

An Analysis of Biodiversity Governance in the Kiskunság National Park according to the GoverNat Framework

Paper for the third Green Week Scientific Conference, January 14-15, 2009, Berlin

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Abstract

To address the question how natural resource governance functions in the European multi-level governance setting and what role participation plays therein, the research and training project GoverNat has developed a framework for analysis. We distinguish between the local, the regional, the national and the European and international level of governance. With this framework we look at multi-level governance of natural resources, such as biodiversity or water, through the perspective of different systems: politics, culture, economy, society and nature. The framework has helped to highlight some issues in national park governance in Hungary. In Hungary, there are good links between the national and the international level. Hungary has joined all relevant international agreements and its nature conservation policy is well respected internationally. Yet on the local level of implementation many conflicts occur, especially between farmers and the national park directorates, which have the status of regional nature conservation authorities. These conflicts have become stronger since transition and the accession to the EU: the introduction of the market logic has put a huge pressure on the national park directorates. The availability of EU-funds has increased the competition for land between the national park and farmers. The Kiskunság region in central Hungary suffers from water shortage, which has been caused by inadequate water management and is now getting even more severe due to climate change. The participation of expert NGOs on the national level is well-developed, yet there is little participation of stakeholders on the local and regional level. Due to this missing link to the lower levels, expert NGOs working mainly on the national level may lack legitimacy.

Keywords: Multi-level governance, biodiversity governance, nature conservation, national park, NGOs, farmers

Introduction

The EU-FP6 Research Training Network GoverNat (“Multi-level Governance of Natural Resources: Tools and Processes for Biodiversity and Water Governance in Europe”) aims at analysing the role of participation within multi-level governance of natural resources in Europe (Rauschmayer et al., 2007). In order to gain a profound and comprehensive

understanding of this complex governance setting the GoverNat framework was developed as a guideline for data collection and analysis of the different case studies conducted by GoverNat fellows.

Apart from this comparative analysis, the framework has also helped to highlight certain features of biodiversity and water governance in a single case study. In the following we will discuss the application of the GoverNat framework to the case of resource use conflicts in the Kiskunság National Park in Central Hungary.

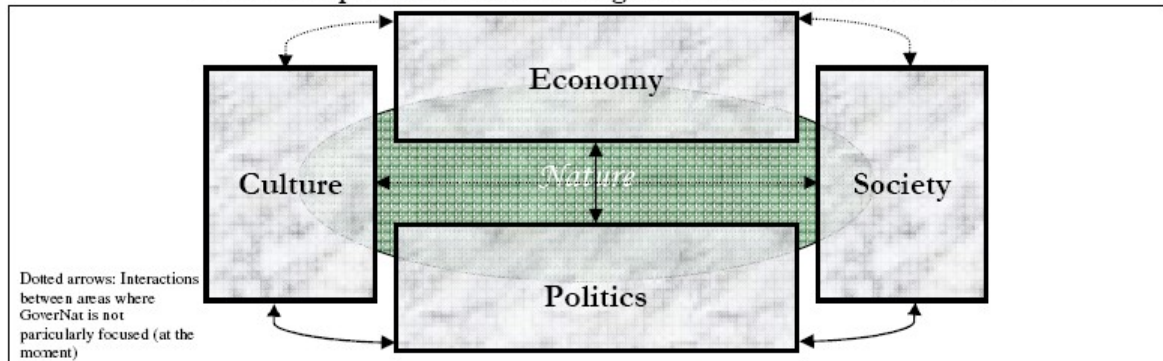
The GoverNat Framework

The GoverNat framework consist of two parts: the first focussing on multi-level governance (MLG) of natural resources (Table 1), the second on the assessment of participatory processes in environmental governance (Table 2).

