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*Challenges and Constraints for Cooperative Conflict Management among
Land Use Stakeholders*

LAND USE CONFLICTS IN PROTECTED AREAS

Throughout the world land use conflicts are steadily increasing. Awareness of the need to preserve nature is confronted by the fact that virtually all natural resources serve, at the same time, as a base for food production and income generation. The establishment of protected areas through public agencies is one important instrument to ensure nature conservation (Reid and Miller, 1989). Biodiversity specifically is a good that needs protection on a fairly large scale (Kächele, 1999). The global concern for biodiversity and nature maintenance was expressed in the Agenda 21 declaration of the Rio Conference in 1992 (BMU, 1997). In practice, the number of protected areas increased dramatically during the last two decades, from some 2000 to nearly 8500 in 169 countries, with a total surface of 5.2 per cent of the world's land area, or 7.7 million km² (Pretty and Pimbert, 1995). Many environmentalists and conservationists feel that 'the less use, the better for nature' and, consequently, restrictions on both traditional and modern forms of productive use are favoured. Often plans for the resettlement of local residents are formulated (ibid.). Resistance of different people to these restrictions leads to land use conflicts in various forms.

In several industrialized and developing countries participatory and cooperative conflict management strategies are actively pursued (Nagel, 1993; Curtis *et al.*, 1995; DePhelps, 1996; Lawrence *et al.*, 1997). Empirical evidence shows that participatory and cooperative approaches lead to better results than classical methods of conflict resolution, at least in terms of sustainability and social acceptance. In Europe, attempts to integrate different interest groups in rural areas as equal partners in the management of land use conflict have started only recently.¹ Until now, these methods have not been systematically used when establishing protected areas and the application of institutionalized administrative procedures is still largely the norm. Analysts doubt whether cooperative methods will be quickly integrated into German administrative procedures as they demand effective participation and the willingness to compromise (Hoffmann-Riem, 1990).

This paper shows how concepts of social psychology relating to cooperative conflict management can be integrated into a model of interaction and commu-

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nication. Experience and results of an action-oriented research project on cooperative conflict management in one protected area of the state of Brandenburg, Germany are analysed. Consequences, challenges and constraints for a potential transfer and wider application in Brandenburg's protected areas are discussed. On a more theoretical level, the insights gained will add to the relevant body of knowledge as well as generating questions for future research.

COOPERATIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THEORY

Sociological, psychological and economics literature is abundant with conflict definitions (Glasl, 1994). None of them was found to be sufficiently clear and unequivocal to guide research and action of the present project, focusing on a practical land use conflict. The following definition has been developed with reference to Glasl (*ibid.*) and work by R.W. Mack and R.C. Snyder in the 1950s (cited by Grunwald, 1981):

Land use conflicts are situations in which different stakeholders or actors claim on one and the same conflict issue, such as a piece of land, a river bank, trees and woods, animals etc. with different use or protection goals in mind. Conflict situations become real conflicts when one actor begins to act in favour of his interests and this is seen as a threatening or aggressive act by the other actor(s).

Conflicts have two dimensions: an object sphere (that is, the conflict issue with its legal, economic and social aspects) and a subject sphere (that is, the perception which people develop of each other as well as their communication and interaction based on these perceptions). Glasl states that, when dealing with conflicts, these two spheres have to be analysed and treated together within a holistic approach because those involved in conflicts also will not separate them (Glasl, 1994). The underlying paradigm of human behaviour is that of humanistic psychology and makes reference to new institutional and political economics. Human beings have different and varying needs, both physical and psychological, and human behaviour is related to actual interests and goals which, in turn, are also related to the perceived environment (Fisher, 1990; Gough, 1994; Söderbaum, 1999). In this context it is assumed that people no longer have the exclusive goal of maximizing individual gains, but that they have to find a balance between their immediate and long-term, their individual and social, interests and goals. Achieving this balance is a continuous process, both individually and socially determined (Gough, 1994).

The implication for conflict management and resolution is that it is not enough to find a one-and-forever optimal solution on the conflict *issue*, as often suggested in neoclassical economic approaches. It is equally important to develop an adequate solution to the *subject* sphere, which corresponds to the complex and dynamic situation of human beings in their environment.

