

Values of Protected Landscapes and Seascapes

A series published by

The Protected Landscapes Specialist Group of IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas

Series Editorial Team: Thora Amend, Jessica Brown, Ashish Kothari, Adrian Phillips and Sue Stolton



3

Protected Landscapes and Wild Biodiversity

Edited by
Nigel Dudley and Sue Stolton

Published by



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On behalf of



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Contents

Introduction: Understanding the biodiversity values of category V protected areas	7
<i>Nigel Dudley</i>	
Croatia: The floodplain ecosystem of the Central Sava River Basin	19
<i>Goran Gugić, Dijana Župan and Irina Zupan</i>	
Spain: Somiedo Natural Park bringing “everything to life”	27
<i>José Alba</i>	
Germany: Managing biodiversity conservation in Nature Parks	35
<i>Martina Porzelt and Jörg Liesen</i>	
Mozambique: Protecting biodiversity in coastal forests	45
<i>Rito Mabunda</i>	
Colombia: Makuira, the cosmological centre of origin for the Wayúu people	53
<i>Julia Premauer and Fikret Berkes</i>	
Australia: Dhimurru, looking after our land and sea	61
<i>Ben Hoffmann, Steve Roeger, Sue Stolton and Phil Wise</i>	
Mexico: Wildlife conservation on community conserved lands in Oaxaca	71
<i>Elvira Duran, James Robson, Miguel Briones-Salas, David Barton Bray and Fikret Berkes</i>	
India: Community conservation at a crossroads	83
<i>Neema Pathak Broome and Nandita Hazarika</i>	
Canada: Reconceptualising wildlife conservation at Poplar River First Nation, Manitoba	91
<i>Agnieszka Pawlowska</i>	
Conclusions: Lessons learned and recommendations	99
<i>Nigel Dudley</i>	



Germany: Managing biodiversity conservation in Nature Parks

Martina Porzelt and Jörg Liesen

Summary

Covering about 27 per cent of the country's land surface, the 104 Nature Parks in Germany are assigned a category V in the IUCN system of protected area management categories and are governed by the German Federal Nature Conservation Act. The primary purpose of Germany's Nature Parks is the preservation, development and rehabilitation of landscapes shaped by various types of land use, including the diverse species and habitats native to these areas. Environmentally sustainable land use is the key to achieve this purpose. In addition to this, Nature Parks provide a particularly favourable environment for the promotion of sustainable regional development and sustainable tourism. The Lüneburger Heath and the Southern Black Forest Nature Parks highlighted in this chapter are examples which show that nature tourism products can help to generate value from species and habitat conservation efforts, and that tourism development in the Nature Parks is conducive to sustainable regional development.

The Association of German Nature Parks (VDN), the umbrella organisation of Nature Parks in Germany, developed the German Nature Parks' Quality Campaign (*Qualitätsoffensive Naturparke*) and guidelines for improved nature park planning. These two nature park management tools were designed to help the parks accomplish their specific tasks in the areas of management and organisation; environmental protection and landscape conservation; environmental education and communication; recreation and sustainable tourism, and sustainable regional development, and to evaluate the success of nature park conservation efforts, thereby also ensuring effective biodiversity conservation.

The strength of the administrative organisations responsible for many of Germany's Nature Parks is that they provide for knowledge exchange and cooperation between stakeholders from various backgrounds in the different regions, such as land owners, communities, planning agencies, educational institutions and private businesses, thus allowing for the coordination of disparate interests and contributing to the success of a large number of relevant projects related to environmental protection. Therefore, one of the key objectives for the future is to strengthen the role of the Nature Parks as drivers of sustainable development in rural areas which contributes to the conservation of Biodiversity.



Pasture beeches in the Southern Black Forest Nature Park

Introduction: Nature Parks in Germany can help protect biodiversity

In many European countries Nature Parks have become established large-scale protected areas. Due to their primary dual purpose of ensuring sustainable conservation and the sustainable use of cultural landscapes, Nature Parks are becoming increasingly important to ensure that the biological diversity of Europe's cultural landscapes will be conserved in the long term.

