

Transboundary Cooperation in Protected Area´s Management – Factors Influencing Success or Failure

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Summary

Little disagreement exists about the need of conservation measures at the ecosystem level. As mountain ranges or water bodies do not end at administrative borders, ideally neighbouring countries have to coordinate their activities. Many international organisations strongly recommend the establishment of transboundary protected areas. However, cross-border cooperation adds another layer of complexity to the already difficult task of managing a protected area. "Still protected areas are being established near borders without any thought of coordinating measures with the neighbouring country to ensure an effective protection" (BRUNNER 2006). Recommendations of concerned stakeholders and the application of principles of change management may help to find new approaches for a successful and sustainable cooperation.

Keywords

Transboundary cooperation in protected areas management

Aims

The study examines the factors for success or failure of transboundary cooperation as perceived by stakeholders in three case study sites with different levels of cooperation. Further, it analyses, if basic principles of change management in organisational development can be applied in order to facilitate decisions on whether to establish and how to handle transboundary protected areas. The results are meant to add to the international discussions and facilitate transboundary cooperation in protected area´s management.

Duration of project

From January until August 2009

Areas of study

Three adjoining protected area complexes in Europe have been selected as case study sites (cp. Figure 1):

Interstate Nature Park Maas-Schwalm-Nette between Germany and The Netherlands with one management unit responsible for both sides of the frontier (high cooperation level),

National Park Triglav in Slovenia and (almost) adjoining Regional Nature Park Prealpi Giulie in Italy (medium cooperation level) and

the mountain range „Karwendel“ between Tyrol (Alpenpark Karwendel which currently is transformed into a Nature Park) and Bavaria (nature conservation site), where since 20 years stakeholders make an effort towards an institutionalised cooperation, however so far without success (low cooperation level).

Methods

The guidelines of IUCN (SANDWICH et al. 2001), UNESCO (2000) and EUROPARC (2000) and some previous studies (ZBICZ 2003, LANFER et al. 2003 and UNESCO 2003) have been compared in order to identify the most important and commonly agreed criteria for a successful cooperation in transboundary protected areas.



Figure 1: Location of the selected case study sites in Europe (Graphic: Lange).

In a second step, representatives of relevant interest groups (conservationists, mayors, tourism experts, land users etc.) have been chosen in the case study sites on both sides of the border and questioned about their experiences with transboundary cooperation. In total, 30 guided (phone or face-to-face) interviews have been carried out.

In a third step some basic principles of change management have been applied to analyse the cooperation processes in the case study sites. It has been evaluated if they may help to find new approaches of how to establish or handle transboundary protected areas.

Results

What do international organisations and previous surveys recommend?

International organisations and previous studies agree on some basic recommendations like specifying common visions or (written) agreements, establishing coordinative structures, encouraging personal meetings between all levels of staff members, finding a way of how to deal with language barriers, harmonising regulations and management practices, developing common external communication, realising joint projects and finally guaranteeing a particular budget for transboundary activities (cp. summary in Figure 2).

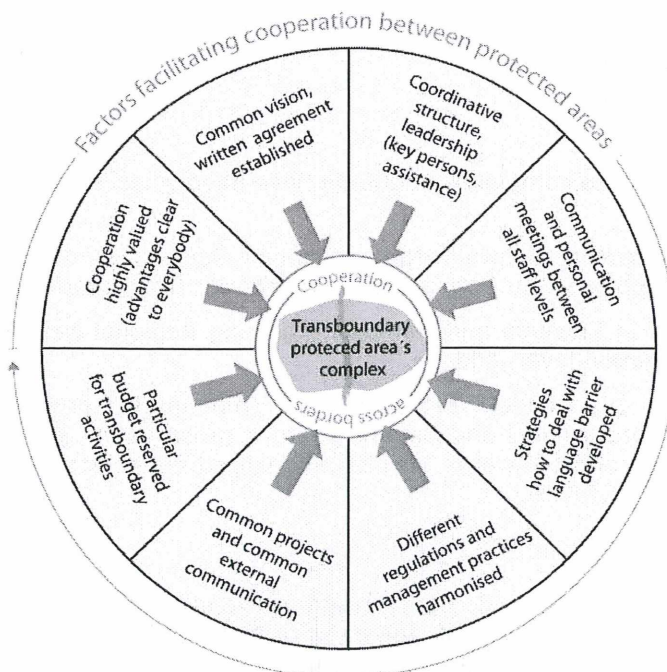


Figure 2: Factors facilitating transboundary cooperation in protected area's management (Graphic: S. Lange, based on recommendations of international organisations and results from former studies).

What do stakeholders recommend?

