

## **How can PAs offer local people a chance to participate and benefit?**

### **PA Management and participation as key factors for the acceptance and the sustainable implementation of the "PA idea" in different categories of PAs**

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Supervisor Univ. Prof. Dr. M. Coy

**Birgit Reutz-Hornsteiner**

#### **Summary**

Protected areas (PAs) offer a high potential to involve the local population. The main objective of the research project is to find out how PAs can offer local people a chance to participate and benefit, including the topic of how the managements of PAs deal with the role and the intensity of involving the local population. The field research was undertaken in 4 categories of PAs with different cultural and management background with the objective to make a scientific comparison (Grosses Walsertal, Austria; Etna, Italy; Guadeloupe, France and Morne Trois Pitons, Dominica) in order to show similarities and to discuss how different PAs can learn from each other. This article shows the first results of the 72 interviews and the 3 future workshops.

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#### **Keywords**

Participation, involvement of local people, governance, benefit, regional management instruments, sustainable development

#### **Introduction**

More than 113 700 PAs cover 19.6 millions square kilometres of the planet's surface – today over 12 percent of our planet is under protection (LOCKWOOD et al. 2006). PAs offer a high potential to involve the local population and to make them feel responsible for their area. The matter of sustainability plays an always more important role in PAs. A new focus of PAs concepts is to see them as regional management instruments (HAMMER 2002, JEKEL 1998, KALS 1997). Discussions about the successful implementation of PAs are becoming increasingly important. Particularly the interdisciplinary discussion between pure nature conservation and the interaction of man-nature in PAs as well as questions of sustainable development gain importance. In the sense of an "applied-geographical" perspective the analysis of implementation problems and the creation of PAs in the local-regional context are important research topics. Another focus of scientific research is the local populations' perception and acceptance of the idea of PAs.

#### **Duration and aims**

The project was started in 2007; the field research took place from 2007 to 2008. The project is planned to be finished in 2010. The main objective is to find out how PAs can offer local people a chance to participate and benefit and how the managements of PAs deal with the role and the level of participation. Expected outcomes are a scientific comparison of approaches of participatory decision-planning processes in different categories of PAs in different cultures as well as the review of their transferability.

#### **Areas of study**

The field work was undertaken in the following PAs: Grosses Walsertal (Austria) – Biosphere Reserve (BR) and pilot project; Etna (Italy) Regional Natural Park; Guadeloupe (France) – National Park, part of it being BR; Morne Trois Pitons (Dominica) National Park and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The BR Grosses Walsertal in Austria served as pilot scheme for further steps and field work abroad. In addition to different socio-scientific qualitative research methods such as expert interviews (72 interviews), surveys, analysis of existing data the outcomes of workshop groups of the “future workshops” – a participatory approach to involve local stakeholders which were held in three PAs – were used for the interpretation of the results (3 workshops with a total of 73 participants). A stakeholder analysis was made in each case study to find experts for interviews and to gain additional information: the interview partners consisted of representatives of the PAs’ managements, of people being involved in various projects in the territory as well as of members of NGO’s and representatives of government and public authorities in order to guarantee a presentable stakeholder mix.

## Research Questions

Answers to the following research questions in different categories and types of PAs should be found:

What is the general framework which determines participation in PAs?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of participatory planning and management processes?

Does participation – irrespective of category of the PA – play a key role in the acceptance and the sustainable implementation of the protection idea?

How flexible are participatory processes – which general standards do exist, how must participatory processes be adapted to the local situation?

Which role does participation play in the examined case studies?

How is participation seen by the different players and stakeholders in the examined PAs?

What potential for participation can be found in the case studies, how do the local players engage in the projects, how far does “active participation” develop?

How should PAs be planned, so that they have the highest possible acceptance of the local people and the issues participation becomes important as a learning process for managers and involved people?

Can different participation methods, taking into account the needs of the local population be transferred and emulated successfully? How can a system of optimised “good governance” in management structures lead to participation as a valid working method?

## First selected results of the expert interviews and future workshops

### Implementation and management of PAs - lessons learnt

The interviewed people in all the case studies focused on the issue that “Everything you miss in the planning process – like involvement of local people – will then be a central problem and conflict source in the PA you want to establish”. In the case of the BR Grosses Walsertal the local population was involved from the very beginning, even in the planning process for the BR. In the alpine pilot case study active participation took place in terms of that part of the local people developed a common concept for the planned PA. The other three case studies are PAs which were installed only by law and in the planning process without any participatory approach. So the management of the PAs Etna, Guadeloupe and Morne Trois Pitons nowadays are confronted with other problems than in the Grosses Walsertal. The BR Grosses Walsertal was established with the intention of giving an impetus to sustainable development whereas the other three case studies were installed mainly for protection goals where development and participation did not have a major importance. Another important issue for the interview partners in all the case studies was the importance of the development of a product (like nature tourism packages etc.) which should go parallel to the implementation of a PA. The tenor was that saleable products under the patronage of the PAs lead to higher identification with the territory. Further important topics mentioned in the interviews were the involvement of young people in planning and decision processes, communication and transparency, to offer possibilities for alternative livelihoods in case the PA creates new restrictions and to plan visible short term projects but also in a long term perspective.

### Use of the PAs’ label

In the pilot study Grosses Walsertal many initiatives and projects grew under the logo of the BR. The common label helps to organize money and makes people trust in the idea and the concept of the BR. Nevertheless also in the Grosses Walsertal only a few percentage use the label and do really count on the PA as a promoter for selling their products. In Dominica no labelling system exists, in Guadeloupe there is a label for partners in tourism and in the Etna Park a labelling system for local products is being established.

The interviews pointed out that if the PA is seen as a benefit only a few people realize the possible surplus value by the PA. Especially in Guadeloupe and in the Etna Park the PA is not seen as something which brings a benefit. In Dominica and in the Grosses Walsertal, where a lot of projects towards sustainable development take place in and around the PAs, some groups realize that they could intensify their cooperation with the park managements. It needs good practice examples and people who are convinced of the PA. This includes that the PA should be present in peoples' everyday's lives, which means to be at several occasions with information and so on.

### Participation

Although the Grosses Walsertal can be seen as an example where participation takes place very successfully the interview partners emphasized that the general public is not reached yet. In Dominica participation takes place only in some pilot projects like COMPACT, environmental education and youth projects. In Guadeloupe and the Etna Park participation is very limited, according to the managements people are invited to participate, according to the other interview partners people feel excluded from projects and decisions.

### Measures for success - support for participatory processes

The interview partners in all case studies pointed out that it is necessary to stay with active groups and to give them support and guidance to develop ownership and responsibility for the PA. When involving people it needs a Subject-Subject relationship, constant training and appreciation, a good and active management which coordinates and gives impetus where necessary, networking, time-limited participation and in general "to work on a local level but with effect on a regional level". It is essential to talk to the people in their language and to adapt concepts to the local level. Involving the local communities is essential; the Park must be part of the communities and visible. Also in PAs where the main focus is on protection it needs development opportunities – then the awareness for the strictly protected zones grows.

## **Discussion – Benefits of the research**

As the expected outcomes of the research are a scientific comparison of approaches of participatory decision-planning processes in different categories of PAs in different cultures as well as the review of their transferability, specific recommendations and orientation guidelines for the managers of PAs can be given. In the BR Grosses Walsertal and in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park the Future Workshop held during the field research had a follow up.

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## **Contact**

Mag. Birgit Reutz-Hornsteiner  
[b.reutz-hornsteiner@ecoResponse.org](mailto:b.reutz-hornsteiner@ecoResponse.org)

Fohnstraße 7  
6822 Satteins  
Austria

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