

M.Sc. Programme  
"Management of Protected Areas"

## **Unique selling proposition (USP) of Nature Parks in Austria and Germany**

### **Status quo and creating a guideline**

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## 1 SUMMARY

Thinking about protected areas and marketing as a part of economics it seems to be a kind of antagonism at the first view. Over many decades protected areas have been some constructions of biologists with very high idealism. They encouraged themselves to protect nature as the base of all our lives and they have been fighting against destroying it. Nature itself has been the centre of activism. Nature protection is quite a hot potato in our times too. In 2002 the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognised the need of action. Together with its parties the CBD defined the need for a significant reduction of biodiversity loss till 2010 ([www.cbd.int/2010-target](http://www.cbd.int/2010-target)). Nevertheless shown by the Living Planet Index by WWF biodiversity is still declining rapidly and nature protection is still a big issue.

On the other hand the amount of protected areas in common and nature parks in detail is especially increasing year on year and worldwide. Beside the challenge of nature protection different protected areas nowadays have to deal with a kind of business competition. According to the level of protection many protected areas have to offer recreation, education, regional development or science. Wilderness areas have to focus especially on nature protection and science while nature parks or biosphere reserves have to integrate regional development, recreation and education additional to nature protection. The competition doesn't concern only the variety of recreation and education offered within the field of protected areas itself but also with other institutions offering recreation and education like theme parks e. g. Without any doubt there is a demand for every protected area to find a position on the market of protected areas. There exists a need to define the strength and the characteristics of a special sight and to define a unique selling proposition. Other than that mentioned, getting public funds or finding a well defined position in an umbrella association supports the request in creating a USP for each nature park.

Nature parks are protected areas to safeguard cultural landscapes with all their values. Man has taken part to create these landscapes in interaction with nature and man will be needed to preserve them in future. Especially nature parks in Austria and Germany should be developed as sustainable model regions. The four pillars nature/landscape protection, recreation, education and regional development should interact and strengthen each other ([www.naturparke.at](http://www.naturparke.at); [www.naturparke.de](http://www.naturparke.de)).

Focussing on nature parks in Austria and Germany this work deals with the question of positioning a protected area – in this case different nature parks – in the wide market field of protected areas. What do these nature parks need to

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handle marketing aspects? How much sense does it make to create a USP for a nature park? When should a USP be created and should it be done by the PA management itself? How can a USP get created? How much value should be related to an USP? Even USP creation for nature parks has quite a young history in Germany and Austria. This work summarises the status quo based on questionnaires and interviews and creates a kind of guideline for finding a unique selling proposition for each nature park.

**Key words:** USP, Unique Selling Proposition, Nature parks, cultural landscape, market position, marketing, sustainability

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Preface

This master thesis was prepared during the course of the Master of Science Programme "Management of Protected Areas at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria.

Based on a very interesting and heterogeneous two years period of studies with many experts who influenced my choice of this topic I want to thank especially those who shared their good ideas, comments and time according to USP creation in Nature Parks in Germany and Austria.

First I want to thank my colleagues working in Nature Parks who spent their time to answer the questionnaires send to them. That was a very important part of this study. Not only time but especially the personal experience gave valuable input to this work.

Thanks go to Michl Jungmeier und Michl Getzner who both supported me with this topic and to my colleagues of the master course from different countries and fields of activity - without them my horizon wouldn't be the same it is today! Especially Renate Visotschnig-Bruckschwaiger, Lisbeth Zechner und Birgit Koch gave many constructive inputs – thanks!

Special thanks go to my family and my friends for their enormous support anytime!

*We are not only responsible for things we do but also for those we do not!*

*(Voltaire)*

## 2.2 Objectives and Purpose

Nature parks are large scale protected areas – mostly IUCN category V - to safeguard cultural landscapes with all their values. Man has taken part to create these landscapes in interaction with nature and man will be needed to preserve them in future. Especially nature parks in Austria and Germany should be developed as sustainable model regions. The four pillars nature/landscape protection, recreation, education and regional development should interact and strengthen each other ([www.naturparke.at](http://www.naturparke.at); [www.naturparke.de](http://www.naturparke.de)). The challenge is nature and landscape protection and sustainable development by wise land use at the same time.

As mentioned by Weixelbaumer (2005) Nature Parks developed from recreation areas around big cities in the 1960ies to model landscapes for sustainable rural development. The essential factors for model landscapes are human capacity and landscape quality. On the way to model areas in the sense of integrative regional development Nature Parks need the following impulse factors:

- Participation of local population
- Optimized policy mixture between exogenous induces endogenous regional development and good governance.

Nature Parks can give impulse for rural areas on the sector of indirect and direct regional support, nature conservation and development of cultural development. In common the area of a Nature Park on the one hand is an individual unit and on the other hand it is embedded in a network of habitats. The potential for a unique selling proposition of a Nature Park area is to specify, to protect and to develop to strengthen the value of the region.

Focussing on nature parks in Austria and Germany this work deals with the question of positioning a protected area – in this case different nature parks – in the wide market field of protected areas. What do these nature parks need to handle marketing aspects? How much sense does it make to create a USP for a nature park? When should a USP be created and should it be done by the PA management itself? How can a USP get created? How much value should be related to an USP? Even USP creation for nature parks has quite a young history in Germany and Austria. This work summarises the status quo based on questionnaires and interviews in several nature parks and creates a kind of guideline for finding a unique selling proposition for each nature park.

## 3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### 3.1 Background

#### 3.1.1 Biodiversity is still declining

In 2002 the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognised the need of action for nature protection. Signed by 150 government leaders at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the Convention on Biological Diversity is dedicated to promoting sustainable development. conceived as a practical tool for translating the principles of Agenda 21 into reality, the Convention recognizes that biological diversity is more than plants, animals and micro organism and their ecosystems, it is about people and their need for food security, medicines, fresh air and water, shelter, and a clean and healthy environment in which to live ([www.eea.eu.int](http://www.eea.eu.int)).

Together with its parties the CBD defined the need for a significant reduction of biodiversity loss till 2010 ([www.cbd.int/2010-target](http://www.cbd.int/2010-target)). As mentioned in the natura 2000 newsletter (May 2006) this is established as an objective of both the European Strategy for Sustainable Development and the Sixth Environmental Action Programme. Nevertheless shown by the Living Planet Index by WWF biodiversity is still declining rapidly and nature protection is still a big issue.

Even in Europe real wilderness areas are in the minimum. Most areas are cultural landscapes that are more or less influences by human use. Thinking of alpine pastures, extensive meadows or other grassland type e. g. the high amount of biodiversity is only possible through land use by men and their animals. As shown by WWF Austria those habitats need further extensive land use measures otherwise biodiversity will get lost and landscape will change dramatically. On the other hand of course there are areas where doing nothing is the challenge. The key will be to find the right balance. Agricultural landscapes in Nature Parks very often are situated in areas where traditional, extensive cultural landscape is the only possibility to deal with rough conditions. Nature parks with well designed unique selling propositions could strengthen the position of such areas on the market of tourism or agricultural products and somehow be a kind of compensation.

#### 3.1.2 Amount of protected areas is increasing

Beside the ongoing declining of biodiversity the amount of protected areas in common and nature parks in detail is increasing year on year and worldwide. For



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example the first nature park in Austria was founded in the 1960ies and actually there are 45 ([www.naturparke.at](http://www.naturparke.at)).

Especially nature parks are living a very integrative approach due to a big amount of different interests to handle with. Of course the trend of more nature parks can be seen very positive and nature parks as well as other protected areas can play a relevant role in creating a sustainable regional development as shown in many studies and be discussed below.