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

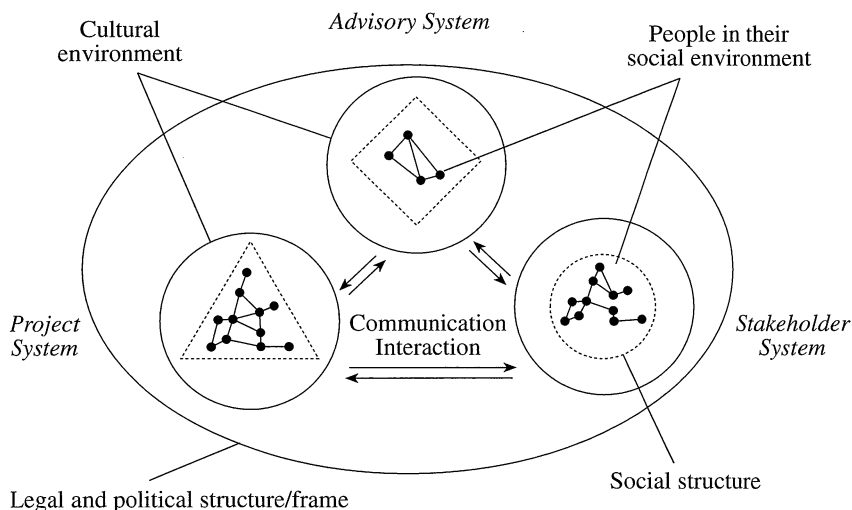
Research in social and organizational psychology as well as in game theory shows that in most conflict situations cooperative behaviour leads to satisfying results for all persons involved (Deutsch, 1976; Hofstadter, 1998; Rapoport, 1981). Cooperative conflict management is determined by five important factors.

- (1) Cooperative behaviour at the individual level is an attitude that can be characterized by personal openness, the willingness to exchange information, the search for common interests ('linking' rather than 'separating') and response to external demands (Deutsch, 1976).
- (2) People must have common objectives; that is, different persons must be able and willing to identify one or more objectives which everybody wants to reach (*ibid.*). Usually, these objectives are located at a rather abstract level and the root issue of the conflict is not directly mentioned. Through common objectives at a given level a joint point of reference can be created.
- (3) The focus on interests rather than on positions (Fisher and Ury, 1987) is important for several reasons. It means that at a general level interests of all participants are seen as relevant and serious. People who feel that they are being taken seriously can more easily accept diverging interests and look for similarities. Positions, on the other hand, are not perceived as negotiable. To hold on to positions means blocking the cooperative process.
- (4) Procedural justice means that the decision-making procedures are clear to everyone and are accepted by everybody. In other words, the question of how the controlling or influencing power among participants in a decision-making process is distributed has been solved satisfactorily. Transparency of interaction and of the decision-making process can be achieved either through the use of already established and recognized standards and structures, or through procedures and criteria that have been jointly developed (Thibaut and Walker, 1975).
- (5) Major preconditions for the structure of a cooperative conflict management process are the autonomy of the actors, their voluntary participation, development and coordination of labour division, and the delegation of tasks to single actors or subgroups (Grunwald, 1981).

These factors are important for the process as a whole but do not necessarily apply to everyone initially involved. The lead role may be taken by an individual who is convinced of the importance of cooperative conflict management, and who has relevant experience of it, sufficient to influence other participants (*cf.* Fisher and Ury, 1987; AGILNP, 1995). The elements can also be introduced and supported by an external actor, a so-called 'third party' (Glasl, 1994). The role of such a third party is, first, to analyse and to understand the conflict situation and, second, to be an advisor on methodological and procedural questions.²

THE FRAMEWORK MODEL OF ORGANIZED EXTENSION

Analysis and action in complex conflict situations such as land use conflicts in rural areas can be facilitated by a model that has been developed for agricultural extension (Albrecht, 1989). The original model which shows the interrelationship between the advisory and the target group systems has been expanded to include all relevant groups in a land use conflict (Figure 1). It shows interactions between the third-party (advisory) system, the project system representing the environmental actor who intervenes with a project dealing with conservation measures, and the stakeholder system, which stands for one or several different interest groups involved.



Source: Albrecht (1989), our adaptation.

FIGURE 1 *Framework model of organized extension*

In extension research where questions of transfer and exchange of knowledge between scientists and practitioners are investigated, the model helps to take into account all necessary factors for a meaningful problem analysis. For our case it illustrates that the analysis and management of conflict situations does not deal only with conflict issues and communication and interaction problems but also with social, cultural, legal and political structures. The latter may differ from actor to actor and thus be the base of misunderstandings and further conflict escalation.

THE CASE STUDY: PROCESS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The research area is a biosphere reserve in the north-west of Brandenburg, located along the river Elbe. The conservation area covers about 53 000 ha., of which about 13 000 ha. are arable land and 17 000 ha. grassland. It is a rather remote and sparsely populated region with tourist attractions due to its natural beauty. The area contains many valuable biotopes with rare floral and faunal species (LAGS, 1999, p.19).

The process of cooperative conflict management was preceded by a pre-analysis of the conflict situation, including a stakeholder or interest group analysis.³ This analysis revealed the main actors and their respective interests, identified in Table 1. A phase of informal talks on possible subjects and procedures with a group of agricultural land users preceded the actual process of cooperative conflict management. The final decision for starting such a process came from this group. They also decided on the topic to be dealt with, namely the extensive use of grassland. This relates clearly to the local agricultural situation, with an important number of grassland-dominated livestock farms.

