkeit als Partner?

34. Wie profitieren Sie vom Nationalpark Gesäuse?

35. Wie beeinflusst das Projekt der NP Gesäuse Partner Ihrer Meinung nach die Alpenregion Nationalpark Gesäuse?

- ☐ Sehr positiv
- ☐ Positiv
- ☐ Positiv und Negativ
- ☐ Negativ
- ☐ Sehr Negativ

36. Warum denken Sie so?

37. Haben Sie als NP Partner irgendwelche Wünsche oder Anregungen für die Zukunft des Projektes?

38. Wären Sie bereit, diese Themen mit mir in einem persönlichen Interview zu diskutieren?

- ☐ JA
- ☐ NEIN

*Wenn Ja, füllen Sie die Kontaktdaten auf der nächsten Seite aus!
Wenn Nein, lassen Sie die Kontaktdaten frei!*

Vielen herzlichen Dank für Ihre Unterstützung!



Christoph Gahbauer
Karl-Franzens Universität Graz

