

Suggestion for further work: Protected Area, Conflict Area?

Experience	Tackling conflict situations arising from nature conservation in protected areas
Activity	<p>In small groups: discussion of typical conflict situations arising in protected areas using role play: park administrators, nature conservationists, local inhabitants, town mayor or mayoress</p> <p>Whole group: presentation of the conflict situations and solutions, discussion</p> <p>Afterwards: loop game</p>
Reflection	In order to protect biodiversity, everyone has to work together. Why, in terms of biodiversity, are protected areas a good thing?

Material:

- Maps showing the conflict situations to be discussed and instructions (for templates to be copied see below)
- If desired, use objects to distinguish the different roles. For example, a straw hat for the local inhabitant, a ranger's hat for the administrators of the protected area, a forage cap with twigs on it for the nature conservationist, a scarf for the mayoress

Each small group is presented with a conflict situation to work on. All students are divided up to play the parts of the following four protagonists:

- The inhabitants and users of the protected area: farmer/farmer's wife, hunters and foresters whose livelihoods may depend on making use of the resources such as timber, wild game and agriculture products in this protected area
- Administrators of the protected area who are concerned that the aims of the protected area are upheld, and who draw up appropriate regulations
- Nature conservationists who represent the interests of nature
- Mayor or mayoress who wishes to "promote" the area regionally and who would also like to be reelected – in a few years time, rather than decades from now

Another optional role might be that of the neutral observer who does not take part in the discussion, but who later gives an account of it to the group as a whole.

The following are the conflict situations which are up for discussion (individual boxes can be used simultaneously as templates):

New protected area brings restrictions on use

A family lives in a little cottage in the country and depends, for its livelihood, on growing a few vegetables, grazing some cattle in the neighbouring forest and catching fish in the nearby lake. They don't have much, but it is enough to live on. They still have a few neighbours in the district who visit them sometimes.

One day, however, a dividing line appears through the middle of the area in which they live. A new protected area has been set up which now also includes the lake and a part of the forest. From now on the family is no longer allowed to send its cattle into the forest or to take fish from the lake.

There are species in this area which have to be protected, and the government wants to increase the area of land which is protected at present in order to improve their international standing and also because they would like to contribute to worldwide and national biodiversity. At stake in this park is the survival of a tiny species of deer, the pudu, which is threatened with extinction and whose hoofprints and droppings the family have also come across from time to time in the area.

What is the family supposed to do now?

(Simply stay there and carry on using the resources – which then of course would be illegal; leave, and try their luck somewhere else; submit a protest and activate the media; ask for compensation; intensify their use of those resources which remain legal; get permission to continue using the resources, but less of them; look for alternative sources of income, working as tourist guides (if indeed tourists come to visit) or as park rangers, ... Theoretically they could also be employed by the administration of the protected area to observe the pudu, or a land swap might be arranged enabling them to resettle elsewhere.)

The forest is being damaged

The administrators of the protected area have placed a part of the forest area in the national park under a management system characterised by the motto "Leaving nature to its own devices" and prohibiting all human activity there apart from walking. However, because of unfavourable climactic conditions a pest has taken hold. Let's call it a bark beetle. Because of past human management of the forest, large parts of it are composed of a single species of tree which unfortunately happens to be susceptible to this particular beetle. As a result, many of the trees in this forest have been attacked by the bark beetle and are dying. This is very alarming for the local population who are used to seeing the wood as it has always been – a scene of pristine verdancy.

In theory, the timber from the trees which are dying due to the bark beetle infestation could be removed and sold (this could benefit the community, and the mayor or mayoress). In the national park however, it is of course simply left to lie there, with the resulting nutrients remaining in the forest. There is now the danger that the "plague" of bark beetles will continue to spread, causing more trees to die – inside, as well as outside, the park.

What should be done? Some are calling for the beetles to be poisoned, even in the park. Others are fearful for their stretches of forest which border the park...

Game hunting

There are lots of buffaloes in the national park. Worldwide there are not so many of them, which is why one of the objectives of the protected area is to ensure that the species survive. However, the park does not get very much financial assistance from the government, which is itself short of money. At the same time, lots of people live in the vicinity of the park, many of them in great poverty. They are in the habit of going into the forest to hunt (illegally) and either using the animals they have killed for themselves, or selling them at nearby markets for very little money (to dealers who then sell the skins or horns of the animals to foreign dealers for considerably more money).

Here is an idea: you allow individual tourists, in return for a large sum of money, to hunt individual buffaloes. With the proceeds, the village inhabitants and the park administration could guarantee the conservation of a great number of buffaloes. You could make it conditional on the hunters that they only are allowed to keep the horns and skins, while the remaining parts of the animals killed – the meat, for instance – would remain in the community in which the animal was hunted. Could this, perhaps, be an option?

Building a hotel or protected area?

A previously little-used stretch of forest, which is home to no species of particular significance, borders a protected area. The trees in this area are now either to be integrated into the existing national park, or felled to make way for the building of a hotel complex whose guests, it is hoped, will come seeking rest and relaxation in the protected area. The person who wants to build this hotel promises to bring jobs and sources of income to the local population. There are problems in the area on the other side of the national park because the people living there are moving ever closer to the forest and are building their huts and houses there. They would all like to "free up" (in other words, clear) a little plot of land in order to build on it.

In the protected area itself, there are a few rare species which need a large habitat in order to guarantee its long-term survival.

What decision would you arrive at?

Protected area near to a large city

Every weekend tourists visit the protected area located close to the city. They concentrate at certain points which, in part, are already overused: the paths have been worn away, tramping feet have created fresh ones, rubbish lies all over the place. Income from the sale of souvenirs goes mainly into the pockets of the inhabitants of this section of the park – there is no benefit to those living further away in the border zones of the protected area.

But now, a tour operator whose main customers come from the city is seeking permission to offer trips to the remote part of the protected area. In return he is offering to contribute to the costs of improving the local infrastructure. This would enable the children in the district to get to school more easily – at present the path they have to take is very tricky, particularly in the rainy season when parts of the clay road are regularly swept away. A local nature conservation group, however, is of the opinion that there are far more species of animals and plants in these remote areas than in the part already used by tourists.

Should the tour operator be given this permission or not?

The groups then proceed as follows:

1. There will be a presentation of the conflict situation (the group could be given a copy of the texts).
2. When everything is understood, the representatives of each particular interest (farmer, farmer's wife, mayor etc.) separate briefly to consider their position.
3. When everybody is together again, they will each give an account of their position. For instance: "As a farmer I don't know how else I am supposed to earn a living. The government/protected area administration have to compensate us financially, otherwise we shall continue doing, illegally, what we have always done."
4. There will then be a discussion, and some bargaining; how can we arrive at a solution to the problem which is acceptable to all parties?
5. The group agrees upon a solution

Have fun!

Finally, there is a meeting of the whole group. The conflict situations are discussed one after the other:

- Presentation of the conflict situation which has been worked on
- Who represented what position, how did the arguments proceed?
- How did the discussion go?
- What possible solutions were considered?
- What solution was finally chosen?

(If there was a neutral observer of the group, he or she presents their remarks)

Then there is the opportunity of feedback from the other groups:

- Were there other arguments and attempts at solutions?
- Which solution did others opt for?
- How feasible is the solution arrived at in reality?
- What difficulties might the solution in fact bring?

When all the conflict situations have been discussed, consider the following:

- What did the nature conservationists, the inhabitants of the protected area, the mayoress, and the administrator all have in common?
- Where, in fact, do such problems occur? Are they realistic?