

The idea of German-Austrian Alpine National Parks – Motives and Settings

Ronald Würflinger

Until today the *Verein Naturschutzpark* (German Association of Nature Conservation Park) has property within the Hohe Tauern National Park in Salzburg. The 3.500 hectares present a 100 year history of protected areas in Austria and Germany and stand for common efforts of the creation of the Hohe Tauern national parks in particular until 1945. This paper outlines those efforts and the first steps to the Hohe Tauern National Park until the Second World War. The different nature conservation and homeland preservation movements in Germany and Austria and their approach to the conservation tool national park are emphasized.¹¹

On October 23 in 1909 the *Verein Naturschutzpark* was founded in Munich. The creation of three nature parks in Austria and Germany was defined as the main objective: One in northern Germany, one in the low mountain range and one in the Alps. The work of this association, the date of the foundation and their first work program is a significant act in the history of protected areas in Germany and Austria and in nature conservation in general.

German and Austrian nature conservation movements continuously gained strength in the second half of the 19th century. The straight concept of protection of species dominated the beginning of nature conservation activities. Networks, clubs and associations like the *Wiener Tierschutzverein* (Viennese Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 1846) or the *Deutscher Bund für Vogelschutz* (German Conservation Union for Bird Protection, 1899) were founded.

At the end of the nineteenth century the view of nature conservation changed in a remarkable way and obtained amplification. In Germany the *Deutscher Bund Heimatschutz* (German League of Homeland Preservation) was formed by Ernst Rudorff in 1904. Rudorff elevated the romantic perception of a mythical rural Germany to the ideal state of affairs. Rudorff's movement aimed to preserve the existing social order and cultural heritage and criticised the development of the upcoming mass society, in detail capitalism, Americanism, proletarianization and urbanization. The main focus was the preservation of traditional "German landscapes" which included a concept of nature conservation and "German wilderness". Even the word nature conservation has been attributed to Rudorff. Since the epoch of German Romanticism a nationalised discourse about nature and wilderness and their meaning for the German culture and value for the German society have existed – similar to the United States where "...wilderness became part of the national identity".¹²

The first public department of nature conservation in Europe was installed 1906 in Prussia – *Staatliche Stelle für Naturdenkmalpflege* (State Agency for the Care of Natural Monuments). From the beginning the agency focused on identifying, researching and monitoring natural monuments. The state agency adopted the methods that have been applied in the preservation of historical monuments and sites. Natural monuments were defined as objects of cultural value and as national treasures. Under the direction of the founder Hugo Conwentz the agency took over a leading role in the nature conservation policy in Austria and Germany. Conwentz' perception of nature was concentrated on a small scale conservation policy. In 1905 an inventory of Austrian natural monuments was started and initialised an extensive designation of natural monuments especially in Vienna.¹³

¹¹A chronicle overview of the establishment of the Hohe Tauern National Park wrote: Anton Draxl, *Der Nationalpark Hohe Tauern. Eine österreichische Geschichte*, Band 1 (Innsbruck, Österreichischer Alpenverein, 1996).

¹²Karl Ditt, *Naturschutz zwischen Zivilisationskritik, Tourismusförderung und Umweltschutz. USA, England und Deutschland 1860-1970*. 518, in: Matthias Frese, Michael Prinz (ed.), *Politische Zäsuren und gesellschaftlicher Wandel im 20. Jahrhundert. Regionale und vergleichende Perspektiven* (Paderborn, Schöningh, 1996), 499-534.

¹³ Alexander Mrkvicka, Petra Schneider, „Grüne Wende“? Naturschutz im Jahrhundertwende-Wien. 338, in: Karl Brunner, Petra Schneider (ed.), *Umwelt Stadt. Geschichte des Natur- und Lebensraumes Wien* (Wien, Böhlau, 2005), 331-339.

In 1898 the Prussian deputy Wilhelm Wetekamp held a speech in the Prussian Congress and demanded national parks for Germany – he directly referred to national parks in the United States. But both, the *Deutscher Bund Heimatschutz* and the state agencies for the care of natural monuments in Prussia and Austria have not focused on protected areas. The “Yellowstone Park Act” and the formation of the Yellowstone National Park in the United States in 1872 influenced the European nature conservation movement. Alongside the formation of departments of nature conservation and the strengthening of homeland and landscape preservation movements the idea of the establishment of protected areas became an important role in the discourse about nature conservation. This movement on one hand admired the United States for their national park program and despised their society for the lack of history and culture and their capitalism on the other hand.

