

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS AN INSTRUMENT TO REVEAL THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN LOCAL ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION OF A WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROJECT

A case study from the Bavarian Forest National Park

MELANIE LUDWIG, FRIEDERIKE GRÜNINGER, EBERHARD ROTHFUSS and MARCO HEURICH

With 3 figures

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Summary: Protected areas rate among the most popular nature conservation measures according to general public opinion in Germany. However, people living close to these sites do not always share this positive view. In fact, the implementation of such measures often leads to conflicts between the local resident population and management staff, which in many cases emanate from the failure to actively involve locals in the decision processes. Communication and participation are now acknowledged as crucial for the acceptance of nature conservation measures and are applied more and more in practice, but these factors do not guarantee the successful cooperation between the protected areas' administration units and their inhabitants. Past experiences and events may have planted mistrust and antipathies now thoroughly embedded in the collective memory, and thus hinder successful results in future decision-making processes. By means of discourse analysis, we examined a bottom-up process initiated in the Bavarian Forest National Park (southern Germany) concerning the future management of its red deer population. This exemplary study reveals the pivotal role the media plays in presenting the public discourse on nature conservation issues in general, and which discursive elements may have led to the final failure of the project in the case study presented.

Zusammenfassung: Wenn sich Großschutzgebiete in der deutschen Gesamtbevölkerung auch großer Beliebtheit erfreuen, so zeigen zahlreiche konkrete Beispiele, dass Anwohner mit dem Management dieser Gebiete oft keineswegs einverstanden sind. In vielen Fällen wird besonders kritisiert, dass Entscheidungen über zukünftige Schutzmaßnahmen ohne Beteiligung der einheimischen Bevölkerung getroffen und umgesetzt werden. Umfangreiche Kommunikations- und Beteiligungsprozesse spielen daher gerade auch im Naturschutz eine Schlüsselrolle bei der Vermeidung von Akzeptanzproblemen und Konflikten und werden verstärkt eingesetzt. Es ist jedoch festzustellen, dass historisch gewachsene Widerstände und Ressentiments, welche sich aufgrund zurückliegender Negativerfahrungen im kollektiven Gedächtnis der Bevölkerung festgesetzt haben, oft selbst mit partizipatorischen Ansätzen nur schwer zu überwinden sind. Im vorliegenden Beitrag wird anhand eines Fallbeispiels aus dem Nationalpark Bayerischer Wald in Süddeutschland vorgestellt, auf welche Weise ein solcher bottom-up-Prozess, der zur Regelung des zukünftigen Managements der im Nationalpark lebenden Rotwildpopulation von Seiten der Parkverwaltung angestoßen wurde, schlussendlich zum Scheitern gebracht wurde. Mithilfe eines diskursanalytischen Zugangs wird dabei herausgearbeitet, welche Rolle die lokalen Medien bei der Produktion und Reproduktion des Diskurses zwischen den lokalen Eliten und der Nationalparkverwaltung einnehmen.

Keywords: Bavarian Forest National Park, nature conservation acceptance, discourse analysis, red deer, conservation conflict, local participation, media

1 Introduction

Since the founding of the world's first national park, the Yellowstone National Park in the U.S.A. in 1872, the number of national parks, biosphere reserves, and other protected areas has continuously increased throughout the world (JOB 2010). Moreover, with popular media emphasizing the positive effects of conserving beautiful natural scenery and endangered wildlife species, the establishment of protected

sites is widely approved by the public (SCHRÖDER 1998). Nevertheless, many professionals in the field of nature conservation management observe that people living close to such areas show resistance rather than acceptance towards such projects (RENTSCH 1988; SCHENK et al. 2007; SCHUSTER 2008; SRU 2002) – a finding well known as the NIMBY (not in my backyard) syndrome (SRU 2002; RUSCHKOWSKI and MAYER 2011).

As there is a particularly severe opposition to the designation of protected areas in Germany, sev-

eral studies examining the basis of this lack of acceptance have been carried out (RENTSCH 1988; LUZ 1994; WEIXLBAUMER 1998; STOLL 1999; BECKMANN 2003; SIEBERATH 2007). Taking these case studies and other research on the topic into account, the SRU (2002) has pointed out the five main reasons responsible for acceptance deficits: 1) Local residents of a protected area are directly affected by associated restrictions to their traditional habits, such as land usage and trespassing, or also by damage caused by wildlife. Thus, they often feel their personal and private property rights threatened (JOB 1996; STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001a; SIEBERATH 2007; WALLNER et al. 2007) and respond with reactance (HEILAND 2002; STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001b). 2) Another emotional factor procuring resistance to the park management derives from the inhabitants' feeling of being disregarded. Especially when it comes to decisions regarding the future development of the park, which are often made by non-local professionals, participation of all parties involved is crucial for acceptance of the measures (COY and WEIXLBAUMER 2007). 3) Insufficient knowledge about the benefits of environmental measures, which can be a consequence of insufficient or inadequate communication, 4) as well as different traditional values and contradicting attitudes on environmental issues, can lead to conflicts (STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001a; RUSCHKOWSKI and MAYER 2011). In Germany, these emotional and cultural aspects might even outweigh 5) the fear of economic loss from competing uses of resources, which certainly is another but not the main driver for conflicts in protected areas (STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001a).