Most of the Nature Parks in Germany are funded and managed jointly by associations of local community and rural district authorities, other special interest associations or, in some German states, state or federal authorities. The Nature Parks have no administrative authority over the land on which they are situated, so they depend on the cooperation of communities, farmers, woodland owners and other land owners (Liesen and Köster, 2005). In 2006 the VDN presented its 'Petersberg Programme' for Nature Parks in Germany, a ten-point action plan that contains the general nature park development goals for the coming decades (Liesen et al., 2008) and also places the work of the Nature Parks in the context of efforts to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Of particular importance in this regard



- 1 Schlei
- 2 Hüttener Berge
- 3 Westensee
- 4 Aukrug
- 5 Holsteinische Schweiz
- 6 Lauenburgische Seen
- 7 Mecklenburgisches Elbetal/Flusslandschaft Elbe-MV
- 8 Sternberger Seenland
- 9 Nossentiner/Schwinzer Heide
- 10 Mecklenburgische Schweiz und Kummerower See
- 11 Flusslandschaft Peenetal
- 12 Insel Usedom
- 13 Am Stettiner Haff
- 14 Feldberger Seenlandschaft
- 15 Wildeshauser Geest
- 16 Lüneburger Heide
- 17 Südheide

- 18 Elbhöhen-Wendland
- 19 Bourtanger Moor – Bargerveen
- 20 Dümmer
- 21 Steinhuder Meer
- 22 TERRA.vita
- 23 Weserbergland
- 24 Elm-Lappwald
- 25 Solling-Vogler im Weserbergland
- 26 Harz/Niedersachsen
- 27 Münden
- 28 Drömling
- 29 Harz/Sachsen-Anhalt
- 30 Unteres Saaletal
- 31 Fläming
- 32 Dübener Heide
- 33 Saale-Unstrut-Triasland
- 34 Stechlin-Ruppiner Land
- 35 Uckermärkische Seen
- 36 Westhavelland

- 37 Barnim
- 38 Märkische Schweiz
- 39 Hoher Fläming
- 40 Nuthe-Nieplitz
- 41 Dahme-Heideseen
- 42 Niederlausitzer Landrücken
- 43 Schlaubetal
- 44 Niederlausitzer Heidelandschaft
- 45 Hohe Mark – Westmünsterland
- 46 Teutoburger Wald/Eggegebirge
- 47 Schwalm-Nette
- 48 Deutsch-Belgischer Naturpark Hohes Venn – Eifel
- 49 Rheinland
- 50 Siebengebirge
- 51 Bergisches Land
- 52 Ebbegebirge
- 53 Homert
- 54 Rothaargebirge
- 55 Arnsberger Wald
- 56 Diemelsee
- 57 Kellerwald-Edersee
- 58 Habichtswald
- 59 Meißner-Kaufunger Wald
- 60 Lahn-Dill-Bergland
- 61 Rhein-Taunus
- 62 Hochaunus
- 63 Hoher Vogelsberg
- 64 Hessische Rhön
- 65 Hessischer Spessart
- 66 Bergstraße-Odenwald
- 67 Eichsfeld-Hainich-Werratal
- 68 Südharz
- 69 Kyffhäuser
- 70 Thüringer Wald
- 71 Thüringer Schiefergebirge/Obere Saale
- 72 Erzgebirge/Vogtland
- 73 Zittauer Gebirge
- 74 Rhein-Westerwald
- 75 Nassau
- 76 Südeifel
- 77 Vulkaneifel
- 78 Saar-Hunsrück
- 79 Soonwald-Nahe
- 80 Pfälzerwald
- 81 Neckartal-Odenwald
- 82 Stromberg-Heuchelberg
- 83 Schwäbisch-Fränkischer Wald
- 84 Schönbuch
- 85 Schwarzwald Mitte/Nord
- 86 Südschwarzwald
- 87 Obere Donau
- 88 Bayerische Rhön
- 89 Haßberge
- 90 Frankenwald
- 91 Bayerischer Spessart
- 92 Steigerwald
- 93 Fränkische Schweiz-Veldensteiner Forst
- 94 Fichtelgebirge
- 95 Steinwald
- 96 Frankenhöhe
- 97 Hirschwald
- 98 Nördlicher Oberpfälzer Wald
- 99 Oberpfälzer Wald
- 100 Oberer Bayerischer Wald
- 101 Bayerischer Wald
- 102 Altmühltal
- 103 Augsburg-Westliche Wälder
- 104 Nagelfluhkette



The Black Grouse

is the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA), adopted by the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD. Nature Parks are intended to achieve the self-proclaimed objective of reducing the current rate of loss of global biodiversity at global, regional and national scales and to contribute to sustainable development (UNEP/CBD, 2004).