Beside the challenge of nature protection different protected areas nowadays have to deal with a kind of business competition. With a higher amount of protected areas the competition between them and a kind of pressure to be better than the others will occur.

According to the level of protection many protected areas have to offer recreation, education, regional development or science. Wilderness areas have to focus especially on nature protection and science while nature parks or biosphere reserves have to integrate regional development, recreation and education additional to nature protection. The competition doesn't concern only the variety of recreation and education offered within the field of protected areas itself but also with other institutions offering recreation and education like theme parks e. g.

As pointed out in Liesen & Köster (2004) the increasing number of nature parks in the European countries is joyful, especially in those countries where this category for protected areas was until now underrepresented. But at the same time it is necessary that the nature parks posses a management and a certain quality in order to prevent the appearance of so called "paper parks".

I think, creating a unique selling proposition could help to ensure also a high standard of quality because nature park then has to think about its strength and weaknesses, its offers etc. Without any doubt there is a demand for every protected area to find a position on the market of protected areas. There exists a need to define the strength and the characteristics of a special sight and to define a unique selling proposition. Other than that already mentioned, getting public funds or finding a well defined position in an umbrella association supports the request in creating a USP for each nature park.

## 3.2 Can protected areas be a base for sustainable development?

### 3.2.1 Nature Parks in a field of tension

Nature parks are based on a four pillar concept of landscape protection, recreation, education and regional development as shown by the association of Austrian nature parks ([www.naturparke.at](http://www.naturparke.at)).

In reality nature parks and their effects very often are reduced to the field of tourism or agriculture. Even that's not enough it plays quite an important role also in regional development. Nature parks mostly are situated in rural areas with nice landscapes that are also preferred for holidays. In this complex field the unique selling proposition and the unique values for visitors and the protected areas themselves have to be worked out seriously to ensure sustainable protection.

As shown in Eagles et al (2002) tourism in protected areas produces benefits and costs. These effects interact often in complex ways. It is the responsibility of the protected area planner and/or the regional development planner to maximise benefits while minimising costs. Protected areas are established primarily to preserve some type of biophysical process or condition such as a wildlife population, habitat, natural landscape, or cultural heritage such as a community's cultural tradition. Tourists visit these protected areas to understand and appreciate the values for which the area was established and to gain personal benefits. Tourism planning and development aims to take advantage of the interest shown by tourists so as to: enhance economic opportunities, protect the natural and cultural heritage, and advance the quality of life of all concerned. The protected area as relevant part of a region can secure regional development with something special that is not repeatable at any other place or area. Sustainable surviving can be ensured. Not to be forgotten are the manifold ecosystem services that maybe cannot be seen directly but are very important for the region. Due to that fact life quality as a whole for the locals will increase. All these qualities can also be part of the unique selling proposition for a nature park.

### 3.2.2 European Nature parks as model landscapes

As discussed before nature parks are focussed to integrate man use of the landscape in protecting nature. Nature Parks in Austria and Germany are mainly situated in rural areas. Therefore a little digression to rural areas in Austria and Europe as a quite interesting and important living space for many people makes sense.

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As mentioned in Schmied (2005) at the turn of the millennium 80 % of the European territory was rural and home to about 25 % of the EU's population. Staatsminister Josef Miller (II. Bayerisch-Österreichische Strategietagung 2005, see [www.stmlf.bayern.de](http://www.stmlf.bayern.de)) or Josef Plank (Umweltlandesrat of Lower Austria during his speech at the Wintertagung in February 2006, see [www.oesfo.at](http://www.oesfo.at)) have shown over 90 % of the European surface as rural areas and over 50 % of the population is living there. However it is a rather huge amount of European population living in these rural areas. Therefore it is any question that developing strategies for this "living room" are needed to adapt to the needs of actual and future time continually.

The so called concept of integrated rural development has gained increasing attention for the layout of regional development policy today and in the following paper I will try to focus on this concept and its opportunities for a sustainable development of rural areas as well as for protected areas to be integrated in a concept of integrated rural development.

### 3.2.3 Multi-functionality and integrated rural development

Even if agriculture is a kind of backbone of rural areas it seems to be a fact that rural areas are based on quite more parameters. They have multiple functions and are building a quite complex system. Schmied (2005) worked out that rural areas serve some common characteristics like spaces for the production of food and – increasingly – of non-food materials (e. g. wood, industrial and medicinal plants), for the generation of renewable energy (e. g. wind, water, solar energy); they are used for social-economic and cultural activities (for housing, crafts, industry, services etc.). In addition they are of prime environmental significance because of their role in protection soil and water quality, biodiversity as well as landscape diversity; and finally they offer rural and urban dwellers a wide range of recreation and leisure opportunities. Thus one can safely claim that – in spite of the greater overall economic importance of the urban areas – rural areas are vital in Europe and that they should be appreciated as such. This idea of "multi-functionality" is a common characteristic of all rural areas in Europe although of course there are existing differences in terrain, climate, landscape, population density, settlement pattern as well as in cultural heritage, land use and economic activities of their inhabitants. Rural areas share certain features and problems but at the same time they have unique potentials, unique problems and are therefore undergoing unique forms of transformation (Schmied, 2005). For me personally this concept of multi-functionality is also very important to understand the concept of integrated rural development as mentioned below.

### 3.2.4 The influence of globalisation

Another important point of view is the impact on globalisation as one external factor. Rural areas and nature parks in detail have not been left out from this influence and in Europe – as elsewhere – they have come under severe adaptation pressure. Technological innovations but also economic and political international institutions and agreements (e. g. WTO) have enabled a enormous increase in the speed and frequency in which information, financial capital, goods and people are moving round the globe (Schmied, 2005). It is a fact that also small regions have to handle with global playing rules.

Nevertheless in my opinion it is very important to see this situation as an integrated approach and to try to live these two aspects (globalization – regional approach) characterizing our all actual lives in combination and not to play one off against the other. I think this is the real challenge of our times: keep regional identity within a global network. To create new perspectives for a rural area in the future it seems to be necessary to work with this multisectoral approach (like seen above), to integrate possibly many parameters characterizing rural areas.

### 3.2.5 Integrated approach of rural development

The concept of multi-functionality as a definition of different functions of rural areas - besides external influences for an area - takes part of building up a system of types and categories of rural areas within one is the integrated approach of rural development. There is not only one single answer or system fitting everywhere but it is necessary to structure it on a more complex level. Rural areas are very different and characterized by enormous biodiversity and heterogeneity. Therefore the definition of different types is quite useful not to get lost in this biodiversity and to give some basis for political concepts.

The challenge according to protected areas and nature parks in detail is the combination of development AND conservation. Therefore, as shown during the course by Mose, concepts of “integrated rural development” are being discussed as appropriate instruments to target the development perspective of large protected areas. There is no clear definition available but there are empirical experiences. The following elements of integrated rural development may be important and characteristic: use of endogenous resources, cross-sectoral approach, decentralization of powers, area-based approach, working in networks of state, private and civic actors, participative planning and animation and capacity building. To convert the policy it needs some reformation of government and local/regional governance. Changes in administrative structures are needed

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as well as new relation between stat, private and civic actors or the creation of new institutions as regional management etc. Some authorities by the state have to be replaced in direction of local level to ensure large protected areas to be "model landscape" for rural development. The integrated approach tries to combine on the one hand a holistic approach and on the other hand a local approach. Quite typically for such an integrated approach is the fact of working more or less independently within the area – unimportant if we are dealing with a protected area or a rural area. The focus should be on a network of local perspective and a bottom up approach instead of top down! Otherwise in integrated approaches it is usual to take into account the multi-functionality of the area to integrate possibly many functions and stakeholders characterizing the specific area. It is important and useful to create a plan or strategy (preferred in a participative way) before spending any money into the area. Based on such a strategic plan for a nature park there can be worked out the unique selling proposition and a brand to communicate the characteristics and specialities of one single protected area.