Scientific research has revealed that opposition to nature conservation projects in Germany is mainly rooted in social conditions (RUSCHKOWSKI and MAYER 2011). These include emotional and cultural aspects (see above) that directly influence a third driver – the perception and communication barriers (Stoll-KLEEMANN 2001a). Among these aspects, group effects, stereotyped images, and social discourses play important roles (STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001a; MOSE 2009; RUSCHKOWSKI and MAYER 2011). Especially in rural areas, attitudes about environmental issues have to be analyzed in front of a background of rigid hierarchies, strong social control, and leadership of local elites (HEILAND 1999). Thus, proposed changes to traditional practices should be introduced first to opinion leaders and local authorities (e.g., the town mayor), who enjoy high public credibility and are able to influence the general opinion (STOLL 1999; RUSCHKOWSKI and MAYER 2011). If this is not done, any group with strongly consoli-

dated members, e.g., farmers or foresters, can reject and even cause the failure of nature conservation projects (STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001a, 2002), as negative attitudes towards nature conservationists among those are often prevalent and reinforcing (HEILAND 2005). Any communication between two different parties can be aggravated by stereotyping (HEILAND 1999), which is mostly evoked by past negative experiences (LUZ 1994). Stereotypes are used to simplify an individual's character by attributing exaggerated and often derogatory qualities to him or her (STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001a; 2001b). The only way to overcome stereotyping is to develop environmental management bottom-up, with transparent communication and participation from an early planning stage on (STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001b; JEDICKE 2007; WEIXLBAUMER and COY 2009; MOSE 2009).

As a consequence, the inclusion of local people in decision-making processes is crucial for the mitigation or even avoidance of conflicts between residents and professionals about conservation issues (STOLL-KLEEMANN 2002), and participation as well as cooperation are recognized as key factors in a sustainable management of protected areas (MOSE 2009; TOMIĆEVIĆ et al. 2010; RUSCHKOWSKI and MAYER 2011). However, participation is not always clearly defined and different types of involvement lead to different levels of success. According to WALLNER et al. (2007), only bottom-up approaches with active involvement of local communities, organizations, and agencies are able to achieve long-term accomplishments.

RUSCHKOWSKI and MAYER (2011) view communication as the foundation of park management – no other variables, i.e., reactance, participation, understanding of economic benefits, and attitudes about the environment, can be discussed without communication. Only when the resident population is well informed about ecological measures and their aims is agreement possible. This emphasizes the importance of an efficiently working public relation office of the park administration (WIERSBINSKI 1998; SRU 2002; RUSCHKOWSKI and MAYER 2011). As a strategy to reduce the distance between the parties involved STOLL-KLEEMANN suggests the establishment of “citizens' forums” (2001b, 127) and “landscape preservation associations” (2001a, 382). Undoubtedly, the social and individual behavior of the parties involved that can influence the outcome must be integrated much more into nature conservation policy to achieve long-term acceptance, e.g., by offering communication training to employees working in nature conservation (STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001b).

Another influencing factor that has been neglected despite its significance for forming public opinion is the local daily newspaper. Especially in rural and peripheral regions, such newspapers are the predominant source of information (KUŠOVÁ et al. 2008) from which people obtain most of their knowledge about current topics, including nature conservation issues and conflicts in their region (KUCKARTZ et al. 2007; SIEBERATH 2007). Mainly the local media's coverage of these often very sensitive environmental topics influences the residents' perception towards these issues. Therefore, the media play a highly significant role in the development of conflicts. Here we applied the method of discourse analysis, which is becoming increasingly influential in geographical research (MATTISSEK and REUBER 2004; GLASZE and MATTISSEK 2009), also to determine to which extent the media are able to exert influence on public opinion about environmental issues. We focused on several newspaper articles¹⁾ covering a recent nature conservation conflict concerning red deer management in the Bavarian Forest National Park.

2 Red deer management in the Bavarian Forest National Park – historical background and current conflicts

Since its establishment as Germany's first national park in 1970, the Bavarian Forest National Park has suffered a great deal of acceptance problems similar to those described above. Nevertheless, at the time of its inception, it was cordially welcomed by the resident population, who expected large groups of tourists to visit the peripheral region close to the iron curtain and to bring economic benefits for the local population with them (WEISS 1998).

However, the attitude turned drastically when the park management implemented measures to get closer to the national park's actual purpose — to return cultivated landscapes to their original state (LIEBECKE et al. 2008). These measures allow development of natural ecological processes in the park's core zone, which, together with the exclusion of human interference, are an important driving force

for the reestablishment of “wilderness”. The forests developing under the progressing realization of this Bavarian Forest National Park philosophy to “let nature take its course” (“Natur Natur sein lassen”; BIBELRIETHER 2007) greatly interfered with the traditional forest concept of foresters and local residents. These parties disliked the national park concept because it led to massive forest destruction by a major outbreak of the bark beetle *Ips typographus*, which has to date killed more than 6,000 ha of old spruce (*Picea abies*) stands. They instead wanted a cultivated forest for harvesting trees for construction and firewood. After extensive quarrels about whether or not to interfere with nature's way, the indignation of the resident population against the park management culminated in 1997, when mass demonstrations and civil initiatives were organized to prevent the planned expansion of the national park area. In spite of the public outcry, the Bavarian state government approved the park's extension against the will of the local people²⁾(Fig. 1).

In 2007, a new controversy, powerful enough to similarly enrage the local people as few years before, came to light: the discussion about the current and future management of the red deer population in the Bavarian Forest National Park. In the years before the establishment of the national park, browsing and bark stripping by red deer damaged large areas of forests around the park. The main reason for the occurrence of these damages was the policy to increase the red deer population and to feed the animals in the mountainous forests during winter. Under natural conditions, the mid- to high-elevation forests only form the summer habitat of the red deer; in winter, the animals would leave these forests with snow heights up to 3 m and migrate to lower elevations for grazing and browsing. After the establishment of the national park, an attempt was made to solve the problem of forest damage associated with this behavior by fencing in areas of about 30–50 ha, each with a central feeding site. After the first snow fall in late autumn, the animals migrate to these areas, attracted by the food provided, and stay in the enclosures the entire winter (Fig. 1). The deer population is also controlled at these sites: Individuals remaining outside of the enclosures during winter are shot. Around the beginning of May, when natural food sources are again readily available, the fences are opened (HEURICH et al. 2011).