In order to achieve these objectives on a national level, the German federal government developed a National Strategy on Biodiversity and a Federal Action Plan for the Conservation of Biodiversity, in which Nature Parks play a prominent role (BMU, 2007; 2010b; 2011; Scherfose, 2009). Nature Parks in Germany already contribute significantly to the implementation of the EU biodiversity strategy adopted by the European Commission (European Commission, 2011), thus supporting the integration of economics and biodiversity, as suggested by UNEP and the European Commission's Reports on the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity (TEEB, 2010a; 2010b).

Nature Parks in Germany work to conserve biodiversity in various ways, either directly by implementing traditional species and habitat conservation strategies and establishing habitat networks, or indirectly by developing natural habitats and landscapes through marketing regional products, developing nature tourism product components, effective visitor management, and meaningful cooperation with agriculture and forestry businesses (Pieper et al., 2010; Liesen and Appelhans, 2011; Liesen, 2011). The following section describes two cases of successful species and habitat conservation efforts in Nature Parks, a success thanks to sustainable regional development and sustainable tourism.

Examples of species and habitat conservation projects in Nature Parks

1. Conservation of Black Grouse in the Lüneburger Heath Nature Park

The Black Grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*) is a highly endangered species in Germany (Bundesamt für Naturschutz, 2009). Extensive habitat loss and conversion, such as the loss of large stretches of heathland, have reduced the Black Grouse population to just a few birds. Increasing isolation and the ongoing loss of natural habitats threaten to reduce the already dwindling population in the lowland and low-mountain regions even further (Bauer et al., 2005).

In order to implement specific measures and activities to protect the natural habitats of the Black Grouse mentioned in accordance with the EU Council Directive on the conservation of wild birds, suitable development strategies must be defined that allow the few remaining habitats to be kept in the best possible condition. Lüneburger Heath Nature Park, located southwest of Hamburg, was one of several areas where the Black Grouse population had been steadily declining for many years, their number dropping to an all-time low of just over 20 birds in 1998 (Stiftung Naturschutzpark Lüneburger Heide, 2009).

However, a project initiated in 2005 to conserve the Black Grouse population in the area has had considerable success. Thanks to the efforts of the Lüneburger Heath Nature Park Foundation, which coordinates the state-funded project in cooperation with various project partners and with financial support from the state government of Lower Saxony, the



Non-forested land in Lüneburg Heath Nature Park, the natural habitat of the Black Grouse, the European Nightjar and the Woodlark

Black Grouse population increased to 78 birds in 2007. In 2010 the total Black Grouse population was estimated at up to 220 in the Lüneburger Heath as a whole, and at about 2,000 throughout Germany. Within the nature protection area of the Lüneburger Heath Nature Park (which protects 5,600-hectare of the heathland area) recent estimates put the population at 66 birds (in 2011).

The protected area consists mainly of heathland and a transition zone between woodland and heathland. The increase of the Black Grouse population in the heath is the result of concerted efforts, which include a predator control programme targeting foxes and wild boars, a Black Grouse monitoring programme and systematic heathland conservation and development measures. The vast stretches of heathland in the Lüneburger Heath Nature Park require appropriate and ongoing maintenance to remove emergent pioneer tree species such as silver birch (*Betula pendula*) and Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) or to prevent their growth. This is achieved through sheep (German Grey Heath, 'Heidschnucke') and goats grazing the land, by removing spontaneous forest vegetation by mechanical means ('Entkusselung'), and by mowing the area or partially clearing it by fire (Wormanns, 2010). The mechanically harvested wood is processed into chips and burnt at the nearby wood chip-fuelled cogeneration plant to supply households in the area with district heating. Between 500 and 600 hectares of heathland are kept clear of emergent woody vegetation in this way every year, allowing for the conservation not only of a landscape much appreciated by many visitors, but of the

natural habitats of other rare species such as the European Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) and the Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*).