Hugo Conwentz, the rational head of the Prussian department of natural monuments criticised the ideas of big protected areas in Germany.¹⁴ He denied the existence of suitable regions. The homeland conservationists adopted the concept of protected areas more optimistically. Other leading persons in Austria like Karl Gianonni, a representative of the homeland preservationists, and Günther Schlesinger, the founder of *Naturschutzbund* (Austrian League of Nature Conservation), supported the idea of nature parks.¹⁵

In 1909 an interest group founded the *Verein Naturschutzpark* (Association for Nature Conservation Parks) in Munich. First members were for example Hermann Hesse, Heinz Reclam, Arthur Krupp and Lina Hähnle from Germany and Maria von Ebner-Eschenbach, Bertha von Suttner or Koloman Moser from Austria. From the beginning the implementation of a program of strictly applied nature conservation and a philosophy of non-interaction was discussed. The Association tried to distinguish itself from the United States and their focus on leisure activities and outdoor recreation in the national parks. The choice of the term “nature park” and not “national park” exemplifies this position. Member Curt Floericke wrote in 1910: “There should be no shot in our park and no blow of an axe but everything should be controlled by wild nature itself.”¹⁶

The strict emphasis on nature conservation was given up in the first hour. In the first publication of the *Verein Naturschutzpark* in 1910 nature parks were defined as instruments for strengthening the tourism in peripheral and rural regions.¹⁷ The topics tourism and outdoor recreation in the parks became a crucial role within the association.

With the Lüneburger Heide (a heathland in northern Germany) the *Verein Naturschutzpark* acquired its first target area and purchased its first properties there in 1910. Already in 1912 the association received the right to expropriate. The association had the right to prohibit hunting and forestry. In 1912 the Austrian members founded their own branch of the *Verein Naturschutzpark*. Initiator and leader was forester Adolf Ritter von Gutenberg. This alliance was still part of the German association and remitted two thirds of the membership fees to Germany. In 1913 Gutenberg declared the establishment of an alpine nature park as the main objective. Opposition against new hydro power plants and the damming of rivers was a crucial topic for the Austrian branch.¹⁸ As in Germany the Austrian association was a pool of homeland and landscape preservationists and of nature conservationists. Gutenberg also emphasized the touristic significance of nature parks for rural areas. The Austrian branch is to be considered as the first effective association of nature conservation in Austria.¹⁹

In 1913 the Austrian branch rented land in the Niederen Tauern in Styria to establish the first alpine nature park. Conflicts about the rent and contract details put an end to those efforts. In the same year the association started to concentrate on the Stubachtal in the region of the Hohen Tauern. Until 1924 more land was bought in the region – around 4.500 hectares. In 1924 the Austrian branch was converted into the *Österreichischer Naturschutzbund* (Austrian League of Nature Conservation). The German branch of the association *Naturschutzpark* retained the

¹⁴ Later he changed his mind but refused tourism and leisure activities in the parks.

¹⁵ Karl Gianonni, *Naturschutzbestrebungen in Österreich*, in: *Verein zur Verbreitung naturwissenschaftlicher Kenntnisse* (ed.), *Vorträge des Vereines zur Verbreitung naturwissenschaftlicher Kenntnisse in Wien*, (Wien, Eigenverlag, 58. Jahrgang, Heft 2), 1-35.

¹⁶ (Authors translation) Curt Floericke, *Entwicklung, Stand und Aussichten der Naturschutzparkbewegung*. 15, in: *Verein Naturschutzpark* (ed.), *Naturschutzparke in Deutschland und Österreich, Ein Mahnwort an das deutsche und österreichische Volk* (Stuttgart, Frank'sche Verlagshandlung, 1910), 7-18.

¹⁷ Floericke, *Entwicklung, Stand und Aussichten der Naturschutzparkbewegung*. 17, in: *Naturschutzpark* (ed.), *Naturschutzparke in Deutschland und Österreich*, (1910), 7-18.

¹⁸ Hannes Rosner, *Die Berichterstattung über den Nationalpark Hohe Tauern in ausgewählten Tageszeitungen. Dargestellt am Beispiel der Diskussion um die Umballfälle*, (Wien, ÖGNU, 1988), 3.

¹⁹ Harald Payer, Helga Zangerl-Weisz, *Naturschutzziele im Wandel der Zeiten. Historische Entwicklung des Naturschutzes*, 72, in: *Wissenschaft und Umwelt Interdisziplinär*, Band 9 (Wien, 2005), 69-80.

responsibility of the properties in the Hohe Tauern. The newly founded *Naturschutzbund* put its focus on the lake Neusiedl south of Vienna. The Austrian efforts to establish a national park became a more intense and diverted discourse through the *Naturschutzbund*.

Beside the German-Austrian *Verein Naturschutzpark* the *Deutsch-Österreichischer Alpenverein* (German-Austrian Alpine Association)²⁰ obtained land in the Hohe Tauern. The *Alpenverein* purchased more than 33.000 hectares including the Großglockner and its glacier. In 1936 the associations demanded a nature protection area for their properties. Even during the Second World War both purchased more land. The *Alpenverein* developed the paper *Naturschutzgebiet Nationalpark Hohe Tauern* (Nature Protection Area Hohe Tauern National Park). In the Third Reich this idea haven't been realized.

Contact

Mag. Ronald Würflinger
ronald.wuerflinger@gmx.at

Steiner Landstraße 90
3500 Krems an der Donau
Austria

Arbeitskreis Wachau/Naturpark Jauerling-Wachau
www.weltkulturerbe-wachau.org

²⁰ From 1873-1945 the German and Austrian branches of the alpine associations were united. Between 1938 1945 only the German Alpine Association existed.