¹⁾ Analysis of 44 articles published from 10/2007 to 11/2009 in the following magazines and newspapers (see References): *GEO* (1); *Passauer Neue Presse* (PNP) (regional section) (5); *PNP Grafenauer Anzeiger* (local edition)(14); *PNP Bayerwaldbote Regen* (local edition) (5); *PNP Bayerwaldbote Viechtach* (local edition) (2); *PNP Bayerwaldbote Zwiesel* (local edition) (13); *Bayerwald-Wochenblatt* (3); *Die Pirsch* (2); *Unser Wilder Wald* (1).

²⁾ A referendum held in Frauenau regarding this issue (turnout 51%) resulted in an 83.7% opposition to an expansion of the national park area (RALL --)

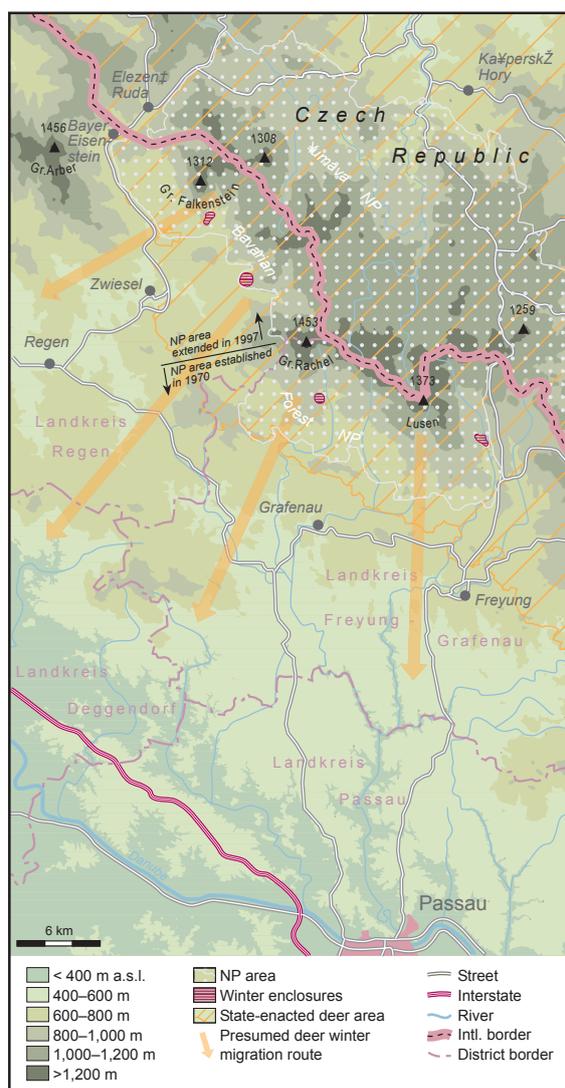


Fig. 1: Map of the Bavarian Forest National Park area in Germany, a part of the connected Šumava National Park in the Czech Republic, and parts of the lower Bavarian Forest, which represent the natural winter refugia of the red deer population

This management not only prevented the animals' migration into the privately owned lowland forests and pastures, but also kept damages in the mountainous forest to a minimum. But at the same time, it severely contradicted the objectives of the national park, namely to maintain natural processes uninfluenced by humans as much as possible. The park administration therefore aimed at changing the red deer management; red deer would be allowed to range freely between their summer and winter habitats, control measures of the red deer population would be shifted from the national park to the surrounding land, and the winter enclosures would be

removed step by step. The national park administration could have legally opened the enclosures and stopped the control measures without notifying the area residents. But, knowing about the consequences for the landowners outside of the park boundaries, the administration decided to integrate the affected interest groups into the decision-making process.

3 Methods

The aim of this study was to analyze the discourse concerning the red deer management project in the media to reveal its impact on people's perception towards it. We used the method of discourse analysis, which is a qualitative method developed and adopted by social constructionists. This method has been used to draw attention to how nature is pictured through the media. Discourse analysis also provides information about the constellation of parties involved, the distribution of power among them, and the roles they assume in public discussion (POLLAK 2002).

The material investigated in this study includes mainly articles distributed on the regional and local scales, including primarily the regional newspaper *Passauer Neue Presse* (PNP) with its local editions (published from October 2007 to August 2009), and also the free mailing *Bayernwaldwochenblatt* (BWB). National-wide reporting of the topic was rare and limited to individual articles in specific magazines (*GEO*; *Die Pirsch*; *Unser Wilder Wald*) and on internet blogs (*Ökologischer Jagdverband*; *Grafenauer Jägerschaft*). This manifests an apparent lack of interest on part of the supra-regional press, which also correlated with the perception that environmental issues are not sufficiently covered by the media (KUCKARTZ et al. 2007).

As explained by FOUCAULT (1976), discourse is a system of representation that provides a language for discussing a particular topic at a particular historical moment. The discourse constructs the topic, and defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs how an issue can be meaningfully discussed and reasoned. According to HUBBARD et al. (2002), the discourses are groups of statements that structure how people think about a topic and how they act based on that thinking. These discourses are involved in multifaceted power relations that often stem from the social and cultural institutions involved in shaping the world. Thus, this methodology not only considers the pure linguistic facts, but is indeed a multidisciplinary research method used

by researchers from diverse scientific backgrounds. Disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and media studies tend to use the term *discourse* to mean what is “sayable” or “thinkable” about a topic in a given political, social, cultural, historical, or even spatial context. Discourse analysis therefore becomes relevant also for human geographers (GLASZE and MATTISEK 2009, MATTISEK 2010).