The theoretical basis of the GoverNat framework is Structural Functionalism's division of modern society into four subsystems: the political system, civil society, the economic system and the expert or cultural system (Renn, 2008; Wesselink and Paavola, 2008). In the GoverNat framework (Table 1, upper part) the natural system ("Nature") appears in the background with broad interfaces to the four societal systems ("Economy", "Society", "Politics" and "Culture"), because it is the basis for all human systems and can be analysed through the lenses of the four societal systems. The arrows between the system boxes indicate that there are strong interactions, and even overlap between the different systems. The lower part of Table 1 focuses on the description of the multi-level governance system and the interactions between the levels. The questions noted in this part of the framework are just examples for possible questions but not a complete list.

The second part of the GoverNat framework (Table 2) provides an assessment guide for participatory processes in environmental governance. The analysis is again structured according to the four systems of Structural Functionalism: complexity, information and governance culture (expert/ cultural system), Legitimacy and politics (political system), social dynamics and civil society (civil society), and costs and efficiency (economic system). The assessment criteria (effectiveness, legitimacy, acceptance, and efficiency) have been formulated as assessment questions (Table 2) (Wesselink and Paavola, 2008). The single questions will not be discussed in detail in this paper. The analysis of the Kiskunság case study will instead follow the general division into the five systems of the GoverNat framework and discuss multi-level interactions.

Table 1: Perspectives on multi-level governance of Natural Resources



Multi-level decision-making processes

Analysis of policies at all levels

Subsidiarity & different national systems – Institutionalised interactions – concrete legislation – Role of science
 Science-policy interfaces? Interactions across scales? Interplay of interests? Role of participation? Consideration of costs?

Analysis of EU policy

- Roles of Commission, Council, EP?
 - Compliance of member states?

Analysis of member state policies

- Federal or centralised system?

Analysis of lower level policy

- Degree of freedom?

Table 2: Assessment of participatory processes in environmental governance

Complexity, information and governance culture

- How well can different types of information (different disciplines, lay and expert knowledge) be elucidated?
- How are different types of information integrated?
- How did the participation culture impact the process?
- How are uncertainty and complexity taken into account?

Legitimacy and politics

- Is the procedure and outcome compatible with the legal and other principles?
- Is someone held accountable for the decision and its outcome? Is it clear who?
- Are all relevant interests and values included or at least represented, and is the process perceived as fair?
- Are rules and assumptions transparent to insiders and outsiders?

Social dynamics and civil society

- How does the process affect the relationships and networks of the actors?
- Is there scope for agency or empowerment of the actors?
- Does the process allow for the changing of perspectives or learning to take place?
- Does it facilitate convergence or illustrate diversity?
- How does the process deal with conflicting interests and values?

Costs and efficiency

- Does the process consider the cost-effectiveness of the proposed solutions (across different time horizons)?
- Was the process design (costs) appropriate with regard to dimension and risk of the decision to be made?
- Were expected outcomes of altered management options and governance structures taken into account? Were they effective?
- How is the distribution of costs and benefits of the decision across different levels and sectors?

Natural Resource Governance in the Homokhátság Region in Central Hungary

The Natural System

The diverse landscape of the Kiskunság region was formed by the floods of the rivers Danube and Tisza and the traditional extensive agricultural practices. The landscape with its diverse soils comprises a variety of habitats, especially wetlands (floodplains, swamps, wet grasslands and alkali lakes) and dry habitats (sandy and alkali grasslands, steppes, sand dunes). The Kiskunság National Park has been famous for its moving sand dunes. Protected endangered species include the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) and the Siberian Iris (*Iris sibirica*). (Biró et al., 2007, 2008; Gilly, 1999; Kalotás, 2004)

The original huge forest steppes were cut in the 16th-18th century. As over-grazing on the sensitive sandy soils destroyed the vegetation and caused sand storms, people started cultivating orchards and vineyards. The homesteads that developed from the end of the 18th to 19th century, have contributed to the diversity of the landscape. Large parts of the land were commonly owned pastures, where the cattle herds continuously moved from one plot to another and so did not overuse the pastures. (Gómez-Baggethun and Kelemen, 2008; Kelemen and Bela, 2008)

Because of water regulations in the socialist period and less rainfall due to climate change the area has become very dry; the groundwater level is decreasing, former lakes are desiccating and the whole area is in serious danger of desertification. (Biró et al., 2007, 2008)

The Political System

Regional Level

The Kiskunság National Park was founded in 1975 as the second Hungarian national park.

