

COMMUNICATING ENVIRONMENTALISM

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During IPSOIL II in March 2006 our group "Communication" dealt with the values attributed to specific features of the landscape around Lake Neusiedl. The results of our survey showed a high level of environmental awareness in Neusiedl am See contradicting trends in local development. Evidence suggests that with the help and cooperation of local residents the present rapid development can be influenced and balanced towards more respect for the landscape and environmental values.

Introduction

Soil is a limited natural resource fulfilling multiple functions being a habitat and a physical basis, providing nutrients for plant growth and attenuating potentially hazardous environmental impacts by its buffering, filtering and transformation capacities, among others. However, it has been recognized by the European Union that the integrity of these multiple functions of soil are increasingly threatened, not only on a regional scale but also on a global level. The major threats are considered to be erosion, structural damage and diffuse, long-time pollution resulting in irreversible damage or even physical loss of soils. (Blum et al. 2004)

The second phase of IPSOIL from 2005 to 2006 focused on the implementation of scientific knowledge into soil policy. The targets of IPSOIL II applied on a local level resulted in several open questions within our group. What is the role of the lake and its shore in Neusiedl am See? What is the level of awareness among the citizens regarding environmental issues in general and those concerning the lake in particular? Are there any discussions on the environmental impacts of constructions within the boundaries of the protected area?

Within our group we also developed two hypotheses:

- Hypothesis one stated that wine as a major economic factor was considered to be more important for the region than the lake.
- In our second hypothesis we assumed that local awareness of (development) processes entailing environmental impacts was low, despite the high level of information on environmental issues in Austria.

To find answers for our questions and to probe our hypotheses we developed a questionnaire comprising of a total of 26 questions in which we also included questions of other groups participating in IPSOIL II.

The aim of our group work was to conduct basic research on environmental awareness in Neusiedl am See that can serve as basis for our work during IPSOIL III in 2007.

In this paper we present our questionnaire and the results of our query. We will discuss the result and eventual shortcomings of our procedure. The resulting conclusions and suggestions will serve as input for next years IPSOIL III.

Asking stakeholders

To test our hypotheses and to conduct further research on environmentalism in Neusiedl am See we developed a standardised questionnaire.

It comprised of 26 open (qualitative) as well as closed (quantitative) questions and was organised in two parts.

Part one was dealing with questions on local identity, i.e. stakeholders' perception of their environment (questions 1 and 2), their relationship to specified economic activities within the region

(questions 3 to 5), their values regarding nature (questions 6 to 9) and practices endangering the environment as well as acts protecting the lake (questions 10 to 14).

Part two was dedicated to environmentalism in practice. This part of the questionnaire was based on the underlying assumption that there was a very high level of environmental awareness in Austria and therefore we were interested in practical results based on this advanced level of information.

In part two the questions were organised as follows: values and awareness regarding environmental issues (questions 15 to 20), the role of the master plan regarding environmental issues (questions 21 to 26).

Our sample was drawn out of some 50 stakeholders considered to be strongly involved in the communication of environmental issues to the general public, such as employees of educational facilities or people working in "green jobs", e.g. as landscape planning or gardening.

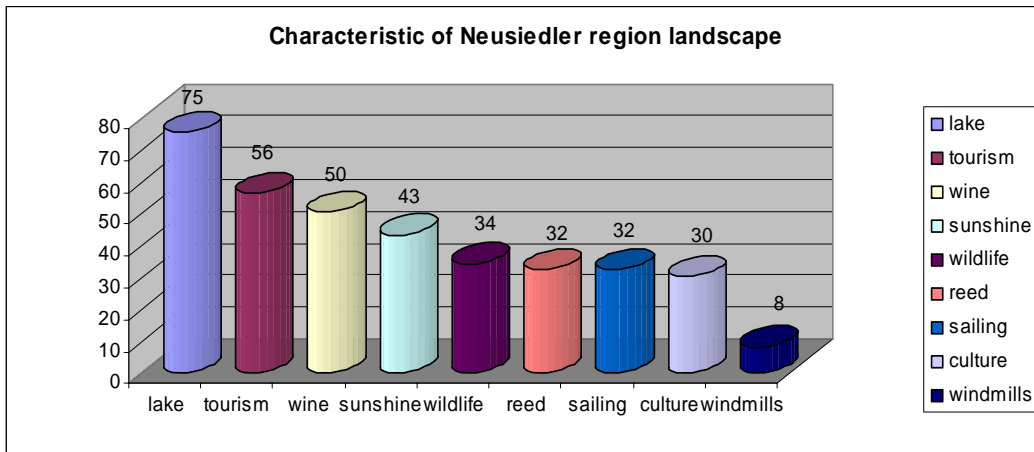
We conducted eleven standardised personal interviews based on our questionnaire.