Discourse analysis is applied by dividing longer discourse strands into smaller units, depending on the basic research question. Analysts thus try to shed light on how speakers or writers create and organize their discourses to transmit their semantic intentions. Discourse analysis also contributes to the identification of symbolic and semiotic systems and shows that rhetorical instruments are powerful devices for constructing realities (ULLRICH 2008). Speakers and writers use discourses to prioritize particular decisive argument lines, making others look in comparison less important. Discourses aid in drawing attention to particular decisive argument lines, while others are left unconsidered. Discovering these means may help to identify power structures that are not visible at first glance but that nonetheless permeate and influence the public discussion. After exposing these structures and the main argumentation patterns, the last step of discourse analysis is to evaluate their significance for the discourse development.

We followed the approach of JÄGER (2004), who describes the basic process of discourse analysis as follows: 1) definition of the central research question and identification of the discourse strand(s), in which the research question could be virulent; 2) short characterization of the discourse sector (print media: PNP); 3) creation of the textual corpus (outline of

the analysis); 4) interpretation (basic and detailed) of the corpus and the discourse strands; 5) total analysis of the discourse strand(s) in this study: What is the contribution of the PNP in the assertion of the political issue “red deer management in the Bavarian Forest National Park”?

4 Results

4.1 Organization and presentation of articles

The first elements of an article that attract the reader’s attention are its headline and illustrations, if present, combined with their placement in the newspaper, serving as “eye-catchers”. Selected wordings and photographs plus interrelations between them offer a huge potential for interpretation and often transmit the basic message of the text right at the beginning (POLLAK 2002).

The red deer project was first mentioned by the PNP in a feature about the *Red Deer Days* in 2007, but only gets clarified one year later, within the next announcement of the annual *Red Deer Days*. After that, the topic’s coverage was basically confined to the various local editions of the PNP (mainly *Grafenauer Anzeiger*, *Bayerwaldbote Regen*, *Bayerwaldbote Zwiesel*), which implies that it was merely seen as a topic of local significance. While the *Grafenauer Anzeiger*’s share of coverage about the issue was rather steady in terms of frequency and volume, the *Bayerwaldbote Regen* and *Bayerwaldbote Zwiesel* just started to pay a greater amount of attention to the red deer project when the dispute began to rise, but then attached even more value to it than the *Grafenauer Anzeiger* (Fig. 2) This

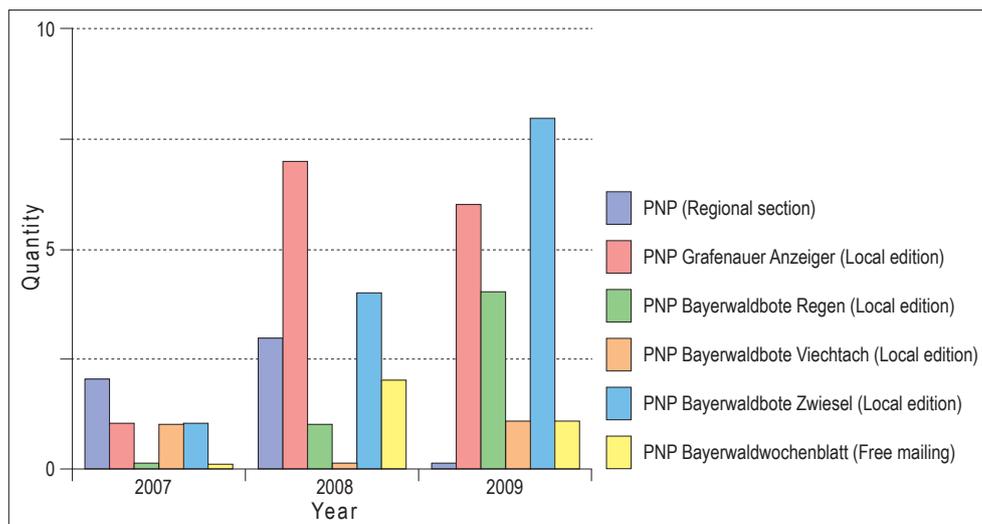


Fig. 2: Distribution of articles about the red deer management in the National Park Bavarian Forest in the local media

detail acquires greater significance, when one considers that the Regen district became part of the national park area only in 1997, when it was annexed in spite of huge civil resistance (RALL-), which is still inherent to this region. As a recent telephone survey study also showed that acceptance of the red deer project was lower in the Regen district than in the Freyung-Grafenau district (SELTER 2009), which has been part of the national park since its establishment (Fig. 1), we assume that the civil denial not only refers to the specific controversy of the red deer management, but is for the major part based on a general negative perception of the national park there.

Early on, the articles mostly focused on the animal itself. The stag was described by positive, poetic rhetoric, e.g., as an embodiment of freedom and strength, literally as the “king of the forests” (“König der Wälder”: PNP, 30.08.2008). These first articles mainly served to announce and promote the *Red Deer Days*, organized in collaboration between the neighboring communities and the national park. The *Red Deer Days*’ purpose was to provide information on wildlife, but they also functioned as a promotion instrument by giving the local tourist sector an opportunity to exploit the full potential of the Bavarian Forest’s first umbrella species.

Yet, in the course of weeks, the image of the splendid bellowing stag was edged out more and more by the opinions of the most important stakeholders and local politicians, who took a stand against the idea of a new management concept for the red deer. The once mostly neutral or even supporting headlines changed to rather negatively penetrative ones or just aggressively recited formulated criticism against the red deer initiative. Instead of animals, the accompanying photographs now primarily showed the main opinion leaders of the conflict, and neither the red deer nor its future life in the Bavarian Forest was any longer the motive of newspaper coverage. Instead, the discussion was now led by the mere conflict about it and how this was handled by the opposing characters.