This example shows that protection of biodiversity and economic development are not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the contrary, efforts to conserve biological diversity can improve the economic and ecological development of rural areas in a way that will also benefit future generations (Liesen, 2008).

2. Common pastures in the Southern Black Forest Nature Park

The Southern Black Forest Nature Park is situated in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg in Southwest Germany. Characterized for its mountains (up to 1,493 m) and hills this area has a high percentage of conifer forest and pasture. The pastures, known as 'Allmende pastures' (from German 'Allmende', meaning 'common land'), with their broad-crowned beeches and the grazing Hinterwald cattle, are a unique characteristic of the Southern Black Forest. 'Allmende pastures' are known for their rich biodiversity, the characteristic pasture beeches – a special growth form of the European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) – and the traditional small-scale farming operations. The unusual disfigured shape of the beeches is caused by grazing animals which influence the appearance of the trees throughout their lifetime. Pasture beeches are found on old pastures in the Southern Black Forest, many of which extend across entire mountain ridges. Farmers' co-operatives have been using these pastures as grazing land for their livestock for centuries.

The Southern Black Forest Nature Park has partnered with stakeholders working in agriculture and forestry to jointly implement a large-scale environmental protection project. The project aims to preserve this natural habitat for endangered species such as two species of grasshoppers, *Oedipoda caerulescens* and *O. germanica*, the European adder (*Vipera berus*) and the smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*). Habitat management, which consists mainly of maintaining the pastures and preventing rock sides from overgrowth, is showing some success. The first appearance of *O. caerulescens* was confirmed and the population of *O. germanica* is increasing. This project is funded by the German federal government, the state government of Baden-Württemberg and the nature conservation association 'Feldberg-Belchen - Oberes Wiesental', an administrative organisation, which is designed to ensure the long-term protection of the Allmende pastures in the region. Results for other species are expected in the near future (Röske, 2011).

The management of the Southern Black Forest Nature Park, in cooperation with the 'Schwarzwaldverein' hiking society, has signposted several round trip hiking trails to the 'Allmende' pastures to allow visitors to enjoy this unique historical cultural landscape (Pieper et al., 2010). The milk from cattle grazing on the Allmende pastures is used to make a number of traditional cheese varieties, which are then marketed directly by the farm owners and the nature park restaurants along the 'Cheese Route'. This provides an ideal way to combine traditional small-scale farming, biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism.

Tools for the management of Nature Parks in Germany

1. The German Nature Parks' Quality Campaign

Germany adopted the 'National Strategy on Biological Diversity' to implement the CBD at a national level in 2007. The aim of the strategy is to significantly minimize and eventually halt the threat to biological diversity in Germany with the consequence to increase biological diversity in the long-term. The strategy formulates a concrete vision for the future, and specifies quality targets and action objectives for all biodiversity-related topics. The target deadlines range from the immediate term through to the year 2050. One goal of the strategy is to improve the management of protected areas: 'By 2020 a well-functioning management system for all large protected areas and Natura 2000 areas should be established' (BMU 2007).

Target-oriented management is essential to increase the contribution of the Nature Parks to the conservation of biodiversity. VDN developed the 'Petersberg Programme' as an overall concept for the development of Nature Parks and the German Nature Parks' Quality Campaign as an instrument to



Hinterwald cow grazing on an 'Allmende' pasture in the Southern Black Forest Nature Park

monitor and assess the effectiveness of their activities, and to ensure that qualitative progress is in line with the general positive quantitative development of the Nature Parks. The Nature Parks' Quality Campaign was specially developed for the evaluation of management effectiveness as it has to meet the specific needs and objectives of German Nature Parks. It allows tracking of progress over time as it is able to supply consistent data. Furthermore, it can be used for broad level comparisons among Nature Parks. In this regard, it is important to take into account the substantial differences between Nature Parks in the different German states, not only in terms of their general purpose, but in terms of the availability of human and financial resources, factors which have a great influence on the way Nature Parks are operating (BLAB, 2002; 2006).

The German Nature Parks' Quality Campaign was developed by the VDN in close coordination with the Nature Parks and with funding from the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) and was officially launched in 2006 (Köster et al., 2006; Porzelt and Köster, 2010).

