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**ECONOMIC INCENTIVE MEASURES IN THE CREATION OF THE
NATIONAL PARK NEUSIEDLER SEE - SEEWINKEL**

by **Klaus Hubacek and Wolfgang Bauer**

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FOREWORD

This paper is one of a series of 22 case studies that describe practical experiences in OECD Member countries with the use of incentive measures for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of its components. These case studies were submitted by OECD Member countries to the OECD Working Group on Economic Aspects of Biodiversity as a contribution to the OECD study of the design and implementation of appropriate incentive measures for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. In order to ensure maximum comparability between the case studies, all were developed under the common methodology described in “Incentive Measures to Promote the Conservation and the Sustainable Use of Biodiversity: Framework for Case Studies” [OECD/GD(97)125].

The practical experiences described in the 22 case studies were used as the basis for the policy advice developed in the *Handbook of Incentive Measures for Biodiversity: Design and Implementation* (OECD, 1999). This *Handbook* combines the lessons learned through the various experiences described in the case studies – covering a wide range of ecosystems, economic pressures on biodiversity, and utilising various incentive measures – with sound economic theory to develop a practical, step-by-step guide for policy-makers on the design and implementation of successful incentive measures for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

This paper was written by Klaus Hubacek and Wolfgang Bauer, and constitutes the English language summary of the report “Der Einsatz Ökonomischer Anreizmassnahmen bei der Errichtung des Nationalparks Neusiedler See - Seewinkel” (Report R-142: Wien, 1997) of the Federal Environment Agency, Austria. It is released as an unclassified document under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD with the aim of bringing information on this subject to the attention of a wider audience.

This study, and the other 21 case studies submitted by Member countries, are available on the world wide web at <http://www.oecd.org/env>.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study examines the use of economic incentives for the establishment and running of the National Park Neusiedler See (Seewinkel). The Park was opened in 1983 and was the first National Park in Austria recognised under Category II by the IUCN. A number of incentive measures were used to ensure the conservation of the Neusiedler See and the reed belt there (recognised as a biosphere reserve by UNESCO in 1977). These include the removal of government subsidies for the drainage of the wetlands for agricultural cultivation, the provision of compensation to land owners ceding their lands to the National Park, restricting the access of hunters to the area (with compensation for entitled hunters), the possible ceasing of the stocking of the lake with non-native fish species (again with potential compensation), and the banning of reed burning while allowing the continued, sustainable, harvesting of the reeds. Because of falling prices and growing intensification in agriculture, as well as increased tourism activities, the National Park is seen as a positive economic alternative to agriculture.

Ecosystem studied: inland freshwater ecosystems

Incentive measures used: access restrictions (national park creation), removal of adverse incentives, compensation for use restrictions

Main lessons learned: The use of a combination of economic incentives, information dissemination, and paying individuals compensation for restricting their use of the lands was particularly successful; compensation was found to be necessary in particular where the pressures on biodiversity came from outside the Park boundaries.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present study, written by the Austrian Federal Environment Agency, examines the use of economic incentives for the establishment and running of the National Park Neusiedler See (Seewinkel).

Various studies worldwide have examined the ways of using economic incentives in order to strike a balance between economy and ecology. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for example, has set up a group of experts to study the economic aspects of biological diversity. The Austrian Federal Environment Agency participates in the work of this group. The Agency produced a report on the use of economic incentives for the establishment of the National Park Neusiedler See (Seewinkel). That report has been received with great interest by international experts so, on the suggestion of the scientific organisation of the United Nations (UNESCO), the following study has been undertaken.

2. HISTORY OF THE ORIGINS OF THE NATIONAL PARK NEUSIEDLER SEE (SEEWINKEL)

The National Park is situated in an area which for centuries has been used primarily for agriculture. From as early as the beginning of this century, endeavours have been made to preserve nature and landscape, and especially to protect the internationally renowned flora and fauna ("the bird of paradise"). Thus, in the 1920s, pieces of land (constituting most of the core land of the National Park today) were leased by organisations for the protection of nature. The idea of establishing a National Park in the area was first formulated in the 1930s.

After the Second World War, organisations for the protection of nature repeatedly requested the establishment of a National Park. These demands, however, were superseded by the political priority of overcoming the area's slow economic development through the agricultural development. Both the drainage of land for the purpose of its cultivation (which was subsidised by the state), as well as drastic interventions in the reed belt in order to provide infrastructure for tourism by the lake, have left their traces not only on the characteristic landscape of Seewinkel, but also on the entire ecosystem.

Despite this, the Neusiedler See and the reed belt received international recognition in 1977 when it was classified as a "biosphere reserve" by UNESCO and in 1983 when it was added to the list of wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention (1971).