As discussed in Nemes (2005) two characteristic systems of rural development can be identified: the central bureaucratic and the local heuristic. Ideally, these should work in co-operation, complementing each other, forming an integrated development system, where rural policy serves to channel resources, establish strategic aims and development models in a top-down mode and convey information and mediate social, economic, political interests in a bottom-up mode. For me personally in this concept nature conservation or the ecological approach is a little bit missing because I think that in the sense of sustainability that should be part of integrated rural development the balance of the three pillars economy, ecology and socials is very important. Nevertheless I agree with Nemes that lack of integration and divergence of interests can lead to dysfunction, conflict and dissipation within the system and should be avoided. Integrated rural development approach could be one way of doing that due to supporting local development "centrally".

As mentioned by the European Rural Exchange ([www.dumgal.gov.uk](http://www.dumgal.gov.uk)) the concept of integrated rural development arose from the experience of Western specialists trying to assist Third World farmers and their eventual realisation that the simple application of the west's focused agri-science approach was meeting with little success in the host countries. It was not until consideration of the wider features of those rural areas as a whole was taken into account that progress was made including life of local communities, non-agricultural employment and cultural/capacity barriers to change as well as the obvious scientific, practical and infrastructure barriers to progress.

All in all the integrated approach seems to be a more holistic one! Integrated rural development (IRD) based in a synthesis of the literature is defined as

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followed by them: IRD is the process through which the economic, social, environmental and cultural resources of rural communities are organized in order to achieve and sustain the long term viability of those communities.

Therefore also Nature Parks as a very heterogeneous area can be model regions for sustainable development in rural areas. As worked out by Hammer (2005) there are hard factors that are needed to ensure sustainable regional development out of protected area management: definition of targets in the field of regional development, clear instructions to the nature park management, personal and financial resources. Based on this process management beside project management seems to be the crucial point for success.

As mentioned in Davey et al (1998) a uniform approach especially for protected areas does not work. I think even in combination with protected areas it is very important to see nature conservation not separated from the development of an area but to integrate it. This integrated approach is the real innovation due to the opportunities coming up from this approach and its flexibility. The range of different solutions that are within this approach of integrated rural development gives the opportunity to respond to all different environments, social and cultural contexts. Davey points out within federal countries national system plans could and should recognize the diversity among the provinces with a range of approaches appropriate to provincial situations and properties: this is particularly relevant given the trend to decentralize responsibility for conservation management as well as management of integrated rural development. One role of the national system plan is to provide a framework within which all of these actors and different stakeholders (indigenous people, NGOs, private owners, government on every level etc.) can identify and make their distinctive contribution to the national conservation effort. As well as in integrated rural development it is very important that all actors are involved in the plan-making process itself. In my opinion also the point of involving locals is an innovative aspect due to not being used too much at the moment: People living in an area – unimportant if rural area or protected area - knowing their region best will have the best ideas and visions how to develop their living place in a sustainable way. Especially in rural areas with long tradition in wise use of nature and the “old” knowledge how to form and cultivate nature without destroying it the involving of the locals is important! Out of this pool of ideas it will be possible to create new and innovative visions and ways of working for different fields in the area.

Integrated rural development plans, PA site management plans and national system plans have to be interlinked and evaluated separately as well as together. Protected areas cannot be separated from needs and wishes of locals according to economic development and a better life quality. Local people have a range of interests in rural areas or protected areas and in my opinion the integrated approach of rural development and/or protected area management

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gives the most innovative opportunities to reach these expectations without acting at the expense of nature.

### 3.2.6 Integrated approach and protected area management?

Looking on history of protected areas a kind of new paradigm for protected areas policy can be recognized. As shown in the MPA course of Mose the change of concepts is going from static preservation to dynamic innovation. First conservation of "scenic beauty" like a nice rock was important then protection of endangered species was the keystone of conservation policy to come to the protection of biotopes with a furthermore ecological approach to reach actually a kind of integrated management in the sense of preserving nature AND be aware on human impact for the protected area. This approach can be compared with the integrated approach in rural development and needs a planning system as well as monitoring and controlling or evaluation.

As discussed in Davey et al (1998) bio-regional planning means a national system plan for protected areas to address the needs of protected areas in the broader context offered by. The overriding objective of such a national system plan is to increase the effectiveness of in situ biodiversity conservation.

IUCN has suggested that the long-term success of in situ conservation requires that the global network of protected areas compose a representative sample of each of the world's different ecosystems. Therefore the integration of the national system plans into the international context is needed to ensure global reduction of biodiversity loss and in my opinion this integrated approach can be connected with the integrated approach of rural development.

Especially in Europe nice landscape everybody likes to be protected is mainly cultural landscape somehow manmade. Real wilderness doesn't exist very often and it makes sense to use concepts also for nature protection that integrate human wise use of nature and that realize the value of this use over hundreds of years as forming elements.

As shown in the MPA course of Mose, the first national park in Great Britain was well created rural area with farms and people living there and having impact on nature. It does not necessarily mean to be a contradiction to protect nature and to develop wise man use but man and environment can be seen as a unity to be handled with! The dynamic-innovative approach in protected areas policy deals with the integrated view on nature conservation and economic development instead of separating them. It means a protection of spaces and processes, steering by management. Also the social task shall be integrated in the sense of a combination of top down and bottom up approach. The better local people

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living in or around the protected area will be integrated by participation in the process of creating a protected area the better they will support a sustainable ongoing of the PA and the more they will recognize the added values such a PA can bring to a region. Then the PA will be important part of the regional identity and people will be proud of it. This high acceptance should also be part of the unique selling proposition created for a nature park to last for a long time.

Especially large protected areas as biosphere reserves or nature parks can be model landscapes in the sense of an integrated approach of rural development and nature protection that ensures the protection of mainly human designed landscapes to conserve one type of area or nature we give a high value to. In my opinion – besides all protection of real wilderness - this trend is rather useful on the one hand to protect nature as part of our all living space and not only separated from is and on the other hand to show up the possibility of living in a form of nature using without destroying it and maybe to link to a sustainable way of living for people AND nature. Such large protected areas as a kind of idealized landscapes try to integrate all multiple wishes of different stakeholders in one single place – a big challenge but maybe the only chance to ensure sustainability in our lives. For sure it is important to create such concepts together with the locals and to deal with the different expectations to get a PA a motor or instrument of rural development – optimally sustainable rural development - and not an incentive. Large protected areas as “model landscapes” can be seen as living responsibility within rural areas. The challenge is the combination of development AND conservation.

As defined by the Association of German Nature Parks ([www.naturparke.de](http://www.naturparke.de)) in several European countries, Nature Parks are established as large-scale nature reserves. Due to their central task of combining sustainable protection and use of cultural landscapes, Nature Parks are gaining in importance for the future. The biological diversity of European cultural landscapes can only be permanently secured through a sustainable use. Nature Parks in Europe make an important contribute to save biological diversity in cultural landscapes.

Nature Parks in Europe differ in their structure from country to country. On the one hand they have all been established as legally protected areas, the legal definition being dominated by the common financing of the nature parks. On the other hand they show many differences, in the number of nature parks they have established, their legal structures, tasks, as well as in their proportion related to the countries surface.