At the core of the German Nature Parks' Quality Campaign is a set of evaluation criteria for Nature Parks, which allow for the measurement of the past performance of the Nature Parks and the monitoring of changes in their performance during certain periods of time. The scope of requirements for the development of the criteria was deliberately set to extend far



The Smooth Snake

beyond the scope of authority of many of the Nature Parks. This decision was based on the fact that the success of a nature park depends not only on its own performance, but also relies heavily on the level of commitment of its partners in the region.

The performance assessment questionnaire is divided into various sections containing 128 questions concerning the four main areas of work of the Nature Parks:

- a) Environmental protection and landscape conservation (habitat networks, environmentally friendly agriculture, agri-environmental programmes, NATURA 2000 areas, sustainable forest management, etc.);
- b) Recreation and sustainable tourism (Nature Parks and tourism marketing; nature-, sports- and activity-based tourism products; accommodation and hospitality, etc.);
- c) Environmental education and communication (visitor information, guided tours and educational events, information and literature on the Nature Parks concerned, online resources, public relations, etc.);
- d) Sustainable regional development (cultural activities, regional business activities and regional products, nature park partnerships, settlement development and building culture, environmentally friendly mobility, etc.).

The questionnaire also contains questions concerning issues of management and organisation such as nature park planning. The four main areas of work are consistent with the priorities defined in the German Federal Nature Conservation Act and the VDN's own mission statement regarding Nature Parks. A Nature Park Factsheet is included in the questionnaire to collect general structural data and information, but none of this information is used for the evaluation. In addition to completing the questionnaire, Nature Parks participating in the

Quality Campaign are also visited and evaluated by specially trained Quality-Scouts, all of whom are employees of Nature Parks in other German states. It is their commitment that allows the Nature Parks to share experiences and valuable ideas. Parks with a score of at least 250 out of 500 possible points are certified as Quality Nature Parks, while parks with a score lower than this minimum are certified as German Nature Parks' Quality Campaign Partners. This certification is valid for five years. Participation in the Quality Campaign is voluntary and free of charge. By developing this instrument the VDN has created a system for the evaluation of the management effectiveness of Nature Parks.

The development of quality assessment criteria is a major and essential step in the work of the Nature Parks. The Quality Campaign enables the administrative organisations responsible for the Nature Parks to evaluate their own performance, manage resources and continually improve their work, with support being provided to the Nature Parks in all areas of operation. This has initiated a nationwide process of goal-directed Nature Park development which already boasts as many as 65 participants. The evaluation process was revised during 2009 and 2010 (Porzelt and Köster, 2010).

As well as enabling Nature Parks to continuously improve their performance and the quality of their products, the Quality Campaign helps them to win more general support for the work of Nature Parks among the general public, the private sector and political decision-makers. This is another way for Nature Parks to serve as drivers and coordinators of sustainable regional development in the future. One of the most crucial steps every Nature Park must take, therefore, is to convince the project partners that they are part of the Nature Park, and that their work and their commitment make a significant contribution to the development of the region and the Nature Park as a whole. This gives the Nature Parks the opportunity to demonstrate to politicians, the private sector and society in general that they play an essential role in the conservation of cultural landscapes and the protection of habitats and endangered species, and that they provide an environment for recreation, living and running businesses.

An evaluation of the Quality Campaign conducted in 2010 (Porzelt et al., 2010) confirmed that it is a valuable and necessary self-evaluation tool which facilitates the future strategic development of the Nature Parks, and which has already received widespread support among Nature Parks and both state and federal institutions. The performance assessment criteria and the scouting process help the Nature Parks to identify possible areas for quality improvement. The scouting process is particularly appreciated by the Nature Parks because it provides for meaningful exchange 'on an equal footing'. Meanwhile 82 out of the 104 German Nature Parks applied to take part in the evaluation process over the next four years. In 2011 16 Nature Parks already have been re-evaluated.