The 1980s saw a rise in disputes, the resolution of which constituted a significant step on the way towards the establishment of a National Park in the area. The WWF, which since the 1960s had been the leaseholder of pieces of land near the Lange Lacke for the partly for the purpose of protecting the bird population, was no longer able to meet the demands of the landowners for an extension of the lease. Intense disputes between the WWF, the landowners, and the provincial authorities followed, during the course of which the WWF demanded more financial commitment from the state. A settlement was eventually reached, on the basis of surveys acceptable to all parties, which specified the amount of compensation for the landowners. The survey repeatedly mentioned the idea of establishing a National Park, but this was not well received by the local population since it was feared that it would drastically restrict the use of the land, and thus deprive the people of the basis for their livelihood.

In the 1980s, environmental policies were gaining considerable importance. Both at the federal and at the provincial levels, decisions were in the hands of those for whom the establishment of a National Park became a major concern. The idea of a National Park that would transcend existing borders and political systems, and which was also supported by the neighbouring Hungary, was especially attractive. A negotiating team consisting of representatives of provincial authorities, of the Ministry of the Environment, and of organisations for the conservation of nature completed the necessary information and persuasive tasks to prepare the ground for the establishment of a National Park in accordance with the criteria set forth by the International Organisation for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The National Park affects more than 1 500 land owners. In the course of the negotiations, the various claims for the use of the land – such as agriculture, hunting, fishing, the reed industry, the interests of the local population, and tourism – all had to be settled.

A major step forward was made when the core zone of the National Park was defined. The pieces of land belonging to the core zone are owned by the Esterhazy family, one of the few major estate owners favourably disposed toward the idea of a National Park, a fact that greatly facilitated the negotiations. Subsequently, more and more of the smaller land owners, who formed shared interest associations and agreed to allocate further pieces of land to the National Park. The financial resources required to pay for the lease on the land and for further compensation were provided by the state (in equal parts by the federal and provincial authorities).

The National Park Neusiedler See (Seewinkel) was opened in 1983 as the first National Park in Austria recognised under category II by the IUCN.

3. DISPUTES OVER THE USE OF LAND AND ATTEMPTS TO SETTLE THESE DISPUTES

The changing uses of natural resources within the area of the National Park determined the socio-economic circumstances under which it was established. The establishment of the National Park was promoted for agricultural development purposes and also for tourism, the two major economic sectors in the area. The other relevant sectors of the economy (hunting, fishing, and the reed industry) have – despite a long tradition in the area – largely lost their economic importance.

3.1 Agriculture

Agricultural activities in the area of Neusiedler See (Seewinkel) have been – as with all over Europe – subject to falling prices for agricultural products. Production-enhancing technologies are primarily beneficial to large enterprises and for increasing competition. Such developments have been reinforced by agricultural policies which promoted over-production and intensive cultivation.

The agricultural developments here had an important impact on the National Park area and on the establishment of the National Park. Despite initial suspicions, a belief that the National Park could provide a viable alternative in the long term was gaining ground. This change of views was facilitated by the "chamber of agriculture", which was soon ready and willing to co-operate, and was able to point out to its members the advantages of a National Park. The establishment of the National Park simultaneously provided incentives for changing and extending the scope of agricultural use.

3.2 Tourism

Tourism in the area Neusiedler See (Seewinkel) has been given several incentives to move towards compatibility with nature and the environment in the last few years. It has also experienced a boom due to the rising popularity of the natural resources of the area.

Measures will be taken to avoid the negative effects which may arise from large numbers of people visiting the National Park. An important aspect of this is the information given to the visitors in advance to help them understand the sensitivity of the world of nature even before they arrive. This also involves a recognition that the best way to protect nature in many places is to leave it to its own devices and, in some areas, to either not allow access by people or to only allow it with restrictions. On site, the visitor will be told what is allowed and what is not allowed by a visitor guidance system of rules and regulations. The establishment of an information centre has created a point of attraction.

The National Park forms a major part of the tourist attractions offered in the Burgenland today, and has a symbolic effect on the re-orientation of the area towards "gentle tourism". The experience of nature and the improved infrastructure for the purpose of professionally communicating educational issues within the National Park and its information centre, in combination with opportunities for sporting activities, are all set to attract visitors in the future.

3.3 Hunting

The hunting of aquatic wildfowl plays a special role in the area of the National Park. In addition to the direct loss of animals, indirect effects of hunting are also harmful to the conservation area.

The process of easing the tension between the hunting and National Park interests is currently characterised by mutual agreements modelled on the settlement of private disputes, with provisions for the financial compensation of licensed hunters. A new legal basis for hunting was created with the National Park Act: the hunting rights in force up to that time were annulled in the core zone and in explicitly defined parts of the conservation area. To counteract the damage to cultivated lands outside the conservation area that might be caused by stopping or reducing these hunting activities, areas leased by the National Park administration are being cultivated. In this way, destructive birds can be kept away from lands outside the National Park ("distractive feeding").

Another way of making hunting more suitable for the requirements of the National Park would be to lease hunting grounds by the National Park. On principle, the aim for the National Park administration is to take over the hunting rights; but other solutions that might be found in the course of the negotiations will certainly not be excluded.