As discussed in Liesen & Köster (2004) a new orientation towards sustainable development has taken place also in the framework of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union and the role of nature parks according to sustainable development of rural areas is increasing. A wide range of different



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tasks have to be fulfilled by the nature parks. The major tasks are the nature conservation and the preservation of nature and landscape, the management, the coordination of the planning through integration of participants, public relations and environmental education as well as the support of a sustainable tourism as part of regional development. Germans Nature parks are defining it as "support of a sustainable use and the marketing of regional products..." while Austrian nature parks point out "regional development with the aim to give impulses reaching over the nature park to increase the net product and to secure the quality of life of the inhabitants". In the most European countries sustainable rural development is a major element of the work of the Nature Parks. The main emphasis concerning sustainable rural development is put mainly on the development of sustainable agriculture, forestry and tourism.

As mentioned at Handler (2004) managed nature parks could offer the following economic effects:

- Coordinated development, synergies, prevention of double rivalling strategies.
- Additional value added, mainly in the secondary sector regional trade and commerce as in the tertiary sector.
- Development of soft economical factors, positive effect of regional identity, increase of know-how-transfer, stronger connection between the different sectors.
- Positive multiplier effects in the preliminarily and downstream markets.

There are many examples in Austrian Nature Parks. One is the nature park Landseer Berge where the positive economic effects have been reached with a stimulus for the regional development through nature park gastronomy and direct agricultural marketing.

### 3.3. USP for Nature Parks – need for marketing in PA?

Nature parks in Germany and Austria both are provided as additional labels that are put on existing protected area in cultural landscape with very high value. In both countries the interactivity of nature and land use plays an important role.

People nowadays are living in an economic world and therefore also managing a nature park needs to handle with economic aspects. For me it is no question that nature parks and protected areas in common need marketing to exist in a sustainable way and to protect nature continuously. The question is how marketing should be used to keep the main issue of protected areas – nature

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conservation – in mind and to use marketing instruments to ensure a long existence of the protected areas.

For sure the use of marketing will be different in the various categories of protected areas. Wilderness areas have to use marketing to focus on pure nature protection with leaving nature itself while biosphere reserves or nature parks have to use marketing instruments to communicate natural values as well as wise land use, regional products, education, sustainable tourism and recreation.

Seeing the protected area as a kind of business the challenge for the management is to communicate and ensure the uniqueness of a single area with its additional benefits for locals and guests. It is important to know the protected area or the nature park someone have to deal with all its strength and weaknesses but also to know the target groups using the protected area. All nature parks somehow have unique natural and cultural values – the crucial point is to define an image that makes it different from others.

As shown by the Association of Austrian Nature Parks (2004) based on a thesis of Gerald Böhm in 2002 there was done a study in the four Nature Parks in Burgenland. The question was the motivation why visitors come to a specific Nature Park. The main aspect is recreation, followed by beautiful landscape and nature experience. Those three arguments seemed to fit the most important expectations of visitors towards Nature Parks. All these three factors are main issues of Nature Parks and their management. The opportunity for hiking, cultural interests, sightseeing, the visit of nature trails and other were other motivations for visiting a Nature Park within this study. Many of the visitors were coming more often than only once to the specific Nature Park. Therefore dealing with expectations and customers needs is important because the investment in creating a unique selling proposition and the binding of guests to a specific Nature Park make sense in a sustainable way. About half of the interview partners in Nature Parks of Burgenland mentioned that they are for holiday with a staying duration of about 6,5 days that means more than the average. To offer quality and differences in services needs creative further development of the offers. 98% of the guests of Nature Parks wanted to return to the Nature Park for another visit. Here a high potential for regulars in future can be stressed out.

As mentioned in Desnik (2004) a park needs a general vision and a good strategy to be able to serve a base because it preserves landscape, evaluates and develops it. Therefore cultural landscape cannot only be protected but has to be developed dynamically. Modern landscapes have to be economically effective – beside all nature protection – and they have to be place of identification for locals and visitors.

### 3.4 Definitions of USP

USP can be understood as an international abbreviation for unique selling proposition or unique sales point. It is a determination out of the field of marketing and economics that deals with the unique attribute of products or services. It is the special quality that makes one's product or service different from all the others within the economic competition (<http://213.198.66.220/teleservice/usp-home.htm>;

<http://www.awsg.at/portal/cCardDatabase.php?dgn=29&dse=28&dsi=601>).

Further the customer has the choice which USP will bring the best satisfaction of the individual needs. The USP can be rooted in the special quality of a product or a service, in the price, the techniques etc. A successful USP is not necessarily something innovative and completely new. Especially products or services based on good quality should offer a catchy USP. Otherwise such products and services can lose the competition to other products with lower quality but better price. Even in the field of protected areas quality is a quite important factor and has to be communicated. To create acceptance and a special value for customers to visit a single protected area and to use its offers is one of the big challenges of a good marketing strategy of a protected area.

As shown e. g. on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unique\\_selling\\_proposition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unique_selling_proposition)) the term USP was found in 1940 by Rosser Reeves within his marketing theory and praxis as a specific undertaking to sell for a product or a service. The USP should differ to other products or services. The specific benefit defined with the USP should focus on attributes of a product or service that others cannot offer. It makes sense to concentrate on a specific target group while defining a USP. The USP should explain why one specific product or service is the best one to consume. Another strategic sense of creating a USP for a product or a service is the help in internal and external communication.

In the field of tourism USP defines the strategy of creating niches for specific characteristics or qualities for single regions, villages or landscapes. One example of such an USP is the category of national parks that stands for perfect and intact nature and landscapes.

To summarize all the characteristics of a product, a service or in the case of nature parks of the protected area is one important step to create a USP. A second one will be to think about the target group of the protected area and a third one will be to find out which attributes can make a single nature park different from all the others and what is the benefit for guests. What will the single nature park make to be the one that will be chosen for a visit? This point

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will then be the benefit for the customer and should be defined as the USP for the nature park. The USP should be part of all communication tools, e. g. homepage, press work etc. of the nature park!

As defined in the marketing lexicon the USP is not the outstanding selling argument but the outstanding benefit of the product or the service. This benefit can be part of the rational or the emotional level. Important is that customer will recognise the benefit as important and that competitors cannot reach the benefit too easy. To think a step further it may make sense to create a double benefit positioning – a nature park has not only a wonderful outstanding landscape but also brilliant services or special local products with high quality (<http://www.wiwi-treff.de/home/mlexikon.php?mpage=beg/usp.htm>).

### 3.5 How to create a USP in general?

As shown up on <http://www.teneric.co.uk> there are several areas where you can be unique. In marketing developing a special pricing policy can be the area of action. Many people think that lowest price is the best but this is not always the case. A low price can indicate low value or low quality. Think about where you are positioning your services. Even in the field of protected areas and nature parks this may be an important point. Very often different offers of a nature park as guided tours or local products have very high quality. Because many offers in protected areas are state-aided it is hard to create a fair price. If the price is too low the high quality will maybe not recognized. Another field of activities in creating a USP is a very good customer service. Service takes on many different aspects, for example knowledgeable staff, personal and friendly support service etc. High quality and premium products are another possibility for creating a USP in a nature park. Marketing and creating a unique selling proposition is simply identifying and satisfying customer needs.

Therefore these questions should take part already in the planning phase of a protected area to give a good overview of the Nature Park and potential customers and target groups. Even reality shows that the unique selling proposition in German and Austrian nature parks often is missing or starting to be developed long time after planning and establishing the protected area.