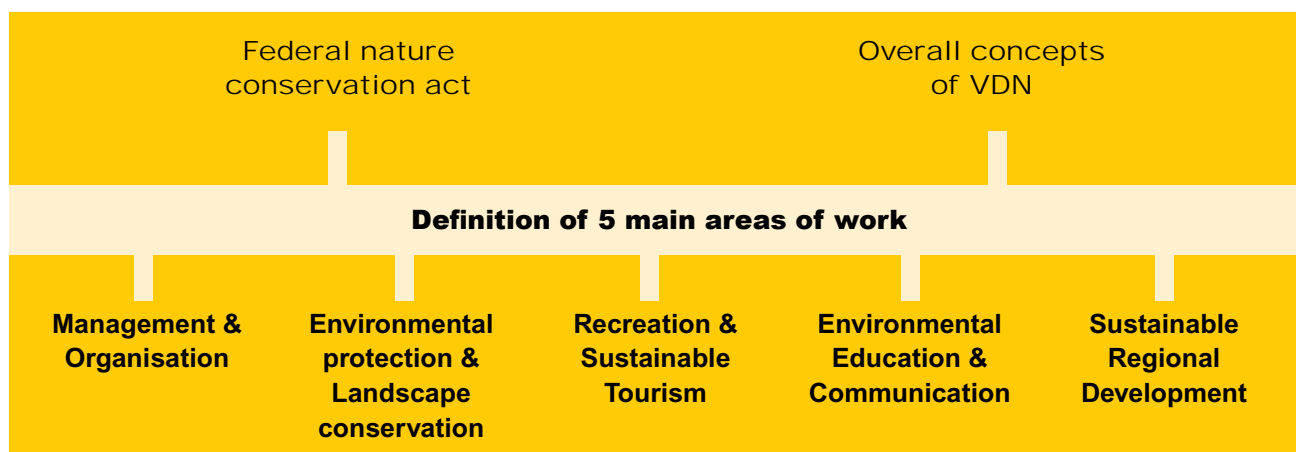


Figure 1: Quality assessment criteria and their basis in federal legislation and the VDN mission statement (VDN, 2010)

The foregoing discussion shows that the Quality Campaign not only makes a major contribution to the development of high-quality Nature Parks in Germany, but also offers the Nature Parks the opportunity to contribute to the achievement of the goals of the 'National Strategy on Biological Diversity'.

2. Nature Park planning

Proper nature park planning is of utmost importance, not only for the work of the Nature Parks themselves, but also for the success of species and habitat conservation efforts. The planning process includes the definition and regional coordination of the future development objectives and the projects planned for each Nature Park. This makes Nature Park planning an important management tool which facilitates the development of the Nature Parks in line with the purposes defined in the federal and state nature conservation acts.

Nature park plans are integrated blueprints for development based on regional consensus, which serve as guides and common points of reference for both the nature park administration and the regional actors involved. Nature park plans also serve as an important basis for discussion and decision making regarding the coordination and implementation of measures with political, administrative and other actors, and the acquisition of external funding. However, to be able to fulfil these roles effectively, nature park plans must be very specific as to the recommended course of action and allow for a high degree of flexibility. Successful implementation of such a plan depends on the general situation in the region and the federal state in which the Nature Park is located, and several other factors shown in the diagram below.

Successful nature park planning requires an integrative planning process, appropriate financial and human resources for the Nature Park and sustainable cooperation networks and linkages.

However, the actual development and implementation of nature park plans often give unsatisfactory results because many plans have very little to do with the specific needs of the parks and are already out of date by the time the

implementation starts. Another reason is that Nature Parks often do not coordinate their own plans with other plans and actors in the region, despite the fact that this is an indispensable requirement for the success of such a plan. In 2008 the VDN carried out the project 'Optimised Implementation of Nature Park Plans', funded by BfN and BMU and designed to enable Nature Parks to plan activities that are the most relevant to their actual needs (Porzelt et al., 2008a; 2008b; 2010). The project included a systematic analysis of the critical factors for the success or failure of Nature Park planning, which had not previously been done, as well as recommendations for optimisation. Based on the project results, a number of recommendations were made as to how the Nature Park plans might be implemented in practice. These recommendations were then used to develop a set of guidelines which included several handy checklists (Porzelt et al., 2008b).

Cooperation between the partners in the region is not only an essential prerequisite for the successful implementation of nature park plans and the successful work of Nature Parks in general, but also benefits the entire region, the environment and the people who live there. As a result, the responsibility to fulfil the objectives of the Nature Parks is shared by several actors, and the details of the Nature Park plans can be integrated with other planning efforts relevant to a Nature Park very early in the process. Limited availability of human and/or financial resources is one of the most common obstacles to successful nature park planning, not only during implementation, but also during development. Actors who become too focused on pursuing their own interests and a lack of 'nature park awareness' can also contribute to the failure of a plan.

