

## Protecting and reinforcing the power of landscape in landscape parks through social cooperation

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**Abstract:** *Protecting and reinforcing the power of landscape in landscape parks through social cooperation.* Landscape parks (nature parks) are important aspects of the system of nature conservation in Poland. The resources in these parks are managed by park authorities through the Landscape Park Protection Plans, as constrained by the Act on Nature Conservation (2004). Nonetheless, few of the parks have a Protection Plan in force. This paper focuses on the importance of public participation both in preparing the Protection Plans and in implementing their ideas. The current state of landscape management in landscape parks is assessed and the main problems are identified, with an emphasis on the lack of human resource management. The arguments are presented based on two examples from the Lower Silesia region of Poland: The Valley of Jezierzycza Landscape Park and the Chełmy Landscape Park.

*Key words:* landscape protection, landscape parks, nature parks, landscape management, social cooperation

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years we have witnessed many global processes which are or can be a threat to our environmental and cultural values. These processes (growing population, intensification of agriculture, developing industry) have resulted in certain phenomena (urban sprawl, loss of biodiversity, pollution, vanishing local culture and customs) that magnify the need for a sustainable economy and the protection of the remaining values. As we

face globalization, we also face a global call to protect local nature and culture. As these two factors meet in the concept of landscape, effective landscape protection is something we urgently need.

Nature protection objectives are nowadays best achieved in protected areas. According to IUCN, a protected area is ‘a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values’ [IUCN, 2008, p. 8]. The IUCN recognizes six categories of protected areas according to their objectives, distinguishing features and role in the landscape or seascape [IUCN, 2008, p. 11]. In this paper the authors want to focus on one of the IUCN Category V protected areas in Poland – the landscape parks.

Category V describes protected areas ‘where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values’ [IUCN, 2008, p. 20]. Polish landscape parks are legally authorized by the Act on

Nature Conservation (2004) and defined as an 'area protected due to the natural, historical, cultural and landscape values in order to preserve and popularize these values in terms of sustainable development' [Polish Journal of Laws 2004, No. 92, Item 880]. Generally, landscape parks are recognized as a lower category protected area, where human activities are allowed as long as they do not harm the environment (housing, agriculture, forestry, environmentally-friendly business, recreation and tourism are permitted). This makes landscape parks places where sustainable development objectives can be implemented in practice, but also places where difficulties in achieving effective nature protection can arise [Locke and Dearden, 2005].

People will always fight for their sacred right to property, but may be badly informed or insensitive regarding the need for nature protection and the benefits that they can derive from it. The same happens in landscape parks. Farmers might be afraid of changes in their past ways of management or of earning less income, which sets them against the creation of new parks [Fjellstad et al., 2009]. Investors are angry about regulations and bureaucracy hindering their actions, and they often appeal to higher and higher courts where they receive conflicting opinions. The landscape park objectives are often not well understood by the public and local government, which can cause many organizational and operational problems. These will be discussed elsewhere in this study.

Polish landscape parks are managed individually, in groups, or as a part of regional administration, but do not come under any national association

[Kistowski, 2004. p. 62]. The management of the park, or group of parks, is required to work to achieve nature protection objectives. There is also an advisory body that can be appointed to the park or group of parks, which is known as the Landscape Park Council. This body consists of representatives of the scientific community, local government, NGOs and practitioners.

The official document that defines protection objectives in the park is the Protection Plan. It is established by the landscape park director or by the director of a group of parks. The Plan specifies the threats to natural and cultural values in the park, divides the territory into zones with different protection objectives and regulations and recommends action to be taken to meet the protection requirements. The details of the information that should be collected and taken into account during the project-development process (before establishing a Protection Plan) are described in a regulation of the Minister of the Environment [Polish Journal of Laws 2005, No. 94, Item 794]. The plan should:

- define the current state of nature components, landscape and cultural values, economic activity, spatial policy and tourism in the park,
- diagnose the threats,
- develop a plan for operations serving to protect the natural and cultural values of the area.

According to article 18 of the Act on Nature Conservation, protection plans have to be established within five years of the creation of a landscape park. Nevertheless, many parks still lack a protection plan, which is mainly because of the high costs involved in preparing

them and having them accepted by local councils.

As provided for by article 19 of the Act on Nature Conservation, a local community can participate in developing a project (leading to a plan) which, when it is complete, must be submitted to local government for approval. At the end of the process, the plan is given legal force by the regional government (articles 19 and 20, Act on Nature Conservation, 2004).

The involvement of local communities in preparing protection plans mainly involves meetings organized by the director of a landscape park with the team of experts selected to prepare a project for a protection plan.

The process of public participation and the problems this entails will be presented through two examples: the Valley of Jezierzycza Landscape Park and Chełmy Landscape Park. They are both part of the Lower Silesian Landscape Park Administration, which is in charge of twelve parks in the Lower Silesia Region of south-west Poland.

The Valley of Jezierzycza Landscape Park covers some 8,000 hectares in the area of two community councils: Wołów and Wińsko. It is sparsely populated and approximately 80% of the surface area is forested. Chełmy Landscape Park is about twice as large (close to 16,000 ha) and lies within the Męcinka, Paszowice, Złotoryja, Krotoszyce and Jawor community council areas. It is characterized by hilly terrain and diverse forms of land use. Both of the parks have a protection plan in force, but the park authorities faced some difficulties during the decision-making process.

In the case of the Valley of Jezierzycza, two meetings were held with the participation of the Wołów and Wińsko community councils to disseminate information when the Protection Plan was being prepared. Afterwards, the draft plans were presented to the community councils. The community of Wołów, which was actively involved in preparing the Plan, approved it, while in the Wińsko community two additional meetings were required for consultations and presentations about the objectives of the Protection Plan and its consequences for community economic development. The Plan was then approved.