### 3.6 USP and Nature Parks

Of course each nature park has something very special in the sense of outstanding cultural landscape that has brought the label nature park. Nevertheless only few protected areas are that special that they are one of a kind. Normally many different nature parks are dealing with one big target group

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that is interested in nature and nice landscape. As mentioned in the study “Wer macht’s, wer zahlt’s, was bringt’s” of the association of Austrian Nature Parks the typical Nature Park visitor is

- between 30 and 60 years old,
- with high education level and regular income,
- is coming from a city or its surroundings,
- is searching more recreation than action,
- wants to experience new landscapes,
- wants to get some comfort beside mass tourism,
- good price-benefit-balance and
- the typical nature park visitor makes also short time holidays.

Nature Park visitors have quite huge expectations, they want to make self organized trips, want to get new nature impressions and need good information. They expect hospitality and regional products and they prefer guest houses owned and organized by local population.

Also the so called unique nature isn’t always that different. Thinking of Tyrolian Nature Parks e. g. all of them are situated more or less within the Alps and on the first view it seems hard to point out their uniqueness according nature. However all Nature Parks in Tyrol together with the tourism association have worked out a concept with a unique selling proposition for each nature park, the national park and all together are marked as “more valuable than ever – nature experience Tyrol”. The unique image of the single protected areas (e. g. Naturpark Tiroler Lech – to be on wild Lech’s track, Naturpark Ötztal – feel the world of glaciers and transhumanz, Nationalpark Hohe Tauern – a journey to the roots, Nature park Kaunergrat – discover the power of diversity, Nature Park Zillertaler Alpen – attraction of fascinating natural landscape and starting alpinism an geology) strengthens the synergy of all of them together for common marketing in the field of tourism and economics.

As shown by [www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com), the key to effective selling in this situation is what advertising and marketing professionals call a "unique selling proposition" (USP) that each single nature park has to create.

Pinpointing your USP requires some hard soul-searching and creativity. One way to start is to analyze how other companies use their USP to their advantage. This requires careful analysis of other companies' ads and marketing messages and how companies distinguish themselves from competitors.

To create a unique selling proposition can on the other hand help to find synergies between single protected areas and nature parks and build up a better

basis for umbrella associations that may find a stronger position on the market and bring benefit for all participants.

Summarizing these general guidelines creating a unique selling proposition, I think, some tips to create a fitting unique selling proposition for nature parks and to strengthen economic power may be:

- Put yourself in your customer's shoes. It is not important to see only wonderful nature but the crucial point is to define the benefits this piece of nature can give to customers.
- Find out how to motivate customer's behaviour and decisions. Why are visitors coming to one special Nature Park? What does it make special?
- Try to put emotions in the USP of a nature park that will strengthen the image of the protected area; that maybe will speak a stronger language than meeting only real needs of the customer.
- Ask customers what they think, what they want.

In my opinion each nature park as a business with its products and services has to be recognized on the market. Competition as part of our economic life needs unique and clear distinguishable positions (<http://www.sdi-research.at/strategie/marketingmatrix.html>). Strategic planning may help to ensure sustainable and long lasting competitiveness of the protected area. It combines knowledge about the market situation with targets and opportunities of the protected area or the nature park.

Also Flasbarth (2004) worked out that large scale protected areas, especially nature parks, can act as a kind of catalyst for sustainable regional development and tourism development. He supports the extending of the role of German nature parks in this field of action and that regional development was incorporated into the catalogue of nature parks. He points out that nature parks and protected areas in general are situated in a framework of open competition. Therefore the development of quality criteria for nature parks seems to be very important as well as the creation of a unique selling proposition of each nature park.

If experiencing nature is an important prerequisite for successfully positioning a region on the market a single protected area as mentioned by Flasbarth (2004), I think that a nature park with a well developed unique selling proposition can on the one hand side strengthen its own market position and on the other side strengthen the market position of the surrounding region. So in my opinion tourism is a quite important factor of regional development and economics in rural areas and therefore there is a specific need for a framework within further development can happen in a sustainable way. Then there can be created good

synergies between regional development as one of the four nature park pillars and nature conservation as a second one.

### 3.7 Nature Parks in Germany and Austria

Further on I will show up the structure, legal framework and targets of Nature parks in Austria and Germany where interviews to USP creation in Nature parks within this work have been done. I focussed on these two countries because the structures and legal frameworks for nature parks within a federal state are quite similar. As discussed at Liesen & Köster (2004) in several European countries, Nature parks are established large-scale nature reserves. Because of their central task to combine a sustainable protection and use of cultural landscape, Nature parks are gaining importance for the future. The biological diversity of the European cultural landscape can only be permanently secured through a sustainable use. However the focus of activities from nature conservation to recreation to regional development is very different in various European countries. In the Nature Parks in South Tyrol nature conservation is the main focus while Germany's nature Parks are focussing on recreation and the French ones on regional development and planning functions ("Raus aus der Käseglocke – Aktiver Naturschutz in Naturparken", Association of Nature Parks in Austria, 2001).

#### 3.7.1 Nature parks in Germany

As shown by the German Association of Nature parks ([www.naturparke.de](http://www.naturparke.de)) the importance of Nature Parks is still increasing because of their central task of combining protection and use of the cultural landscape - the land developed and cultivated by man.

They are an ideal instrument for implementing the integrated, sustainable development of the rural sites demanded on the European and national level. Nature Parks already constitute regions independent of the borders of administrative areas. And the "protection through use" concept of sustainable development has always been the basis of their work. So there is already a structure of cooperation between different interest groups which enables agreement on strategies of sustainable regional development. About 100 nature parks now cover about 25 % of Germany's area.

German Nature Parks play a forward looking and important role in the protection of nature, landscape-based recreation and the conservation of Germany's cultural landscapes. Their contribution is therefore decisive for the identity, preservation and development of the regions. This special identity can also be

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base for the development of unique selling proposition in the single nature parks to communicate characteristics and their benefit to visitors and locals.

According to the legal definition, Nature Parks are large areas consisting mainly of legally protected nature reserves or protected landscapes that are especially suitable for recreation because of their natural beauty.

They have to be planned, structured and developed according to their purpose of recreation and nature conservation. Since they are spacious recreation areas that help to balance the urban and industrial areas, nature parks are very important for the public and enjoy a high level of acceptance.

Nature Parks have succeeded in preserving landscapes with their special characteristics and developing them in a sustainable manner. Nature Parks have proved that nature conservation and use of the land can be reconciled.

At the beginning, the central idea was man's encounter with nature, the experience of the beauty of nature and scenery and the equal value of nature conservation and recreation. In keeping with this central idea, the tasks of landscape-based recreation were initially in the foreground: reasonable control of the increasing number of visitors, recreational facilities compatible with nature, and resolution of the conflict between nature conservation and recreation. The socio-political aspect of nature parks – to provide opportunities for recreation, especially for city-dwellers – was considered very important too.

Nature Parks and their role in society have changed since the beginning of the nature park movement. The ecological approach in dealing with nature and landscape has become more and more important.

In 1989 the restoration of German unity gave new stimulus to Nature Parks. This led to a re-orientation and the establishment of several new Nature Parks, especially in the Eastern German states. With the international conference on environment and development in Rio in

1992 the concept of sustainability took on central importance. In the context of Agenda 21, economic and social development was complemented by ecological development in order to preserve a basis for the life of future generations. The tasks arising from the Nature Park model meet the demands of sustainability in the meaning of Agenda 21. With the concept of integrated and sustainable development of ecological, economic and social factors the nature parks can also provide a regional framework and umbrella for a joint local Agenda 21 embracing several communities.