The following set of recommendations for the situation- and region-specific optimisation of nature park planning processes is an outcome of the project:

- **Screening at the beginning of the planning process:** The screening is used to define the objectives, details and timeline of the nature park plan, as well as the exact course of action required for implementation. The screening needs to answer three essential questions in developing

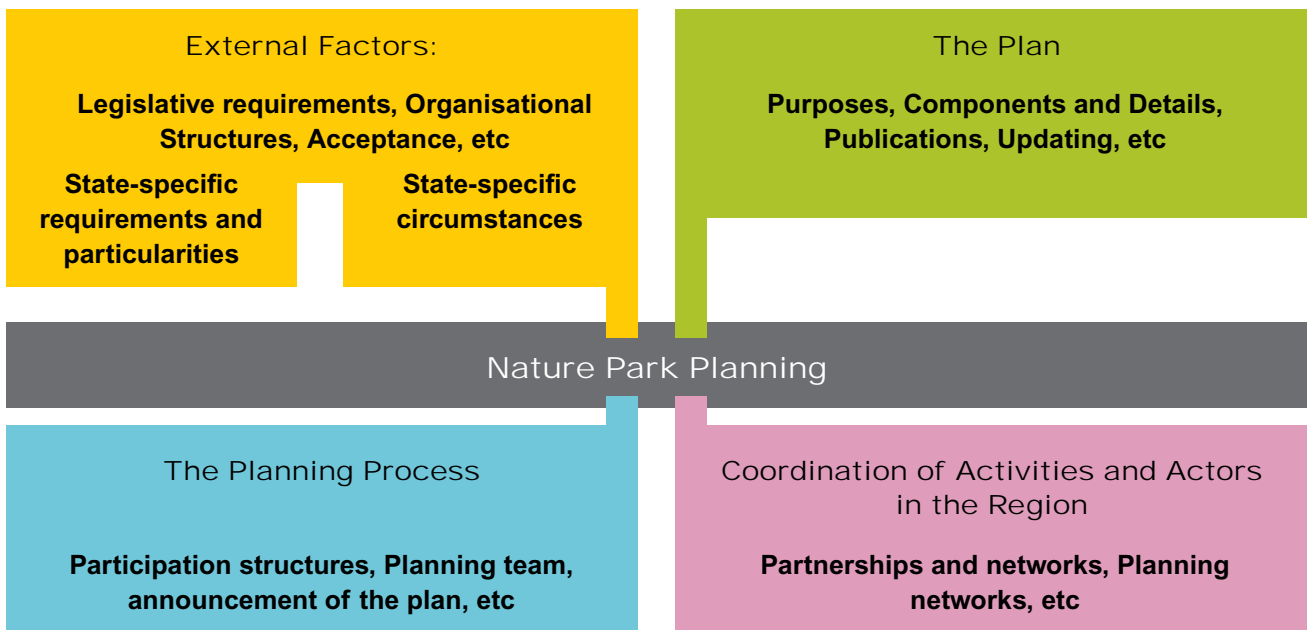


Figure 2: Factors influencing nature park planning (BTE, 2009)

a nature park strategy to ensure efficient preparation of the actual nature park planning process: ‘Where are we?’, ‘Where do we want to be?’ and ‘How do we get there?’. The use of available regional expertise can help to avoid duplication of work and reduce costs.

- **Definition of standards:** Standards to be defined include a nature park-specific mission statement, complete with detailed objectives and implementation strategies for each area of activity, and an effective strategy for audience-focused communication of relevant information related to nature park planning. Nature park plans must allow for a certain degree of flexibility to ensure that they can be easily adapted to changing circumstances, such as a new funding environment and changes in the set of actors involved. Nature park plans should be modular. The core modules are:
 - a) Status assessment, including an analysis of strengths and weaknesses,
 - b) Mission statement and objectives,
 - c) Project and activity planning.
 The modular design allows for careful, step-by-step development, the definition of specific planning periods for each individual module and the selective publication of the mission statement or other modules.
- **Integration:** Integrating nature park planning more closely with other planning processes is one of the most important and most difficult steps in the process. It is essential for nature park plans to include specific information on how to ensure proper coordination with other planning processes, including linkages which facilitate integration with other planning processes, specific statements and recommendations concerning integration with other planning processes and the

definition of general objectives of cooperation.