4.2 Discursive positions

In the present case, the press depicted two dominating discursive positions: the national park administration as the initiator of the discussion process about a new red deer management on one side and a strong coalition of landowners, hunters, and farmers as the principally addressed stakeholders who reject this approach on the other side. Later on, local and

supra-regional politicians also became engaged in the issue, whereby they demonstrated their proximity to the local residents. In the end, the upper hunting authority took responsibility for making a final decision on the issue.

In 2007, when the red deer project was introduced to the public, the newspaper explained the zoological background of the initiative by briefly summarizing the information obtained from a group of wildlife experts who had been invited by the Bavarian Forest National Park to give a lecture on the topic. Although this was the only time the reader obtained more profound background information on the subject, the information given was still very limited compared to the contents that actually were presented. Additionally, this professional knowledge was revealed at a time when public involvement was still very low and would have been more useful for better comprehension later on in the discussions.

In the following year, the topic was more or less neglected, especially because at that time the *Red Deer Days* were understood to be mainly a visitor attraction. The newspaper contained mostly short interviews with the event organizers, e.g., representatives from the patron village and the local tourism sector. No contradicting opinions regarding the red deer living in the Bavarian Forest were allowed to overshadow the popularity of the event; on the contrary, everyone seemed to be proud of their “heraldic animal” (“Wappentier”: PNP, 30/08/2008) – the Bavarian red deer.

Not until the end of 2008, when the national park administration invited the concerned parties to open-ended round-table discussions, did the portrayal of the protagonists involved change. Parallel to the rising anger of forest owners, hunters, and farmers, the press began to take sides with the angry parties, adopting their insulting insinuations towards the national park. This became especially obvious when the director of the national park was characterized. Although he was initially described very respectfully, the journalists began to quote his opponents, who qualified him as calculating and deceitful. Again, references to past events are used to substantiate these allegations directed against the entire national park staff.

In contrast, the opposing alliance was presented as a victim by pointing out its fear of personal damage due to damaged trees caused by red deer at large. Despite their victimhood, the opponents were characterized as a strongly united group willing to “fight” (PNP 18/03/2009) for maintaining the current conditions. Nevertheless, that 12 of the

14 delegates had already been chosen by the various stakeholder groups to represent them in the *Red Deer Working Group* (“AG Rothirsch”) showed that initially the majority of the involved landowners, hunters, and farmers were inclined to participate, even though the press claimed that there was no willingness for cooperation at all. Cooperation only started to subside when the Regen district suddenly refused to take part in any further negotiations, which, in the end, also led to the prohibition of the whole *Red Deer Working Group*. However, the coverage gave the impression that all principal stakeholder groups were either totally in favor of the winter enclosures or totally against them. Recent telephone interviews showed that agreement between hunters and landowners nowadays is in fact quite high compared to 1994, but it should be pointed out that this has not always been the case and still depends much on the origin of the stakeholders (Freyung-Grafenau or Regen) (EKLKOFER 2004; SELTER 2009).

Moreover, it is striking that the opponents of the project, especially certain local politicians, were given in the course of the discussion increasingly more room in the newspaper articles than the defenders, especially by citing their very emotionally and dramatically expressed rejection. In comparison, declarative responses of national park representatives and conciliating voices from others advocating the project were often represented only partially, occasionally even resulting in misleading messages.

Although the reporters themselves did not actively create such misunderstandings, they contributed to them by favoring the antagonists by reproducing their statements without scrutinizing them. Many different speakers who turned down even mere discussions about a new red deer management were given the possibility to distribute their opinion by means of the newspaper, whereas only very little space was assigned to those endorsing the approach. Of course, it is not clear whether this obvious preference for one position was generated from the journalists’ personal points of view or whether the journalists were caught in the tight web of relations that often controls society in rural areas. However, in this case the newspaper failed in its role of providing a neutral forum for discussion.

4.3 The use of linguistic devices and symbols

Linguistic devices, such as metaphors and allegories, contain information about dominating discourse patterns as well as controversies (MEIER-

SCHUEGRAF 2005) and are of special importance with regard to the two collective symbols of the debate on the red deer management project.

The first collective symbol is the stag itself, being depicted very positively at the beginning of the *PNP*’s coverage of the red deer management project in 2007 and still in 2008. The red deer’s general beauty, greatness, and special meaning to the inhabitants of the region is outlined, describing it as “our largest native animal species” (“[...] unserer größten heimischen Tierart”: *PNP* 08/10/07) and stating “red deer roam there through the expansive forests” (“[...] Rotwild streifen dort durch die ausgedehnten Wälder.“: *PNP* 15/10/07).

The second collective symbol is the forest. It is both the emotional homeland of the Bavarian Forest’s inhabitants as well as often the basis of their economic existence, and consequently, a part of their identity (ROTHFUSS and WINTERER 2008). Resulting from this attitude, the local population began to feel that the forest is being “attacked” (“[...] Angriff auf den Wald”: *PNP*, 09/02/2009) by the red deer population, and compared this with the continuing bark beetle invasion. With time, the local people’s admiration and pride of the red deer expressed in earlier articles was replaced by profound rejection. No more information was given about the species-appropriate needs of the national park’s red deer population that might have motivated the reader to defend it. The linguistic transformation of the animal into a competitor of the traditional epitome of nature per se — the intact green forest — leads to a complete change in the reader’s perception of the red deer. This constructed concept of nature demonstrates exemplarily how discursive realities exert influence on society’s thinking and acting and as a consequence are able to shape social reality (JÄGER and MAIER 2009).