The importance of Nature Parks is becoming more and more acknowledged on the European level. In its resolution of 12th March 1997, "Regional Nature Parks – examples for the sustainable development of the most sensitive areas of the



European Union”, the Committee of the Regions emphasized the future tasks of Nature Parks in realizing sustainable development of the rural areas in Europe.

### 3.7.1.1 The legal obligation of German nature parks

The legal obligation of nature parks is stated in Art. 27 in conjunction with Art. 1 of the Federal Nature Conservation Act and in the corresponding Acts of the individual German states ([www.naturparke.de](http://www.naturparke.de)).

The law requires the Nature Parks to combine nature conservation with recreation. The Nature Parks were quick to realize that the protection and care of nature and landscapes are essential conditions for any recreation based on the experience of nature and landscape. The task of ensuring sustainable and socially orientated recreation is therefore simultaneously the task of protecting and conserving nature in the individual parks.

### 3.7.1.2 Targets of German nature parks

As mentioned on [www.naturparke.de](http://www.naturparke.de) Nature Parks in Germany were established to preserve, manage, develop or restore large cultural landscapes that are especially important for reasons of nature conservation or because of their characteristic features and outstanding beauty. Each Nature Park represents a unique landscape.

This point of being unique has to be kept in mind discussing about creating unique selling proposition afterwards. The crucial point is that the heart of all nature parks is high value cultural landscape that has to be protected.

Nevertheless this landscape and nature has to be part of sustainable regional development to be strengthened in acceptance by the locals and to bring visitors to the region. It is the challenge to the management of a protected area to avoid tensions between nature protection and economic use of such area but to create cooperation between all stakeholders. Finding a unique selling proposition may be one important part of such economic development and successful marketing.

As worked out by the association of German Nature parks and supported by scientific investigations, Nature Parks should develop into “large model landscapes” and become regions of sustainable development in rural areas.

In Nature Parks, nature conservation and recreation therefore have to be combined with a form of land use and economic development that is environmentally sound; they also have to be combined with a sustainable use of natural resources. Nature Parks improve opportunities of recreation in the

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country, especially for people in the big population centres, and they encourage the development of sustainable tourism, particularly in structurally weak regions. Nature Parks promote sustainable land use in agriculture and forestry. They primarily follow the model of a cultural landscape that is not a "museum"; this can only be preserved and shaped together with the local people and for their benefit. This form of land use maintains and creates the conditions for meeting the requirements of recreation and nature conservation at the same time.

Nature Parks cooperate with various social groups and promote a balance of interests between them. A focal point of their work is therefore environmental education and public relations. In this way they create an understanding and acceptance of nature conservation and promote regional identity and tolerance of sustainable development of the countryside.

### 3.7.1.3 German Nature Parks as model landscapes

In order to safeguard the future work of Nature Parks in accordance with the model of sustainable development and model landscape, the nature parks appeal to the federal government and the individual German states to adopt these principles – where this has not been done already – in their legislation and their regional and financial planning and to ensure that they are implemented in the following manner ([www.naturparke.de](http://www.naturparke.de)):

Taking the principles and objectives of regional planning into consideration, nature parks must be firmly established in the legislation of the German states as model landscapes and model regions and designated as especially protected areas.

Their existence must be safeguarded permanently. This must be done at least by means of statutory instruments of the state governments that are binding for all bodies responsible for regional planning.

The basis for the development of "Nature Parks as Model Landscapes" is regularly updated plans for landscape management and development in the nature parks; these must be integrated into higher planning in the form of sectoral planning.

Tasks of protection, management and development within the framework of nature conservation and landscape management should be assigned to Nature Parks where the competent authorities are unable to undertake them.

Nature Parks should be recognized as bodies acting in the public interest. The tasks of Nature Parks now go beyond the provision of environmentally sound recreation facilities. More and more the parks are taking on various tasks of

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sustainable regional development. For these they need appropriate funds and personnel.

The personnel of the Nature Park administrations have to meet certain minimum requirements. To guarantee continuous work a full-time management is needed; the number and qualification of the management staff will be in accordance with the tasks and size of the Nature Park and the Number of visitors. The funding of Nature Parks varies greatly from one German state to another. As a rule it is inadequate. Since it is an undeniable public responsibility of great importance in the field of environmental, social and structural politics, it is the task of the German states, in particular, to finance the Nature Parks by continuing to appropriate the necessary funds in their budgetary planning.

One fundamental task of nature parks is to establish and maintain facilities for man's recreation in natural surroundings. Cities and conurbations in the vicinity of Nature Parks should have an interest in making an adequate contribution to the considerable expense of maintaining and managing the nature parks and to permit capital expenditure. All the more so, since the Nature Parks have an important function in local outdoor recreation. Tight budgets make it necessary to acquire additional sources of income. Development into "large-scale Model-Landscapes" must be backed by programmes of financial assistance by the federal government and the states and also by the European Union.

### 3.8 Nature Parks in Austria

As shown up by the association of Austrian nature parks ([www.naturparke.at](http://www.naturparke.at)) nature parks represents a diversity of landscapes. Distinguished through their inviolacy, their natural and cultural highlights and a broad spread of possibilities to enjoy, experience and comprehend nature. Today there are 45 Nature Parks in Austria, covering an area altogether of 400.000 ha. Presently the geographical main focus lies in Eastern Austria, the provinces of Lower Austria, Styria and Burgenland, though the number of areas seeking to become a Nature Park is constantly rising. In Tyrol there are actually four Nature parks, in Salzburg three.

As defined on [www.naturparke.at](http://www.naturparke.at), a Nature Park is a protected landscape that was created through the inter-action of people and nature. Very often these landscapes took many centuries to form into their current shape, and they thus need to be conserved and maintained by the people who live here. In Nature Parks this cultural landscape of special aesthetic appeal is opened up for the visitors through special arrangements and accessed as an area for recreation.

Over 5 million guests every year visit the Nature Parks the majority of whom are families living in urban regions. These people want not only to enjoy the

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recreation in such naturally beautiful landscapes but also want to experience nature and cultural oriented education and appreciate the variety of regional specialities in the Parks. This is seen by the increasing number of school groups, attending the holistic environmental education offers of the Nature Parks.

5 million guests are quite a huge amount of customers. Also within Austrian Nature Parks there have been done a study (see [www.naturparke.at](http://www.naturparke.at)) according to motivation of people coming to a region, especially nature parks. One of the outcomes is the fact that visitors of nature parks choose their destination very consciously. Nature parks are engaged quite positively and people have quite a high expectation in offers and quality.

### 3.8.1 Legal objectives of Nature Parks in Austria

The legal framework for nature parks in Austria are nine different nature conservation laws in the federal states. Even there are nine nature conservation laws not each of them includes regulations about nature parks. Also targets according free access, landowners etc. are different. In Lower Austria and Salzburg for example the agreement of each landowner is needed (bottom up principal) before getting a nature park. The legal objective of a Nature Park is the protection of a landscape in connection with the use of the landscape. Especially valuable and characteristic landscapes are protected from destruction and destroying development. The appointing of a rural region with the title "Nature Park" happens through the provincial government, is based on a legal landscape protection category and faces the region with the following challenges ([www.naturparke.at](http://www.naturparke.at)):

- Protection and development of the landscape.
- Creation of recreation possibilities.
- Ecological and cultural education opportunities.
- Promotion of a sustainable regional development through the creation of new jobs and possibilities for additional income in tourism and agriculture.

This model of the four pillars should be basis for all Nature Parks looking for a sustainable and integrative development.