- **Involvement of stakeholders:** Nature park planning can be successful if the external actors involved in the process are enthusiastic about, and committed to, their goals and projects, if they understand how each of the other partners benefits from the project, and if the partners in the region ‘all pull together’. Given this, the establishment and maintenance of sustainable cooperation networks and linkages is an essential prerequisite for successful nature park planning.
- **Regular updating and evaluation of the Nature Park plans:** These recommendations were incorporated into checklists to provide the nature park management with a quick overview of the project results and recommendations. More detailed information, best practice examples from various German Nature Parks, specific recommendations and suggestions for further reading are included to provide practical guidance for administrative organisations responsible for the Nature Parks.

The German Nature Parks’ Quality Campaign is a useful tool for the optimisation and evaluation of nature park planning. The VDN suggests that these two management tools be used together to ensure successful management.

Conclusions

Nature Parks in Germany are progressive instruments which put cooperation in the regions at the centre of development and encourage people to work together and become committed to environmental protection in combination with sustainable regional development. It is important for the states and communities in Germany to understand that Nature Parks serve as strategic instruments for the integration of

environmental protection and sustainable development in rural areas, and that investments in these Nature Parks are crucial investments in the future of the regional infrastructure. The work of Nature Parks can improve the ecological, economic and social development of rural areas in a way that will also benefit the conservation of biodiversity.

Studies show that Nature Parks can be key drivers of regional development and, consequently, can help save or create jobs in rural areas. One such example is the Altmühltal Nature Park, which provides as many as 483 jobs every year in tourism alone (Fredlmeier, 2004; Job et al., 2005; Römer, 2002). Given this, it makes sense to use regional development funding allocated under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP, Pillar 2) for already existing nature park networks, provided that these funds are used effectively and exactly where they are needed. Environmental protection could thus be used as an opportunity to facilitate and promote the development of rural areas (German Platform Proposal EU-CAP 2013, 2011).

Examples from France, Austria and other European countries show that Nature Parks can serve as an effective tool for regional development (Liesen and Köster, 2005). Nature Parks in Germany are extremely useful tools and provide particularly suitable regional scenarios, because

- they have a strong, long-lasting organisational structure,
- they benefit from established networks of regional actors and strong community involvement, and
- they are areas which are defined by regional boundaries which cut across administrative borders.

In light of the above considerations, it is all the more important to significantly strengthen the role of the Nature Parks as actors, not only in the area of environmental protection, but also in their capacity as facilitators of rural development, sustainable tourism and environmental education.

Hence, promotion of the Nature Parks in Germany is promotion of environmental protection. However, it is also clear that Nature Parks are not impervious to general trends which lead to a loss of biodiversity in Germany. Even so, Nature Parks might be particularly likely to provide solutions to pressing issues that threaten biodiversity, and not just in the Nature Parks themselves. Sustainable land use to facilitate the implementation of the nature protection objectives in agriculture and forest management is one of the most promising approaches in this regard.

The strength of the administrative organisations responsible for many of the Nature Parks in Germany is that their close cooperation with land owners, communities and planning agencies enables them to balance the interests of various stakeholders, and in so doing contribute to the success of a large number of projects to advance environmental protection. Strengthening the role of the Nature Parks in Germany as coordinators and facilitators of sustainable rural development is an important strategic objective for the future.

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About the authors

Martina Porzelt received a Diploma degree in Biology and an M. A. in Sustainable Tourism Management and works as a tourism consultant for VDN. E-mail: martina.porzelt@naturparke.de, Verband Deutscher Naturparke, Platz der Vereinten Nationen 9, 53113 Bonn, Germany.

Jörg Liesen received an Engineer's degree in Forest Management and now works as a consultant in the areas of environmental protection and sustainable regional development. E-mail: joerg.liesen@naturparke.de, Verband Deutscher Naturparke, Platz der Vereinten Nationen 9, 53113 Bonn, Germany.