As mentioned above, the instrumentalization of this collective representation of nature used first to gain sympathy for the animal but then later to produce aversion to it, also activates the collective memory of the local population by evoking accusations similar to those directed at the bark beetle. The population was again called upon to defend its homeland against an invasion that places the forest’s integrity at risk, even if this occurrence is part of a natural dynamic process. This asserted distinction between “good” and “bad” nature shows that the traditional, static concept of nature is deeply permeated by semantics that have turned it into a synonym for “home” that totally differs from its scientific concept. In fact, a large number of conservation conflicts can be attributed to such different understandings of nature that

create tension between inhabitants and nature conservationists, and that are often exacerbated by the aspect of territoriality (RENTSCH 1988; BIBELRIETHER 2007; ROTHFUSS and WINTERER 2008).

5 Discussion

As JÄGER and MAIER (2009) have pointed out, a discourse always consists of different discursive strands, which can either support or contradict each other, forming so-called discursive enmeshments. An overview of the discursive strands building the published discourse on the red deer management project is presented in figure 3. News coverage was reduced to two central questions: (I) whether or not the winter enclosures should be removed and (II) whether or not there is a need for a working group to discuss this. The answers to these questions can

be either yes or no, i.e., for or against the national park initiative, which thus suppresses an open-minded discussion. All other discursive strands can be mostly distinguished as those supporting or rejecting the red deer management initiative, i.e., supporting either the pro or contra side of the two central questions.

The strongest argument used since the beginning of the discourse for defending the current red deer management is that free-roaming wildlife would damage vegetation and thus endanger the forest and consequently the economic existence of the local people (discursive strand 7 in Fig. 3). In relation to this, the above-mentioned and not-yet-settled dissent about the bark beetle invasion was brought up again. Similarly, the old accusations against the former management and its uncooperative working policy were used to impute the same incredibility to the current administration and to explain why the

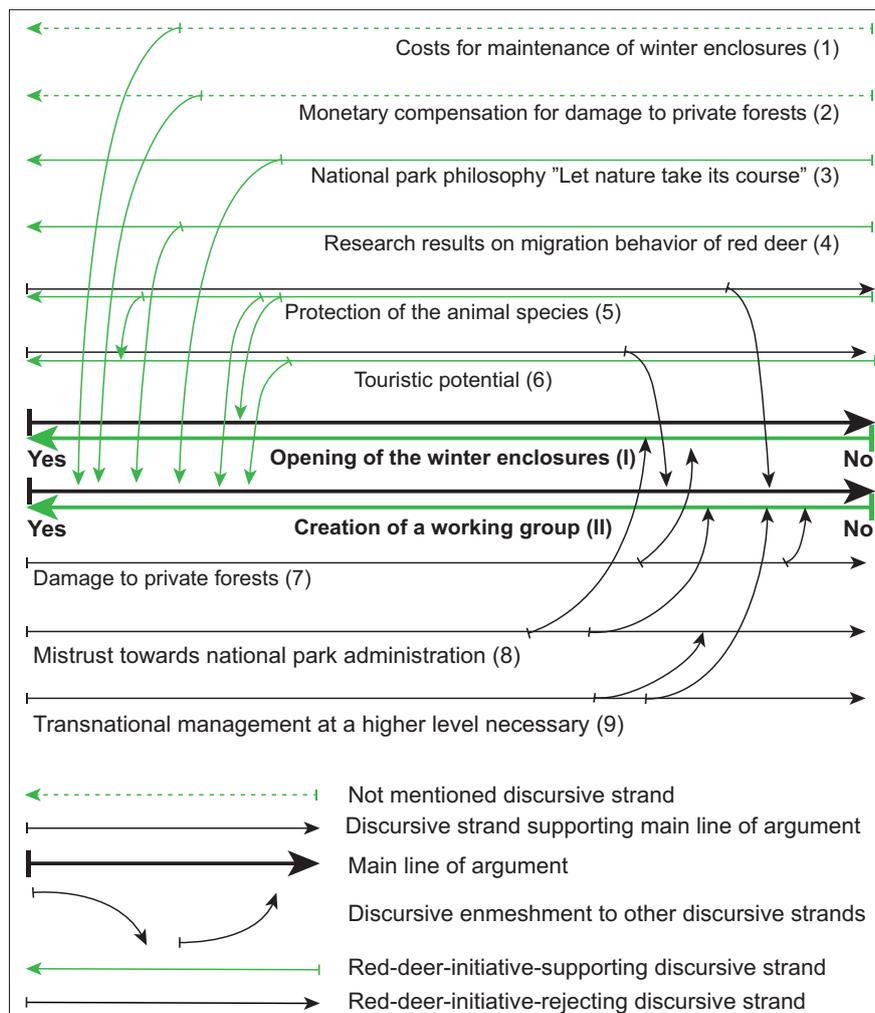


Fig. 3: Discursive strands and enmeshments on which the published discourse is built

establishment of a working group would not make any sense (discursive strand 8). The continuously repeated wish of the national park director for an open-ended dialogue between locals and professionals was neglected in this context. Later on, the explanation that the red deer management should be handled on a transnational level became quite popular among all antagonizing stakeholders (discursive strand 9); according to them, an opening of the winter enclosures would lead to an increased influx of red deer coming over the Czech border. However, recent research projects on red deer migration behavior carried out by the national park showed that there is no reason to assume that an opening of the winter enclosures would lead to a greater influx of red deer and thus would not have a negative impact on the population size of the red deer (discursive strand 4). As the opponents totally ignored the relevance of these research results and furthermore at the very end of the discussion only reason with the need for transnational management, the validity of their argument should have been closely scrutinized, yet it forms the decisive basis to stop further negotiations about a new red deer management on the regional scale.