The approval process was much more complicated in the case of the Chełmy Landscape Park. Some communities did not understand that their areas included portions of a landscape park and that this would require them to include protection objectives in the spatial policy and development strategy of their communities. In the case of three of the communities the areas included in the park are really small and approval for the Protection Plan was given automatically. Two further communities had different approaches to the idea of nature and landscape protection in the park. In the community of Męcinka the problems mostly concerned the incompatibility between current and planned spatial policy and the land use provided for in spatial management documents (Study of Aims and Conditions for Spatial Management and the local Spatial Management Plan). A compromise between the Protection Plan and the local Development Strategy was reached at the discussion stage and the community council approved the plan. Elsewhere, in the community

of Paszowice, it proved impossible to get approval as the local government's opinion was that the Plan would rule out local economic development. As many as four meetings were held between the planning team and the community council representative in this community but, unfortunately, the strong belief that the Park would have a negative impact on the economic situation in the community meant a consensus was not reached. This opinion only changed when new community councillors beginning their terms of office were persuaded that the presence of the Park could contribute to improving the well-being of local people<sup>1</sup>.

## DISCUSSION

People have a legal right to present their opinions and proposals on Protection Plans. The local community is represented by local government, which has to agree to the Plan before it is officially recognized. In principle, public consultations concerning landscape parks are limited to local councils. The process of public participation in shaping conservation policy varies in different communities according to the members of the council, their capacities, the scopes of their roles and changes in their terms of office. The situation that occurred in the community of Paszowice proves that a local council that is unaware of the real influence that a landscape park can have

on a local economy and its development can block the legal procedure and cause many difficulties for landscape park management and their protective measures. By way of contrast a local government that takes an interest in the planning procedure from the beginning can help to achieve effective cooperation between the local community and park management, which was seen in the case of the Valley of Jezierzycza Landscape Park.

This preparation and adoption procedure for protection plans shows that the process does not in itself ensure the involvement of society, which should have the greatest influence on the development of parks from the very beginning. Public participation is only implemented through the approvals of community councils. This could be sufficient if the councillors and local government – aided by park management – worked to educate the inhabitants and took a proper role in shaping co-responsibility for the Park areas. We should refer at this point to the role of public awareness in securing nature and landscape protection objectives.

Most inhabitants of landscape parks are aware of their presence and see the benefits they bring for nature protection and the local economy. Unfortunately, many of them do not participate in the decision-making process and do not play any active role in shaping the environment around them. Studies from another Lower Silesian landscape park, the Valley of Barycz, have found that only around 15% of inhabitants are interested in local government decisions and react if they are not satisfied with them [Lubaczewska, 2009, p. 148]. The hope is that we will see a high number of positive initia-

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<sup>1</sup>Information obtained during work on the Protection Plan project for Chełmy Landscape Park coordinated by the National Foundation for Environmental Protection, which is based in Warsaw. One of the authors took part in the work of the team responsible for spatial planning analysis.

tives, including the educational activities that are of particular importance, from the Lower Silesian Landscape Park Administration in the Lower Silesian landscape parks. One of the best examples so far has been a series of seminars and meetings held with inhabitants of landscape parks<sup>2</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

The examples described show that the current procedure of public participation the law provides is insufficient if nature and landscape protection objectives are to be reached. In terms of nature conservation we are faced with a genuine legal mess: some authors claim that there are even crucial mistakes in the Act on Nature Conservation itself [Radecki, 2008]. Landscape park management can only act within the existing law. Nevertheless, some action to improve stakeholder dialogue during the preparation of protection plans can be taken.

After analysing the examples given, the authors reached the following conclusions:

- every park needs an individual approach; some of them are more “problematic” in terms of local political and investment conditions – the procedure for the preparation and approval of protection plans should be adapted to these conditions,
- educational activities in “problematic” parks should be conducted with particular attention to the adult inhab-

itants, investors and decision makers, who are rarely aware of their impact on the landscape,

- there is a strong need to build cooperation with different stakeholders at the preparation stage of protection plans as public participation is now limited only to consultation with community councils,
- the action taken to protect natural and cultural values in the parks require a systems-based approach and should be subject to long-term planning, which could be pursued through voluntary agreements and strategies,
- park managements lack human resources: a team of experts is needed to coordinate the difficult process of integrating nature-protection objectives with local economic development.

Landscape park management possesses limited financial resources, which hampers many of their initiatives, but they are always allowed to apply for external funding. This depends on the initiative of the particular management team and how it develops cooperation with local communities to achieve maximum effectiveness in landscape protection.

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<sup>2</sup>The meetings were held as part of the “Popularisation of knowledge about landscape parks and land management rules in the protected areas of four landscape parks” project.

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**Streszczenie:** *Ochrona i wzmacnianie siły krajobrazu w parkach krajobrazowych poprzez partycypację społeczną.* Parki krajobrazowe to bardzo ważny element systemu ochrony przyrody w Polsce. Zasobami parków zarządzają ich dyrekcje poprzez plany ochrony, zgodnie z ustawą o ochronie przyrody (2004). Mimo to wciąż niewiele parków dysponuje obowiązującymi planami ochrony. Artykuł przedstawia istotną rolę, jaką odgrywa społeczność lokalna podczas tworzenia planów ochrony oraz wdrażania ich zapisów. Oceniono tu stan obecny zarządzania krajobrazem w parkach krajobrazowych i zidentyfikowano najważniejsze problemy związane głównie z brakiem efektywnego zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi. Problem przedstawiony został na podstawie dwóch przykładowych parków krajobrazowych z województwa dolnośląskiego: Parku Krajobrazowego „Dolina Jezierzycy” i Parku Krajobrazowego „Chełmy”.