The national park directorate has a powerful role in regional nature conservation, as according to Hungarian national legislation it can decide on obligatory management rules for all protected areas within its administrative territory (284,165 acres in total). This includes the nine strictly protected areas of the national park (123,550 acres), as well as all nature conservation, landscape protection, and “ex lege” protected areas in the region. The administrative territory of the Kiskunság National Park is a mosaic of strictly to less strictly protected areas between non-protected areas. (Gómez-Baggethun and Kelemen, 2008; homepage of the Kiskunság National Park)

The national park directorate pursues a strict nature conservation policy, with the aim to preserve a picture of the landscape as it looked around 1900. It has a right for a first bid when protected land is to be sold. Currently the national park is using this advantage, its aim as stated in the management plan is to buy up 4,000 ha from surrounding settlements. (Kelemen and Bela, 2008)

National Level

Hungary has joined all international nature conservation agreements (CITES, CBD, etc.). Internationally the country's nature conservation legislation is very well respected, as it does give priority to nature conservation issues over economic interests. During socialism, nature conservation was a policy sector where international cooperation was supported. With EU-accession the legal framework and administrative procedures fulfil all EU requirements.

Many informal institutions are however still influenced by the former socialist regime. There are many top-down policies and problems with implementation. The administration is overloaded and has few financial resources due to austerity measures. In line with the introduction of the market logic for authorities, the Hungarian national park directorates now have to find their own sources of income. (Kelemen and Bela, 2008; Jongman et al., 2008)

The main body for nature conservation on the national level is the Ministry of Environment and Water.

EU

The EU funds have played an important role for regional nature conservation management (agri-environmental programme, LIFE programme). The funds of the agri-environmental programme are available to who manages the land, not to the owners. 19% of the Homokhátság region has been designated as Natura2000 sites. The management plans are being developed at the moment. (Kelemen and Bela, 2008)

UN

Three areas within the Kiskunság National Park (Upper Kiskunság Alkaline Lakes, Lake Kolon at Izsák, and Upper Kiskunság alkaline steppes) have been designated as Ramsar sites because of their value for international bird migration.. A part of the national park was declared as a MAB-Biosphere Reserve in 1980. (Kalotás, 2004)

Civil Society

Since the foundation of the national park there have been conflicts between the national park and local farmers, starting with the eviction of farmers from homesteads located in the designated core zone of the national park and by preventing local people to access places they had used for traditional festivities in nature. Today, the conflicts focus on who has access to lands for agricultural use and to (EU-) funds. Local farmers regard the national park as a state authority which is acting against their interests. (Kelemen and Bela, 2008) There are, however, also some encouraging examples of good cooperation between environmentally-minded farmers and the national park directorate (Flachner and Kovács, 2003). There is no association of farmers at the local or regional level, where they could find a common position concerning the interactions with the national park; instead every farmer makes individual deals with the national park. (Kelemen and Bela, 2008)

The national park and local farmers have a common interest to keep as much water in the area as possible and to bring back some of the water from the rivers which flooded the area until the water constructions of the 1970ies. Already detailed plans for an irrigation project have not been implemented so far because the national government has not made the funding available. (Kelemen and Bela, 2008)

The area of the Kiskunság national park has been the site for many natural, as well as social science research projects. There is a long history of cooperation between the national park and conservation experts. The advisory committee to the national park directorate, which was established in 2005 upon a national decree – according to which it shall trace the work of the national park, state its opinion on strategic questions, and strengthen the role of civil participation – is dominated by university teachers and technical experts.