The Lake comes first

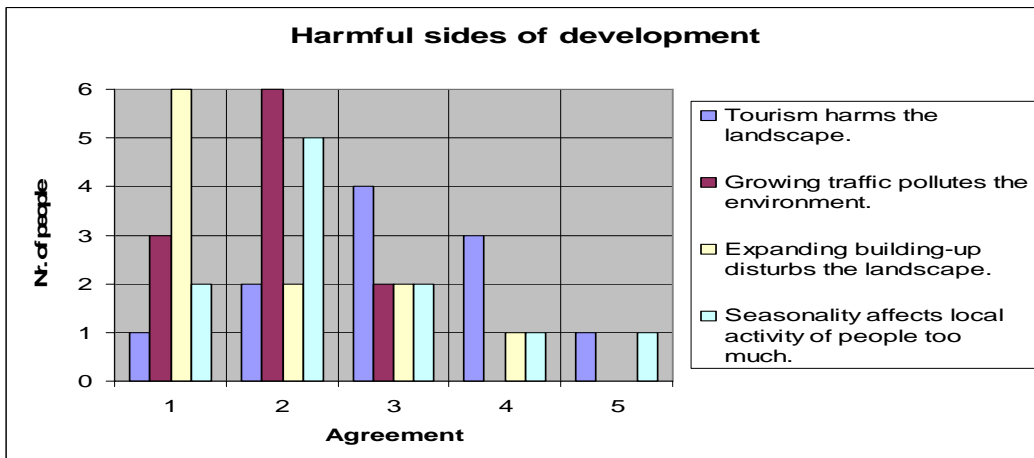
Eleven questionnaires were returned and evaluated.

Hypothesis one implied a quantitative approach therefore we asked our interviewees to rank nine terms regarding the importance for the identity of the Neusiedl-region. They were asked to start with the most important aspect followed by other aspects decreasing in importance

According to the results of the questionnaire our first hypothesis stating that wine was considered to be more important for the region than the lake failed, as out of the nine categories Lake Neusiedl/Lake Fertő was perceived to be most important, followed by tourism and wine ranking only third.



Graph 1: Points given for each feature supposedly responsible for local identity



Graph 2: Residents rank the effects of different impacts on a 1-5 scale. 1= totally agree

Graph 1 shows that the lake received 75 points out of a maximum of 99, followed by tourism (56) and wine (50).

The testing of our second hypothesis proved to be more complex in comparison and had to be split up on several questions.

We asked stakeholders about environmental issues in the region in general and those related to Neusiedl am See in particular and some legal background-information. We also wanted them to tell us about their personal relationship to the area and to indicate their interests.

When we asked residents to rank the effects of different impacts on a 1-5 scale where 1 stood for "I totally agree and five "I totally disagree", Expanded building-up and traffic were considered to have the strongest impact on the environment resulting in seven and eight persons agreeing, respectively. (Graph 2)

We reached the conclusion that our assumption stating that local awareness on (development) processes entailing environmental impacts was low, failed as well.

The four major environmental problems identified for Neusiedl am See could be charted. Picture 1 shows a map of conflicts, clearly depicting that environmental issues arising from past and present developments are perceived to be limited in space.

Based on this map we produced – seen as Picture 2 – a map of potentials for Neusiedl am See. The map of potential shows those places that can serve the positive communication of environmental and cultural values. Showing parallel these values and the threats that may cause harm to the landscape values should initiate active participation of inhabitants towards their protection and conservation.