To summarize we can see, in Austrian Nature parks as well as in German ones nature protection should be fulfilled by integration the population. Creating unique selling proposition for the single nature parks may help to communicate the uniqueness and the high value internal and to local population as well as to visitors. Acceptance can increase and then also the support of the population in

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reaching the conservation targets will be ensured. As mentioned in "Gras im Ohr – Schlamm am Zeh", a publication of the Association of Austrian Nature Parks (2002), creating unique offers to be different to others needs creativity, innovation and sometimes quite a lot of courage.

### 3.9 Umbrella associations for protected areas

In the big field of protected areas in common and nature parks in detail there are quite a lot of umbrella associations. Nature Parks are organised within the umbrella associations of Lower Austria, Styria, Burgenland and Tyrol as well as in the association of Austrian Nature Parks while Germany's Nature Parks are organised in the association of German Nature Parks. For all protected areas in Europe Europarc also as an umbrella association was founded to promote exchange of information and cooperation between nature parks and protected areas in Europe. The association of German Nature Parks (VDN) together with EUROPARC Federation is presenting the diversity of the European Nature Parks and their various recreational purposes on the new website, [www.european-parks.org](http://www.european-parks.org). This portal is the first to be offering nature interested people a service orientated access to the European Nature Parks. Numerous offerings and information like for example, hiking or canoe-tours and complete travel packages make the internet site very interesting and useful for the user. Somehow this is one important part of creating a unique selling proposition, knowing customer's need and offer them benefits.

#### 3.9.1 Tasks of several umbrella associations

##### 3.9.1.1 The association of German Nature Parks (VDN)

The association of German nature parks (VDN), founded in 1963, see the most important capital in species and habitat diversity ([www.naturparke.de](http://www.naturparke.de)). The associations' duty is to support Nature Parks in their aim to preserve unique landscapes for and with man and to contribute to a sustainable regional development. Dedication and expertise are provided. Mainly the Association provides help to Nature Parks in founding and developing as model landscapes. Therefore the Association of German Nature Parks is supporting Nature Parks in correspondence to their tasks by law in the promotion of an environmentally friendly and sustainable tourism, in the establishment of an ecological land use which protects and recovers Biodiversity and in proceeding regional development which is maintaining cultural landscapes. To widen the possibilities of environmental education for visitors and the local population therefore is another task the Association takes care of. The prior task of the VDN is to publicize the achievements of Nature Parks as well as to represent the parks' interests to the

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relevant decision-making bodies. Hence the Association strengthens the Nature Parks in Germany and Europe and contributes to their development.

### 3.9.1.2 The Association of Austrian Nature Parks (VNÖ)

In 1995 all Austrian nature parks aligned with each other to form the "Association of Austrian Nature Parks" (Verein der Österreichischen Naturparke – VNÖ, [www.naturparke.at](http://www.naturparke.at)). The Austrian Nature Parks took the opportunity for closer coordination by the enforced cooperation into an umbrella organisation. Within this alliance nature parks want to create pilot regions for sustainable development. The association's most important aim is the support of further development in the field of nature parks in Austria. The main duties and responsibilities of the VNÖ are the representation of Austrian Nature parks at ministerial, government and sponsors, in international and national expert panels and nature conservation organisations, in international conventions and congresses etc. There is a representative common homepage where all single Nature Parks of Austria are on the association is organizing events and pilot projects. The development and implementation of a combined nature park identity was a big success, Nature parks are characterised by the coequal cooperation of conservation, recreation, education and regional development. The objective of this association VNÖ is for qualitative further development of the Nature Parks and the realisation of common marketing projects.

### 3.9.1.3 Naturpark.Erlebnis.Steiermark – one brand, one voice

In May 2004 all Nature Park organisations of Styria and tourism associations of the Styrian nature park regions associated to a working community. In the meantime, as mentioned by Stejskal (2007), this cooperation got to a very efficient Styrian Nature Park umbrella association. One of the main successes was a fixed and double higher budget for each of the seven Nature Parks in Styria since 2006. The main goal of this organisation is the establishment of a brand for nature protection and eco tourism. Since July 2007 there has been started a common management for better strategic development. It is a platform of competences and communication between nature conservation institutions, nature park managements and tourism organisations to ensure sustainable development. The organisation wants to develop the offers and services of Nature parks in the sense of economics and market without losing out of mind the main issues of Nature Parks for landscape protection. As a result Styrian Nature Parks are a fix part of tourism offers in Styria and many synergies can be used. The necessity of working together of the different groups of interest to ensure successful nature park tourism is also worked out by Siegrist (2005). He

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pointed out that cooperation between local actors, partners and different groups of interest is one of the negative factors influencing the development or partly non development of nature park tourism. Working together of nature park management and tourism managers with communities and regional management is ok but it is worse with train and bus organisations. Anyhow there is a high potential of better cooperation!

This example of successful working together, defining synergies and common targets is a quite impressive one. In my opinion after positioning each single Nature park with its uniqueness it might be much easier to find together in such an association and to use all the potential synergies.

### 3.10 European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

As mentioned before Nature parks are part of economics and of nature protection. Protected areas can influence regional development and one important field is for sure tourism that deals with nice landscape, regional products and recreation offers of nature parks. Creating a USP in Nature parks may sometimes be focussed too much to tourism interests only. On the other hand tourism is a quite strong lobby and therefore the main interest should handle with sustainable tourism. Nature parks can be model regions also for sustainable tourism.

As discussed at Flasbarth (2004) in all regions of his study the tourism infrastructure was improved as a result of nature conservation. The range of goods produced in accordance with the objectives of nature conservation has grown considerably. Customer orientation has improved substantially. There exists a high significance of nature conservation and landscape protection for a region. Nature conservation and also nature parks are not independent of funding. However, this is no different to the situation in other economically or socially important sectors such as agriculture, education or the arts. What is uneconomical from a business point of view in terms of direct effects can still very well be successful with regard to the overall economic aspect. Tourism is an increasingly important factor for rural areas as well as for nature parks. Experiencing nature is also a well established reason for holidaying in a particular area. This highlights the significant role of nature conservation and landscape protection in the development of tourism – both of them are a direct source of income for those directly employed in the sector, while also, indirectly, a source of income for the tourism industry which benefits from them and therefore strengthen the regional development. Mentioned like that nature conservation and large scale protected areas can be seen as a catalyst for socio-economic effects.

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The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism is a new developed award for European large-scale protected areas like Nature Parks, National Parks and Biosphere Reserves ([http://www.europarc.org/european-charter.org/Documents/charter\\_full\\_text.pdf](http://www.europarc.org/european-charter.org/Documents/charter_full_text.pdf)). The parks that get involved in sustainable tourism will be awarded. The general aim is to follow the principles of sustainability, to find a balance between the ecological, social and economic aspects of tourism. The European Charter contributes largely to the protection of natural and cultural heritage areas. It connects sustainable touristy development in large-scale nature reserves with the requirement of visitors and the natives. Furthermore an objective is to enhance the quality of the touristy offers and the living quality of the local population.

The Charter was developed by a European panel of experts in the field of, nature protection and tourism. The Charter is awarded by EUROPARC Federation, the umbrella organisation of European large-scale protected areas. The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) as well as the environmental program of the United Nations (UNEP) supports the Charter programme.

The aims of the Charter processes (Rein, 2004; VDN, 2002) are protection and development of the natural and cultural heritage, preservation and improvement of the quality of life for the local population, the development of tourist offers which are in line with market conditions, higher levels of visitor's satisfaction and economic success. I think, as tourism is one part of economics as well as the creation of a unique selling proposition there can be found quite a lot of parallelism according to these points.