Environmental NGOs are very active on the national level and have a good working relationship with experts working in the ministry. Experts from NGOs were asked to help with writing the list of Natura 2000 sites.

The Economic System

The unemployment rate in the region is about 10%, this is above national average. Many people commute to the nearest town Kecskemét or to Budapest for work. (Gómez-Baggethun and Kelemen, 2008)

The major farming activities are orchards or vineyards and cattle grazing, the national park has a huge herd of Hungarian Gray Cattle. Sheep farming is practiced by some farmers and better from a nature conservation point of view (especially with the native Racka sheep race), yet it is hardly profitable due to the low prices on the market.

As forestry is an economically viable alternative in this dry region, the number of plantations is increasing. Even though the water shortage decreases the value of the land for agricultural activities, the demand for land has increased as people need more land to continue their economic activities. (Kelemen and Bela, 2008)

Since the restitution process most but not all of the national park territory is owned by the state. The national park's the right to make the first bid for land that is sold causes conflicts with farmers who would like to enlarge their property. The national park has rented out land to farmers for extensive agricultural use. The prolongation of the lease contracts is, however, uncertain. There are plans by the national park directorate to keep the land for cultivation by the park itself in order to gain revenues through EU-funds. This means a lot of economic uncertainties for farmers. (Kelemen and Bela, 2008)

The Cultural System

The farmers in the Kiskunság region have a long history of independence. The Cumans ("kun" in Hungarian) were independent noble men directly responsible to the king in the Middle Ages and kept some self-governance rights as late as the 19th century. During socialism the single homesteads, which have been typical of the area, were not fully collectivised like in the rest of the country because this heterogeneous landscape with its sensitive soils was not suitable for the industrial agriculture of the large state cooperatives. Most farmers in the Kiskunság only had to join so-called "specialised cooperatives" (e.g. for the exchange of machines) but could cultivate their lands individually. Because of these historical roots the farmers today strongly identify with farming and have a strong sense of independence.

Local people put a high value on the aesthetic qualities of nature, the older people who still remember the huge lakes and swamps with a diverse bird life, would like to have the lakes back again. Some alienation from nature can be seen over the last decades. The strict protection policy of not allowing local people into the core – and most beautiful – areas of the national park has had some negative effects on environmental awareness as people can no longer enjoy the local environment as they used to. for traditional feasts.

A lot of the local farming knowledge has been influenced by the industrial cultivation methods of the socialist period and does not comply well with the requirements for nature conservation. (Kelemen and Bela, 2008)

As there has until 20 years ago never been a democratic government, there are still many paternalistic governance structures, so most local people do not consider that they can have a voice in the decision-making process but rather rely on personal relationships. Most farmers who actively cooperate with the national park and are interested in nature conservation have a higher education and moved to the area.

Experts have had a strong influence on policy making during socialism (Berg, 1999).

Yet very slowly a changing of perspectives occurs: farmers begin to recognize the value of the national park for eco-tourism development and people in the park directorate begin to see that stopping cultivation in the core zone of the national park was not in every case the best decision for protection because of the spread of invasive species on uncultivated land and as the famous sand dunes stopped moving because of vegetation growth.

Discussion of Multi-level Governance Issues

The main groups of stakeholders in the resource governance in the Kiskunság National Park are the national park directorate and farmers. The upper level bodies (national government and ministry, EU) are important for defining the rules and funding.

Hungarian nature conservation is internationally well-respected and regarded as successful. This can be attributed to a long history of nature conservation in Hungary and strong expertise of Hungarian scientists, who have ensured international exchange. Many of the experts are members in environmental NGOs. Through good personal contacts to experts working in the Ministry of Environment and Water they have opportunities to influence nature conservation policy by giving advice. The national environmental NGOs also have good links to their European and international umbrella organizations.