Evidence suggests...

A possible explanation to our findings, i.e. that environmental awareness and action in Neusiedl am See can differ significantly, can be found in Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour.

The central element to this theory is presented by an individual's intention to perform a certain action. Volitional control over his or her actions presumed, the stronger the motivation, the more likely the individual will perform a certain behaviour. (Ajzen, 1991). The individual's intention is influenced by three considerations, i.e. behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs.

The first set of beliefs refers to a person's attitude towards certain behaviour.

The second set is the perceived control by society or "social norm", exerting pressure on the individual to perform or not to perform the behaviour. In other words, it is about "...the normative expectations of others and motivation to comply with these expectations" (Wikipedia, July 2006).

The third set of beliefs finally, comprises of perceived difficulties or eases of performing certain behaviour and is assumed to be based on experiences made in the past.

These beliefs together produce a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the behaviour; their importance however, may vary in each situation (Ajzen, 1991).

Taking the example of waste separation in Neusiedl am See we perceived a great willingness among stakeholders to put paper, glass, plastic and metallic waste in separate bags. It was explained to us that it was cheaper to do so as fees were charged only for the disposition of regular waste and that it was good for the environment as resource consumption was reduced by the re-use of raw materials.

On the other hand our interviewees were very unwilling to abandon their cars, when being on an errand in Neusiedl am See, despite high prices for gasoline and the ever present news on Climate change and its possible consequences. However, traffic was considered to be one of the major problems in Neusiedl am See!

Conclusions and Outlook

During the intensive programme IPSOIL II we conducted a survey in order to test two hypotheses regarding local identity and the environment. As a result our hypotheses both could not stand the testing. Contrary to our assumption, the citizens of Neusiedl am See regarded the lake as the major source of local identity. In addition they proved to be aware of environmental issues in the region, even though their every day actions suggested differently.

Our results are not immune to uncertainties, though. The interviewees were selected according to their profession and their willingness to participate. Therefore there may be additional aspects that need further exploration in future research activities. The present questionnaire could be adapted for

long-time research and focus more on the differences between awareness and environmental action taken.

We can conclude that lack of information on environmental issues is not necessarily a problem in Neusiedl am See but rather the stakeholders attitude and willingness to contribute their share in preserving the environment.

Therefore, the communication practices regarding environmental issues need to be analysed during next year's intensive programme.

After the even dissemination of local information about values the process can be steered forward with the activation of interested citizens. As a consequence the creation of a common ground will enable the stakeholders to their own future visions of Neusiedl am See.

Only with the help and cooperation of local residents can the present rapid development be influenced and balanced towards more respect for the landscape and environmental values.

For this, an action plan on environmental communication should be created during next year's intensive weeks as well. It includes among others:

- The definition of **focus groups** (stakeholders with different interests)
- The definition of **present processes** and formulation of **future scenarios** with stakeholders.
- **Presentation** and **display** of **Prouds and Sorries** wherever possible (media, local exhibitions inside and outside, thematic cultural events... etc.).
- **Impacts** on investment and development

Outcomes of local group-work, findings of discovering values can be disseminated with the help of every kind of media. We collected the possible media below:

Appearing newspapers

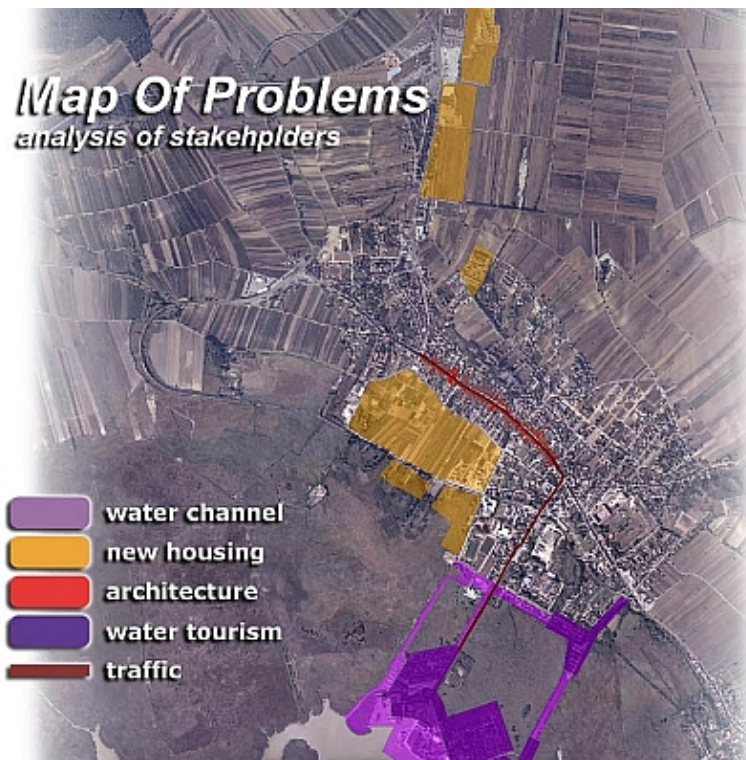
- Neusiedl region
 - Die Neue BVZ; once a week (Wed)
 - Bezirksblatt; once a week (Wed)
- Whole of Austria + extra edition in Burgenland
 - Kurier; daily
 - Kronenzeitung; daily
- Whole of Austria
 - Der Standard; Mo-Sat
 - Die Presse; Mo-Sat
 - Wiener Zeitung; Tu-Sat
- Television (Burgenland)
 - Burgenland heute (ORF)
 - BKF Aktuell (Cable)

Ecological harm will first disturb in 15 years but it must be prevented now!

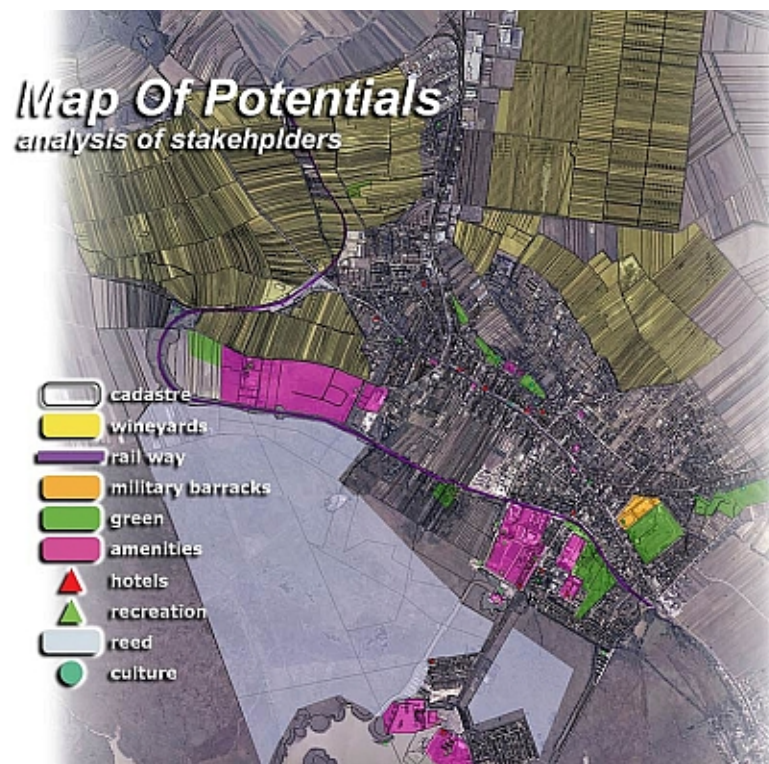
Literature

Ajzen, I.: 1991, The Theory of Planned Behaviour, in Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, 50, issue 2, p. 179-211, Elsevier B.V.

Blum, W. E. H., **Büsing**, J., **Montanarella**, L.: 2004, Research needs support of the European thematic strategy for soil Protection, in *Trends in Analytical Chemistry*, Vol. 23, No. 10-11, Elsevier Ltd.



Picture 1 Map of Problems



Picture 2 Map of Potentials