3.4 Fishing

From an ecological point of view, the most serious effect caused by the fishing industry was caused by importing and stocking the lake with non-native fish species. The resulting competition led to a sharp reduction of the native species, which were of only minor economic interest. Although the question of which fish populations can be called "native" is controversial because of numerous human interventions, experts agree that the current composition of species does not correspond to natural conditions and that measures for the ecological management of the fish are necessary.

A central requirement is to stop the stocking of the lake (with eels especially). Since it is impossible in this case to separate the National Park area from the rest of the lake, such measures would have to comprise the entire lake, which, however, would mean considerable losses for the fishing industry. If given compensation for their losses by the National Park (similar to the agreements for agriculture and hunting), the fishermen would be prepared to agree to such measures. However, this solution would only make sense if it was supported by Hungary, which shares the lake with Austria.

3.5 Reed industry

After decades of decline, the reed industry has now experienced a modest renaissance without, however, reaching the sales volumes of peak years. The cutting of reed is regarded as safe ecologically; the National Park, too, uses the cutting of reed for the maintenance of the habitats in the conservation zones. The problem in the past was the burning of reed, a method widely used to enhance the growing of new plants. However, this – mostly illegal – tradition seems to be becoming less and less common, not least because the authorities have taken severe steps against it.

4. ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

‘Economic incentives’, that is measures which use the price mechanism for the achievement of goals, are used to remedy flaws in the market structure which lead to over-exploitation of the public environment.

Table 1. Economic Incentives

<i>Positive incentives</i>		<i>Negative incentives</i>	<i>Indirect incentives</i>	<i>Withdrawal of false incentives</i>
Monetary	Non-monetary			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lease • Purchase • Compensation • Tax relief • Subsidy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model effect • Species conservation programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance fee • Fine • Taxes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of adequate institutional framework • Change of institutional framework • Ecolabel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of inappropriate agricultural subsidies • Tax reform

Adapted from: OECD (1996), *Saving Biological Diversity: Economic Incentives*.

The following economic incentives are applied in the Neusiedler See (Seewinkel) National Park:

4.1 Positive incentives – monetary

In the case of the National Park Neusiedler See (Seewinkel), an incentive for working the land in an ecologically oriented way was created with the provision of financial resources (lease, compensation, subsidy) for practices which conform to National Park standards. These compensatory payments are based on the principle that measures for the compensation of nature will be successful only if they are negotiated, and that authoritarian orders made by the federal government should be avoided. The aim of the compensation is to bridge the difference in earnings between traditional local farming practices and farming that allows for a higher ecological standard, and to thus create an incentive for environmentally conforming behaviour.

An advantage that this form of nature conservation (“nature conservation by contract”) offers is that solutions are sought by mutual agreement with the farmers. Problems are resolved jointly and not from ‘above’. However, public resources have to be provided for monetary incentives. State nature conservation, which is hard to enforce, is thus bought.

4.2 Positive incentives – non-monetary

The environmentally friendly cultivation of land within the National Park area by the National Park administration has had a model effect on local farmers. Thus, activities undertaken by the National Park administration, such as the protection of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda* L.) or putting rare breeds of cattle out to pasture, serve as examples for specific *species conservation programmes* in the area.

4.3 Negative incentives

Disregarding the law governing National Parks can lead to *financial penalties*.

4.4 Indirect incentives

A *change of the institutional framework* was brought about through the course of the establishment of the National Park by the farmers who joined forces by forming associations of shared interest. These associations emerged from the long tradition of the shared use of the land ('commons'). The people entitled to use the land joined forces, making it possible for there to be a smooth flow of information and efficient management of negotiations, which would not have been possible otherwise given the large number of landowners and rights of use. The interests of those using the land (farmers, hunters, etc.) were raised at regular hearings and included in the decision-making process. Such institutions, whose origin preceded the establishment of the National Park, serve as important communication forums which allow for the participation of a wide range of individual population groups or their representatives in the projects of the National Park administration.

With the creation of the National Park, a National Park logo (*eco-label*) was introduced for the ecological, sustainable use of land in the area.

4.5 Withdrawal of false incentives

Some economic or agricultural policies may have negative effects on ecosystems which are worth protecting. In the course of the planning and realisation of the National Park, policies with negative effects on the environment were analysed and some of them withdrawn.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The use of economic incentives, based on the principle of nature conservation by contract, in combination with the unremitting efforts of the nature conservation authority to promulgate understanding and information, and an appropriate institutional framework, were major contributions towards the implementation of the National Park, which serves as an example for the entire region. The resulting positive attitude should be the constructive base upon which to consolidate the idea of the National Park (a harmonious relationship between human actions and nature) within the consciousness of both the local population and visitors. Whether the entire region will be able to develop into a successful example of the reconciliation between economy and ecology will depend on the extent to which individuals internalise appropriate environmentally conscious working practices. The creation of the National Park has in any case opened up the possibility of reaching such a reconciliation.

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