

COOPERATION – A PROMISING WAY TO BALANCE DIFFERENT INTERESTS?!

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The subject of **cooperation and nature conservation** has really edged into the forefront of debate in recent years. Sceptics maintain that cooperative approaches are just a whim of fashion, that cooperative procedures are “trendy”. This scepticism would seem justified in view of some articles which sing euphoric songs of praise somewhere between naivety and ignorance as to the potential and prospects of cooperative procedures.

This is not mentioned here in order to argue the case against cooperative procedures, quite the contrary. Apart from presenting the realistic possibilities which this approach offers, the intention is rather to point out also the dangers that may arise as a result of false expectations being aroused and justified expectations not being fulfilled because of the negligent way in which this approach has been handled.

Cooperation between nature conservation and air sports can only be engaged in to mutual advantage if all those involved

- are aware of both the opportunities and also the limits of cooperation and
- have the competence needed for a cooperative balancing of interests.

In many places, the issue of “cooperation” is the subject of discussion in terms of fundamental principles and the alternatives on offer. But as far as the Federal Ministry for Nature Conservation is concerned, there is no longer any question of whether cooperative approaches as a way of balancing interests in society should be strengthened or not. In view of certain sociopolitical developments, a greater application of cooperative methods is essential. There are basically four reasons that speak in favour of such an assessment.

- The aim of “sustainable development” is featured as a part of all programmes today. If we take it seriously, then this requires cross-sector action and also cooperation with other actors in society.
- The integration of ecological aspects into other areas of politics, as has also been described in the Cardiff process of the EU, also demands cooperation: i.e. cooperation between different areas of politics and cooperation with other departments.
- Political controllability can only be achieved to a limited extent by taking the sovereign approach. Political controllability and achievement of objectives are increasingly built on specialist networks in which different actors from politics, administration and society - and here in particular associations - cooperate and agree on approaches for solving problems.
- In nature conservation, there was recently a change of strategy under the motto “Protect nature by, with and despite the use of nature”. In terms of practical and successful implementation, this calls for cooperation with the so-called users.

These developments make an expansion of cooperative strategies in nature conservation appear both useful and beneficial. The **opportunities of cooperation** for those involved can be seen in the following five points.

- Identification of the conflict situation

Through cooperation and communication, the conflict situation can be circumscribed more precisely. In the process, any pseudoconflicts that may arise as a result of prejudice and suppositions can be distinguished from real conflicts. This can help to reduce conflict potential.

- Improvement in the level of knowledge

Through the exchange of information, the level of knowledge improves, and the quality of problem-solving can be enhanced.

- Use of opportunities for action and problem-solving options

Differences in perception and areas of knowledge can foster the development of creative options for solving problems.

- Formation of “coalitions of winners”

Through the cooperation of actors with differing interests, coalitions of winners can be formed to focus resources, provided the benefit gained by every actor can be enhanced. This promotes the likelihood of the interest in nature conservation being realized.

- Cooperation facilitates learning processes

Collaboration between differing interests – especially when it is of a lasting nature – opens up the opportunity for gaining the cooperation partner’s understanding for and recognition and acceptance of one’s own position.

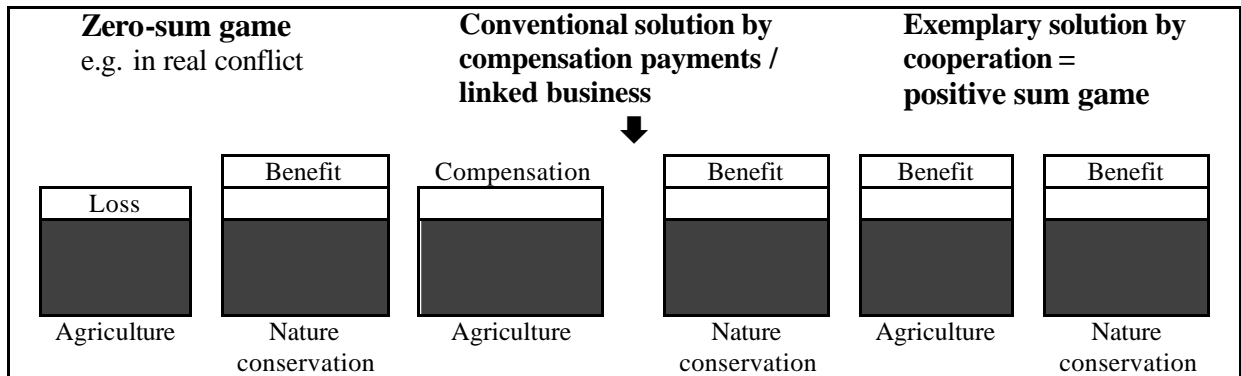
In a study of cooperative nature conservation projects, we found that the positions of the nature conservationists and the users of nature came closer together in the course of the collaboration, and what had been a hostile atmosphere developed into an increasingly constructive and creative cooperation. In one case, this led to nature conservation associations preparing the designation of a nature conservation area together with the user groups.