Several problems and conflicts were listed:

- (1) the consequences of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy/ CAP ('Agenda 2000'),

TABLE 1 *Main actors and their interests*

Main actors	Their interests (as expressed in interviews and publications)
Biosphere Reserve Administration (locally based)	To achieve an acceptable degree of protection for the whole area and differentiated protection according to the specific nature resources and their protection needs
Board of Environment (district level)	
Farmers	To reduce land use regulations as much as possible
Board of Agriculture (district level)	To minimize regulation of grassland use To minimize the damage by birds and other protected animals or to obtain adequate compensation
Community representatives (mayors and so on)	To minimize communal planning and implementation regulations in the area of construction and infrastructure
Other land users, such as foresters, hunters, anglers and tourists	To maintain protection of the environmental resources but also to get free access to the resources they intend to use (river banks, forests and so on)

Source: Knierim (1999).

- (2) the uncertainty of the state (Brandenburg) programme to support extensification of grasslands,
- (3) the (regional) programme of land care on a contract basis,
- (4) different planning horizons between official environmentalists and farmers,
- (5) the competition for land resources,
- (6) the uncertain legal and ecological consequences of extensive grassland use,
- (7) the dissatisfaction with the implementation of land care on contract basis.

These issues were mainly presented by the farmers. Only the last point was suggested by the biosphere reserve (BR) administration. The group as a whole formulated the following objectives for the common process.

- (1) People within the nature conservation area would jointly communicate their interests to external agencies such as the ministries of agriculture or environment.
- (2) The agricultural land users and the Brandenburg administration would regard each other as partners.
- (3) The contract basis for land care should be efficiently arranged for everyone.
- (4) All farms in the nature conservation area would be maintained.
- (5) All information on the subject of 'extensification' of grasslands (especially on supporting governmental programmes) would be exchanged.
- (6) Additionally, the farmers claimed that, in order to build up confidence, the administration had to put its plans on the table and to pass on information at its disposal.

The process of cooperative conflict management took place in the form of 15 group meetings (facilitated by one of the researchers) during a one and a half year time span. There were generally eight to 12 participants, including three to six farmers, two or three members of the Brandenburg administration and two to four members of the district administration. Table 2 shows the topics treated within three distinct phases of the process.

RESULTS OF THE PROJECT

Conceptually, results were to be reached both at the objective and at the subjective level. As for the first point, no pressing land use conflict has been resolved within the timeframe of the research project. But group members are satisfied with their achievement and have decided to continue to work on the conflict over ploughing up grassland.

On the subjective level, by contrast, a number of results were realized:⁴

- common objectives have been elaborated at a general level for the whole process as well as for specific issues;
- according to group members, exchange of information was the most important result. It was highly appreciated because of the directness and

TABLE 2 *Phases, topics and instruments*

Phase/no of meetings	Contents	Means
Situation analysis Meetings 1–4	Analysis of the local land use and land care Situation and of the political framework conditions in view of the agricultural policies at EU and federal state level	Information presentation by the Dept of Agriculture and by the BR administration
Identification and representation of interests Meetings 5–10	Identification of common and separate interests regarding the agricultural subsidy programme for extensive use of grasslands Elaboration and presentation of joint proposals to promote the extensive use of grasslands to the Minister of Agriculture Retrospective clearing up of a conflict situation over competition for land resources	Facilitated group discussion Preparation of documents in small groups Individual execution of organizational tasks Information presented, facilitated group discussion
Conflict management and joint planning Meetings 11–15	Conflict issue to be treated: whether and, if so, under what conditions, grassland can be ploughed up. At present, there are two contradictory agreements which are both valid A joint planning process is started on the categorization of grasslands on the basis of different use and protection criteria	Facilitated group discussion Use of external expertise Proposals to the ministries Facilitated group discussion, preparation of maps by stakeholders

the topicality of the material, as well as for the possibility of being able to clarify misunderstandings and open questions;

- supportive activities were voluntarily offered by individuals and small groups in the form of data seeking and supply, preparation of drafts for common documents, the organization of a visit by the Minister of Agriculture, and the elaboration of a joint proposal on the promotion of extensive use of grassland;
- the participants began to appreciate and accept their mutual interests to a growing extent in a process which was characterized by respect and understanding;
- transparency of the process was reached through open discussions supported by visual aids, decision making by consensus, explanations about the procedures by the facilitator, and through minutes which were controlled by the group;
- the structure that evolved is that of an open group with a fairly constant participation. Its composition was heterogeneous. As there is no farmers' organization operating at the state level, participating farmers do not have an institutional mandate. The Brandenburg administration is part of a larger administrative body, as are the representatives of the district administration.

CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR COOPERATIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The case study shows that it is possible to adapt and introduce methods for cooperative conflict management among land use stakeholders. Chances of a transfer of these methods to other conservation areas in Brandenburg and in Germany are good. However, some impediments to diffusing or scaling up this approach must be taken into account.

The general topic of the process was proposed by the agricultural land users; nearly all problems and conflicts mentioned reflected the questions and fears of farmers. While the facilitator suggested that it would be useful to distinguish between local conflicts and problems at higher levels (for example, CAP), this distinction could not be maintained in the group discussions. It became obvious that for farmers local, regional and international questions are intermingled and that they preferred not to restrict their discussions to local matters. This was not the case for the other participants. This can probably be explained by their different socioeconomic and cultural situation.

Farmers act as individual entrepreneurs. Many are responsible for a large number of employees and thus their objectives are profit generation, security against undue risks and long-term planning perspectives. They see themselves as part of the regional, social and cultural structure, and they feel a heavy dependence on external policies as well as on measures of the Brandenburg administration. The other participants were mainly members of administrative organizations. They had prescribed goals, but with some room for interpretation and fulfilment according to personal priorities. As they were members of a

hierarchy, their room for manoeuvre could sometimes be quite clear, sometimes less easily predictable. As civil servants, they had no personal economic risk in the given situation.

For these different participants, getting together is a challenge in terms of communication and mutual understanding. Their socioeconomic background can be interpreted as involving two different cultures (the private business, locally integrated; the administrative bureaucracy, coming from outside) with different values and different styles of behaviour and ways of dealing with difficulties. The fact that it took ten meetings for an actual conflict to be openly addressed shows that there was a need to develop a common style of communication. One important feature was the fact that environmentalists involved were open to propositions and demands of the agricultural land users and that they also accepted the slow pace. This can be generalized. The challenge for using and scaling up the cooperative approach lies in the development of a mutually acceptable style of communication. This can only be achieved through conscious efforts and will take time, demand restraint and patience, and will require considerable flexibility in implementation.

During the process, the group approached the ministries of agriculture and environment several times with proposals, questions and demands for support. The agency directly superior to the Brandenburg administration was sometimes involved as an observer. On occasions when the group had questions or proposals, it turned out that there was no clear way, and certainly no fast way, for hierarchical organizations to respond to such 'basic' initiatives. This can produce frustrating effects on participants willing to cooperate and to look for compromise solutions. In addition, horizontal linkages within the region were not clearly defined, as exemplified by the non-official mandate of participating farmers.

This point needs to be addressed very early in the process. Once the group has managed internally to come to solutions, the question of how to integrate other land users may be difficult to solve. At present, there is no institutionalized model for stakeholder cooperation that could help to overcome the practical problems of vertical and horizontal communication.

CONCLUSIONS

Land use stakeholders in the protected area did not try to resolve an identified conflict directly and right away. Rather, creating a cooperative atmosphere and establishing a common basis were given first priority. Open information exchange was the most important instrument for reaching trust and cooperation. When the group finally started to resolve a pressing conflict, this happened in a very constructive and goal-oriented manner.

The process has been judged positively by the direct participants (and by the researchers). A transfer, or generalization, of experience seems possible, at least in principle. In order to institutionalize the approach, however, a number of practical as well as theoretical questions have to be solved. Two items seem to be crucial. First, the demand on participants to recognize and understand

other people's interests is essential to cooperative conflict resolution. How can this understanding be developed for group settings, especially in conflict situation? This question has been widely neglected within social psychology and research on group dynamics (Scholl, 1997).

Second, how should such groups be organized? How can they be integrated into a larger context? Some experience has been gained in other parts of the world (for Australia, see Curtis *et al.*, 1995) but solutions must be location-specific and for Germany these are largely lacking. Joint efforts and the development of an interdisciplinary approach will be fruitful. Recent contributions have been made by new institutional economics and political economy, with their concepts of 'political economic organizations' (Söderbaum, 1999) and of the economic significance of discourse and communicative action.

NOTES

¹Examples are stakeholder platforms and farmer cooperatives in the Netherlands (van Woerkum and Aarts, 1998; Wagemans and Boerma, 1998), the cooperation between private or semi-private enterprises and farmers in France (Gafsi and Brossier, 1999) and Germany (Mantau, 1992) and cooperation among scientists and rural stakeholders to promote sustainable land use forms (for example, the GRANO-Project, www.zalf.de/grano/ and the Projektgruppe Kulturlandschaft Hohenlohe, www.uni-hohenheim.de/%7ekulaholo).

²The inherent ambivalence of such advisory work is discussed in detail by Glasl (1994).

³Data for this analysis were collected with the help of semi-structured interviews of regional stakeholders.

⁴Results have been documented in the form of written evaluations by participants as well as through minutes and records kept by the researchers.

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