According to the surveyed stakeholders cooperation brings some benefit not only for nature conservation, but rather for increasing the popularity of the area and strengthening tourism activities. Motives behind the cooperation are (amongst others) gaining more income, maintaining historic relations and creating a European feeling. Personal contacts are considered a key factor for the success of cooperation. However, these contacts should not only occur on staff but also on local level (exchange of farmers, children, tourism associations etc.). Further the importance of informal events (like cultural events, competitions, having a beer together) was stressed to allow for building trust and friendship. Differences between neighbouring countries will always occur. However they rarely have been perceived as being an obstacle but rather an enriching source for new learning experiences. Shall joint projects be implemented successfully, there only has to be a key person who is familiar with these different structures, regulations and attitudes on both sides of the border in order to guarantee a smooth flow of the project.

Can principles of change management be applied?

Even if already some important aspects of how to organise transboundary cooperation have been identified, they still do not answer the question under which circumstances transboundary cooperation is worth trying. Change management principles deal with the question of how people can be motivated to give up familiar habits and accept changes. One of these principles is summed up in the following change equation:

$$D[\text{issatisfaction}] \times V[\text{ision}] \times F[\text{irst step}] > R[\text{esistance}] \text{ to Change}$$

It reveals that dissatisfaction with the current situation is a key driver for changes. Developing a common vision is important to agree on what shall be achieved in the future. Concrete first steps have to be taken in order to demonstrate the progress towards the vision. The change formula is multiplicative, which means that if any factor is missing or poorly developed, resistance will be greater and positive change will not take place (BECKHARD & HARRIS 1987).

Can this be applied to transboundary protected areas? Does it explain why the cooperation in the Karwendel mountain range still has not worked out yet? Yes, it does.

The cooperation between Tyrol and Bavaria should be easy as there is no language barrier and the last armed conflict happened 200 years ago (cp. Figure 3). Currently, the main resistance comes from the Bavarian stakeholders (representing the smaller part of the Karwendel). They fear that their interests may be ignored by the Tyrolese majority. Additionally the driving forces for cooperation are not well developed. Some benefits are expected from the cooperation, but the majority is not at all dissatisfied with the current situation. They don't share a common vision of how to develop the region and the first steps taken in form of a joint INTERREG project have been realised mainly on the upper management and expert level with the consequence that no contacts on the local stakeholder level have been triggered. The establishment of a transboundary protected area is therefore at present not imaginable.

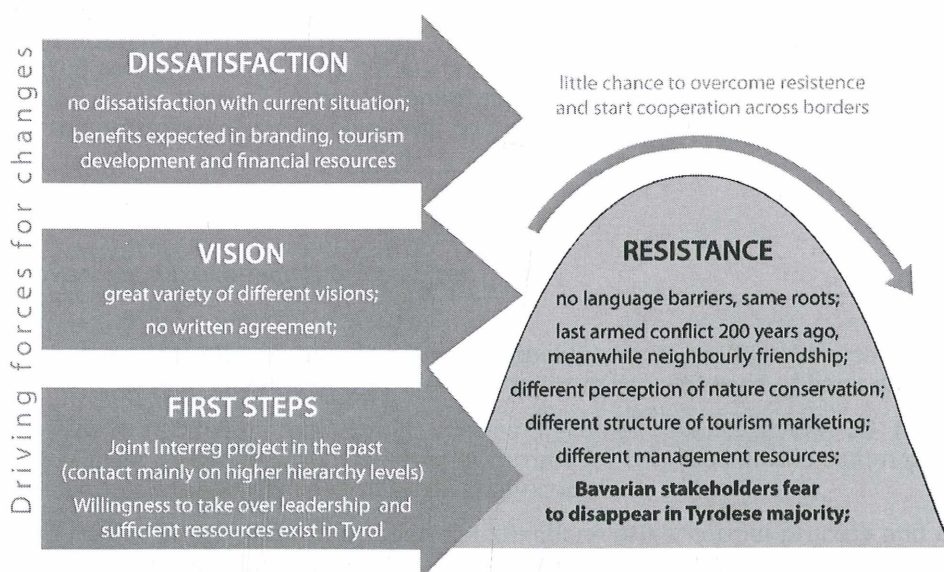


Figure 3: The basic principles of change management, applied to the transboundary cooperation process in the Karwendel mountain range (Graphic: S. Lange).

Discussion

The recommendations given by international organisations encourage transboundary cooperation. However, they lack the aspect of how to build trust and friendship amongst the neighbours which seems crucial to allow for a sustainable cooperation outlasting the ending of an INTERREG funding period. Combining the recommendations of concerned stakeholders with principles of change management may stimulate new approaches of how to deal with transboundary protected areas. In case of the Karwendel mountain range, informal events on the local level would be advisable to overcome the distrust of the Bavarian stakeholder. Once more confidence is provided, the attention could be turned to the benefits of transboundary cooperation, establishing a common vision and implementing first concrete steps.

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