Cooperation offers realistic opportunities for improving the possibilities for action for those involved.

However, there are also **limits to cooperation**. Despite the potential described here, they are not the universal panacea for resolving all conflicts of interest.

- Real conflicts

Different actors in society have different interests. In the socio-political decision-making process, there is therefore a competition of interests. Many conflict situations are characterized by the existence of a real conflict of interests: the increase in benefit for one actor comes at the expense of another actor (for example, intensification of agricultural production and nature conservation). One speaks of a zero-sum game. Such opposed interests are difficult to resolve – even through cooperation. As a rule, the solution is only possible through compensation (mostly of a financial nature) or through so-called package solutions.



- Indivisible goods

Conflicts usually arise around natural resources such as soil, water, air. If a resource is seen as indivisible, this heightens the conflict and substantially complicates attempts to find a solution. It is then not usually possible to resolve the conflict of interests through cooperation.

- Lack of willingness and capacity for cooperation

Successful cooperation is based on the willingness and capacity to find a common solution to the problem despite differences in objectives. If the actors are neither willing nor able to cooperate, then any cooperation which is nevertheless engaged in tends to be a pseudo-cooperation. Under such conditions, a successful outcome of the cooperation is rather unlikely. Cooperation in a hostile atmosphere is either condemned to failure or results in protracted, unsuccessful negotiations in which the effort outweighs the benefit. The question as to the will to cooperate applies to both sides: on the nature conservation side and on the user side. In practice, there is evidence to suggest that cooperation on both sides serves purely as an alibi.

In a research project of the Federal Ministry for Nature Conservation (BfN)¹ the following success factors were identified for cooperative processes.

- Committed people

Personal commitment; “ecological” entrepreneurs; readiness to take risks.

- Pressure of problem and will to find a solution

Minimum pressure of problem; subjective perception of problem; will to find a solution.

- Coalitions of winners

Positive sum games; helper interests; nature conservation as a “resource with a market value”; various benefits.

- Strong actors

Strong nature conservation actors; strong political support; strong material support.

- Acceptance through success

Early success; communication of success; review of success; success chains.

- Clear project structure

A few clear objectives; preferably just a few actors, quick success.

- Active management of social environment

Aggressive “foreign policy” for project; active, anticipatory and continuous support.

- People as advocates

Personnel support networks; personnel alliances.

- Availability of working time and money

Critical mass of money and working time; resource-oriented conception.

- Flexibility, ability to learn; willingness to compromise

Success-oriented pragmatism; adaptation to changes; a proven sense of proportion.

- Increase in acceptance through expert support

Personal acceptance; common language; shared socialization.

- Capacity to connect

Link to legal control instruments; sponsorship programmes; macro political framework.

- Process competence

Capacity for strategy; management ability; socio-political knowledge.

It has been found that successful cooperation in all potential areas where it is offered for collaboration between nature conservation and air sports is no easy business. Successful cooperation calls for both the will and the ability to cooperate on the part of the actors involved. It should be neither an end in itself nor a fashion trend, but should be seen as an important and proper instrument for achieving a balance between different interests.

Thanks to the cooperation projects realized in the last few years between air sports and nature conservation, marked progress has already been achieved. The projects show at the same time that the right path would seem to have been taken in the cooperation between flyers and nature conservationists.

¹ Uwe Brendle: Musterlösungen im Naturschutz (Exemplary solutions in nature conservation). Münster-Hiltrup 1999

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