Two discursive strands were used by both parties to support their opinion (Fig. 3): the defenders of the new red deer management project argued a high touristic potential if the red deer were allowed to freely roam, whereas the stakeholders regard the winter enclosures as a special tourist attraction, as they enable visitors to observe the animals from close quarters (discursive strand 6). Both parties argue that the protection of the animals matters, albeit from different points of view (discursive strand 5): the nature conservationists appeal to the species' natural living conditions based on winter migration and non-intervention within the park borders, whereas hunters and landowners claim that the red deer might suffer food scarcity during hard winters without the feeding in the enclosures.

In addition to the main discursive strands and those supporting the main line of argument, two other discursive strands were not mentioned in the discourse published by the press: the monetary compensation for damage in private forest (discursive strand 2), as discussed by the director of the national park, and the costs for maintaining winter enclosures (discursive strand 1). Monetary compensation would have gained quite high acceptance among the concerned residents, and such compensation could possibly even be financed through the money saved by dissolving the cost-intensive winter enclosures.

These two points probably would have increased the project's popularity, but they were withheld in the press discourse.

Apart from these thematic lines of discourse, the national park's philosophy to "let nature take its course" (discursive strand 3) is not specifically attached to the current cause, but is nonetheless of superordinate significance. Stating this principle not only explains the national park administration's position in the conflict, but also communicates its main goal in general and therefore serves to transmit a positive image. Such superordinate references also appeared on the opponent side in expressions of their overall mistrust and suspicion towards the park administration. The collective memory was activated to stir up more people against the national park by subliminally dwelling on past incidents. Nevertheless, we assume that the local people interpret the new information based on their earlier experiences with nature protection, as similarly observed by WALLNER et al. (2007). Especially such statements not directly related to the topic at hand lead to the assumption that the actual source of the conflict is not necessarily the red deer management initiative, but lies far beyond. Rejection of theoretical and academic indoctrinations that do not contribute to a better understanding of the aims of nature conservation often turns into an ingrained refusal of new proposals made by nature conservation professionals. Not recognizing the knowledge of the experts, who often do not belong to the local community, is often accompanied by the locals' feeling of being cheated of their right to govern their homeland – both of which are regarded as key factors for sustaining conflicts (STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001a, b; SRU 2002; SCHENK et al. 2007; MOSE 2009).

Another aim of discourse analysis is to examine whether an event becomes discursive or not, as only discursive events are able to influence the further development of the discourse (JÄGER and MAIER 2009). With regard to the red deer discourse, several discursive strands prioritized within the media discussion and even entire articles were dedicated to rather insignificant incidents. On the other hand, other discursive strands were ignored in the published discourse, including a number of events with an obvious significance for the conflict.

The initial basis for discussion was a new, comprehensive, and improved concept for red deer management in the Bavarian Forest National Park. The opening of the winter enclosures, on which the controversy ultimately focused, was named as one possible option among others, and the national park

administration always stressed that they were open to any other suggestions of the various stakeholder groups. Nevertheless, the numerous stakeholder meetings organized by the national park to find a consensus were not covered by the press, and a discursive strand focusing on the idea of a joint action to develop a new red deer management concept in the Bavarian Forest was barely mentioned. In contrast, for example, a hunters' assembly, which had not even be summoned explicitly to discuss the red deer initiative, was described lengthily, with the article reflecting the hunters' disapproval of the initiative.

The local press seemed to be particularly interested in covering the various stakeholders' reactions during the development of the conflict and only weakly examined the technical pro and cons of the project. The local newspaper certainly reflected the general attitude of the local population quite well, but failed to reveal pertinent background that was marginalized in the public discussion, which would have proved helpful for a thorough understanding. However, this case confirms the results of a study carried out by MAKOWSKI (1998), which found that the regional media consolidates public opinion rather than forming it. In contrast, critical reporting is usually attributed more to the national press, which, at least in this case, unfortunately did not pay much attention to this local conflict.

As already mentioned, most of the coverage appeared in the local newspaper *PNP*. Most of the few other sources alluding to the topic have an environmental background and were thus more in favor of the approach of the national park. But their style of coverage also stands out, as it offers more comprehensive explanations, often accompanied by illustrative graphics enabling an understanding of the full impact of the project, and ignores neither its advantages nor its disadvantages. Background information provided about the red deer species in its natural habitat and the function of the winter enclosures ensure that the reader obtains a proper and complete view of the circumstances. Moreover, some very informative new discursive strands appeared that have been excluded in the local press coverage so far, despite their relevance for the comprehension of the theme. For example, one essential element of the new concept is the regulation of the red deer stock outside the park area, which would be carried out by hunters and would prevent an extreme increase in the red deer population. A reference to this suggested measure would help to reduce the fear of a massive influx of deer into the forests located next to the national park area, but was totally ignored by the local press.

The authors of the pro-nature media sources placed noticeably more emphasis on explaining the situation professionally and not just merely portraying the different attitudes of the stakeholders towards it. Of course, the background knowledge and intentions of journalists of an environmentally orientated magazine differ from those of a journalist of a local newspaper. The local reporter mainly wants to inform the public about local events, whereas the journalist from the environmental sector wants to enlighten the readers about the complexity of the Earth ecosystem so that society begins to realize what impact human behavior exerts on the planet's intactness. Despite these different functions, both types of media should always aim at elucidating even multifaceted topics, enabling the reader to consider all views. And, as the already-mentioned telephone survey revealed, during later discussion stages, the concerned stakeholders were quite interested in possible alternatives to the opening of the winter enclosures (SELTER 2009), but this was unfortunately never discussed in the press.