The Ministry for Environment and Water has over focused its attention to the international- and European level but rather neglected the regional and local level of implementation where the conflicts occur. So the formal rules for nature conservation in Hungary are excellent but the praxis is often difficult.

The Hungarian government and the Ministry for Environment and Water have given a lot of authority and freedom to the national park directorates operating at the regional level. The national park directorates have, however, not been equipped with sufficient financial and personal resources for a good management.

In the Kiskunság National Park there are many conflicts between the national park directorate and local farmers, which have their roots in the history of the national park and are maintained by the current competition for land use rights. The EU-funds have been welcome because they brought money to the region; the agri-environmental programmes are crucial for financing the nature conservation management of the protected areas. Yet, the availability of EU-funds has also increased the competition between farmers and the national park, which as a result of the cuts from the national funding was forced to gain income to finance its nature conservation activities. The EU-funds have, moreover, been incentives for unsustainable agricultural investments (the number of cattle kept by the national park and farmers is too high relative to the decreasing productivity of the land).

In course of EU-accession, advisory committees to the national park directorates were established that should improve civil participation. Most members of the advisory committees are university teachers, only few other stakeholders were brought into the decision making process.

Members of environmental NGO are active on the local level in rather technical ways (e.g. bird watching) but hardly interact with the local farmers who are managing the ecosystems.

Even though both, nature conservationists (i.e. the national park directorates and NGOs) and farmers in the Kiskunság region suffer from the same major problem of water shortage, the two groups have not joined forces to try to find common solutions (e.g. lobbying for the highest subsidies for farmers who keep rainwater on their fields instead of draining it before the cultivation season). A closer cooperation between the two groups is made difficult by the many old and on-going conflicts between them and the missing organization of farmers. True support from the national level to solve the major problem of water shortage in the region is missing (the government did not fund an already developed irrigation project, and many EU regulations support unsustainable practices).

Conclusion

There is an urgent need to better integrate local farmers, who have been managing the landscape for a long time, into nature conservation governance in the Homokhátság region or in Hungary more generally. This is not to say that there are no positive examples for good cooperation between farmers and national park directorates in the Kiskunság and other national parks. Yet in all these are not sufficient for successful and legitimate governance.

Renn (1993), when discussing his three-step model for decision-making, emphasised that in legitimate democratic policy making technical and economic rationality should be combined with public values and preferences. Decision-making processes should specifically integrate stakeholders' concerns and personal experience, as well as social interests. Expertise is important but should only be used to evaluate different options, as the decisions itself are based on values. So while advice by experts is valuable, concerns of stakeholders have to be taken into account when developing solutions for policy problems. In the Kiskunság expert advice has been very influential but the concerns of local stakeholders have not been respected sufficiently.

Klausen and Sweeting (2004) argue that because selective and unsystematic inclusion of organized actors in a polycentric system can erode the legitimation basis of collective institutions it is important to keep in mind the three principles of legitimation – consent, accountability and utility – and that these principles should be complementary, not excluding. For the Kiskunság case study we can state that only the principle of accountability has been fulfilled; it is clear who is responsible for the decisions. Yet the consent with the decisions taken by the park directorate is low, and the utility of the governance is not good as the resulting resource use is not sustainable.

NGOs could contribute to create a more legitimate governance setting by increasing awareness within the ministry and the national park directorate for the concerns of local stakeholders, and by working more intensely with local people improve the understanding and acceptance of nature conservation. This could stimulate an improved cooperation between the national park directorate and local farmers, which is an important basis for an environmentally and socially sustainable development of the region.

Acknowledgement

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to György Pataki for his valuable comments. We would also like to thank all the members of the ESSRG research group and Raphael Treffny for their friendly help in getting the information needed to write this paper.

This research was financially supported by the European Union (European Commission, Marie Curie RTN GoverNat, Contract No. 0035536, www.governat.eu)

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