6 Conclusions

When we compared the changing writing style and contents of coverage in the daily local newspaper with the actual development of the conflict, it became clear that the reporting confined itself to just reflecting the current mood of the public. When the red deer served for tourism, the press was used as an instrument to exploit this, e.g., by stressing the uniqueness of the region as the animals' habitat and by encouraging the readers to identify with "their" region. But as soon as the topic became conflictive, the press changed its tone and mirrored the view of the majority or of the local opinion leaders, as it has been observed in similar analysis by MAKOWSKI (1998), thus even running the risk of unbalanced reporting. The unavoidable result of unreflective reporting that just presents the strongest opinions as the leading discourse is a quite homogenous public discursive position. The power of those stakeholders who already dominate the discourse is strengthened even more by the media, while the viewpoints of the minority have no chance of being heard.

Above all, this case study shows by which means a current incident can be instrumentalized to activate old but not-yet-settled resentments. As shown, it is not the discourse about the red deer alone that bothers the local people. It is entangled with other discourses, among which the territorial discourse

about their homeland, the Bavarian Forest, is definitely the strongest. Most other discourses, such as that concerning the bark beetle, can be reduced to this superordinate discourse – all measures applied so far in the framework of the national park in the end presented more-or-less restrictive changes for the inhabitants with regard to their territory. And as “home” (“Heimat”) is a very sensitive topic for humans, the often extreme reactions to such changes are understandable.

In this context, it becomes evident that even by following the rules that acceptance research has revealed so far, resistance is sometimes too inherent to be overcome and turns into a matter of power and influence (HEILAND 2002). Despite the intent to apply modern mediation practice, even the proposal of an open-ended dialogue was perceived as an offence. The mere suggestion that this offer could be, in truth, a strategy to persuade the Bavarian Forest inhabitants of measures that in the end would bring them harm, leads to the construction of social realities that are sufficient to stir up fear among the stakeholders and make them oppose the project. Though the administration of the national park has never said so, it appeared as if the opening of the winter enclosures was an already settled plan and the agreement to join a round-table discussion was turned into an agreement to this plan. As a consequence of these social constructions of reality, the discussion eventually came to an abrupt end when the addressed stakeholders decided to boycott the working group.

What exactly was the reason for the failure of the intended participation process? A major problem was definitely the lack of a neutral third person functioning as a mediator, which is strongly recommended (WIERSBINSKI 1998; STOLL-KLEEMANN 2001b; HEILAND 2005). Such a mediator would thoroughly analyze the factors that promote as well as hinder a successful implementation of a nature conservation project. In the case of the red deer management project, the difficulty of being both the planner and the moderator at the same time was not recognized.

Another explanation for the negative outcome lies in the supercharged history between the national park administration and the local population, which in the past was consistently marked by top-down decisions (RALL --) and which is still too present to be overcome by only one participatory approach. A positive outcome would have required much more communicational and educational work, placing more emphasis on establishing a positive relationship to the relevant stakeholders. The personal level of relationship, especially in rural regions, is of par-

ticular importance (BRENDELE 1999) and can even be more significant to the further development of communication processes than a professional relationship. Thus, also informal talks should be considered (LUZ 2000) – the perfect place and time to discuss a controversial topic could be at the local pub just after work. Therefore, it is necessary to use a key figure capable of socializing with the local stakeholders and gaining their respect. This is easier for someone who comes from a similar professional background (JEDICKE 2007). As this is not always possible, an alternative is to try to find an external key person who can be convinced of the issue and later on act as a promoter of the topic (BRENDELE 1999; JEDICKE 2007). Such persons should best be influential local authorities (politicians as well as private persons), who already enjoy a high social status in the community. In the present case, the national park administration neglected to organize in the first place such talks with leading personalities of hunting and landowner associations to analyze their general attitude towards a change in the red deer management. As a consequence, a few strong opinion leaders were able to undermine the communication process with their veto.

Nevertheless, it should be underlined that the invitation of all representatives of the various stakeholder groups was exemplary. But, as explained by JEDICKE (2007), this is not a guarantee of success; however, only inviting those in favor would definitely have caused even more conflicts.

As we have shown, in the end it was primarily the hegemonic discourse on the identity of “Heimat” (homeland) in the context of the socio-cultural landscape that was used to stir up resistance and was powerful enough to result in the final failure of the whole project. Reasoning referring to the nature of the red deer was irrelevant, even though they were also mentioned. But to provide further evidence for the argumentation of why the winter enclosures are against the nature of the red deer, it is necessary to continue research on the effects of the enclosures on the population. Especially effects on the physical well-being of the population should be examined, such as domestication, higher risk of spreading diseases, and influences on the genetic pool (FICKEL et al. 2012). Although the idea of a new red deer management concept in the Bavarian Forest National Park will not appear on the agenda of the administration in the near future, the administration should continue to involve local people in the planning and management of the park and should intensify any efforts. And even if this is no guarantee for achieving

active participation in nature conservation measures, it is the only way to make people identify with their environment and eventually to be willing and eager to actively conserve biodiversity (TOMIĆEVIĆ et al. 2010).

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Authors

Melanie Ludwig
 University of Passau
 Faculty of Philosophy
 94034 Passau
 Germany
 melanieludwig5@googlemail.com

Dr. Friederike Grüninger
 University of Passau
 Physical Geography
 Innstraße 40
 94034 Passau
 Germany
 friederike.grueninger@uni-passau.de

PD Dr. Eberhard Rothfuß
 University of Bonn
 Department of Geography
 Meckenheimer Allee 166
 53115 Bonn
 Germany
 rothfuss@giub.uni-bonn.de

Dr. Marco Heurich
 Bavarian Forest National Park
 Department of Research and Documentation
 Freyunger Str. 2
 94481 Grafenau
 Germany
 marco.heurich@npv-bw.bayern.de