As shown in Flisbarth (2004), in the tourism sector large scale conservation areas have proved that they can provide impetus for a sustainable regional development. To meet the demand for tourism, in addition to the natural character there must also be an appropriate tourism infrastructure. In many tourist destinations or in areas wishing to become such destinations, there is often no tourism model. Such a model deals with questions such as what am I offering and which target groups do I want to reach? Which conditions must be met locally in order to achieve the goals of sustainable tourism development which is consistent with nature and environment? Those questions need to be answered and should also be part of the creation of a unique selling proposition. Nature parks can develop their image by elaborating such models in tourism development. The Charter for sustainable tourism is a suitable instrument for this.

As we will discuss later on the unique selling proposition of a nature park should not be only part of tourism but of course a well defined USP can support tourism and regional development.



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In Germany three Nature parks were designed as pilot protected areas to test the Charter for sustainable tourism (Flasbarth, 2004). One of them was nature park Frankenwald. The Charter procedure first identifies an area's tourism strength and weaknesses. This is the basis of developing a future development strategy and to implement needed measures. Furthermore, the targeted tourism development is reconciled to the needs of nature conservation to ensure long term sustainable development for the nature park and the region as a whole.

The Charter process was primarily used to give tourism in Frankenwald nature park a new and above all sustainable image. The key projects included developing a mountain bike route network in cooperation with nature conservation and promoting regional products in order to strengthen the Frankenwald as a tourism destination. Somehow the unique selling proposition for the nature park now is focussing on the special needs and demands of mountain bikers based on wonderful cultural landscape with its local products. Both projects led to a rise in tourism demand and to new target groups being reached. A study has shown that this brand of the nature park Frankenwald has a positive image for around 80 percent of those holidaying in the Frankenwald region. That is one successful example how the development of a brand and a unique selling proposition can influence regional development and the nature park itself.

As discussed at Rein (2004), the advantages of the European Charter for large reserve areas are the following:

- Better cooperation within the protected area.
- Enhanced status of the protected area.
- Competitive advantage through clearer tourism profile.
- Higher credibility towards support institutes.
- Better premise for successful public relations work.
- A part in the European large scale protected areas network, leading to exchange of experiences and better access to EU funds.

In my opinion many of those points worked out are also advantages when a protected area has a unique selling proposition that clears the image of the nature park and strengthen its position on the market. Only if I know who I am and what benefits I can offer I will find my right position and hold it in a sustainable way.

### 3.11 Brand as a support of USP

To keep the success of a created USP long living it is necessary to combine quality with emotions, to create a brand-image. A brand should be a distinctive mark that helps customers to recognize a specific product or service with a special USP.

([http://www.crmmanager.de/ressourcen/glossar\\_363\\_usp\\_unique\\_selling\\_proposition.html](http://www.crmmanager.de/ressourcen/glossar_363_usp_unique_selling_proposition.html)). Developing a brand in the right way is somehow an instrument to strengthen the USP of a product or a service. The brand will help to enhance the acceptance, to remember a good experience, a good product or service and to recognize it. Nature park managers can create customer retention by developing a USP and a brand. Brands are a tool for customer to identify, to assign a product or a service. One important target of creating a brand is to provide confidence with quality, services or image ( <http://www.sdi-research.at/lexikon/marke.html>). To know a special brand and to connect it with good experiences will influence customer behaviour. Products and services they know already will be preferred.

Very often protected areas are seen as something holy to protect where people should mainly stay out. Nature Parks are quite different as discussed above. People and their land use are a quite important factor of creating the typical landscape with high value. Also marketing for a protected area or developing a unique selling proposition doesn't mean to sell a protected area but to manage it in a sustainable way and to guide locals and visitors somehow to a wise land use. The marketing of a protected area should be able to create an image that communicates the real values and uniqueness of the protected area. Creating a brand it is only a part of marketing but it has to be honest, has to mean something and transport some content and value. People have to believe in it to make it successful and people have to get satisfied.

### 3.12 Examples of successful USP and brand in Nature Parks

#### 3.12.1 Nature Parks in Tyrol

Thinking of Tyrolian Nature Parks all of them are situated more or less within the Alps and on the first view it seems hard to point out their uniqueness according nature. However all Nature Parks in Tyrol, the National park Hohe Tauern together with the tourism association have worked out a concept with a unique selling proposition for each nature park. All of them together are marked as

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“more valuable than ever – nature experience Tyrol”. Each of them has its one uniqueness as following:

- Naturpark Tiroler Lech – to be on wild Lech’s track,
- Naturpark Ötztal – feel the world of glaciers,
- Nationalpark Hohe Tauern – a journey to the roots,
- Nature park Kaunergrat – discover the power of diversity,
- Nature Park Zillertaler Alpen – attraction of fascinating natural landscape.

The unique image of the single protected areas strengthens the synergy of all of them together for common marketing in the field of tourism and economics. But also to communicate conservation content is easier with this platform.

### 3.12.2 Nature Parks in South Tyrol

Even Nature Parks of South Tyrol are not really part of this study it seems to be quite interesting to make a very short digression. The main focus of all seven nature parks of South Tyrol together is definitely nature conservation. Nevertheless sustainable tourism is playing a role there.

Every Nature Parks has its one unique selling proposition:

- Nature Park Sextner Dolomiten – loneliness of big names,
- Nature Park Trudner Horn – one visible and one hidden time,
- Nature Park Rieserferner-Ahrn – the limit of nature and the limit of men,
- Nature Park Puez-Geisler – the book of history of the earth,
- Nature Park Texelgruppe – from water and light,
- Nature Park Fanes-Sennes-Prags – in the empire of animals,
- Nature Park Schlern-Rosengarten – old cultures and new perspectives.

Those USP make every Nature Park very special and unique but on the other hand is it a structured composition of all relevant topics in the region of South Tyrol. After visiting one of them you should see also the others to get a perfect overview. In my opinion this is a very good example how unique selling propositions can work – strengthen the single image and at the same time the image of an association!

### 3.12.3 Nature Park Pöllauer Tal in Styria

The example of Pöllauer Tal is well described in one of the booklets of the Association of Austrian Nature Parks (Raus aus der Käseglocke, 2001). It is a region in Styria with nice hills, wine yards and orchards. A very typical element of this landscape is the regional pear "Hirschbirne". Many of the old trees were already lost and the rest was really endangered. The fruits of this tree haven't been used any more and more and more upcoming forest was changing the landscape. In a very participative way a new project for ensuring this local pear tree was created:

- First target was to protect the typical cultural landscape in the nature park with its old orchards and to restore old ones or plant new "Hirschbirnen".
- Second target was the support of the regional development through marketing the products out of the pear. Old knowledge has been used to create new products (Schnaps, vinegar, marmalade etc.). Nowadays everybody connects the Nature Park Pöllauer Tal with this pear "Hirschbirne", the according landscape and its products.
- Exchange of knowledge and education measures.
- Creation of common plants for processing of products and refining them.

Results of this project are many new planted Hirschbirnen trees, new products, new refining methods, new co-operations, new natural areas for fauna and flora, better increase in economic value etc.

This example makes clear that on the first view also a product or a product group can seem to be a unique selling proposition. The second view shows up that the real USP is this local fruit species and the according landscape structure that was developed to the unique selling proposition with all its products and services.

I think that's a very crucial point. Even if products and services seem to be important part of the USP we should never forget the real basis of Nature parks and that ist nature or cultural landscape!

### 3.12.4 Nature Park Altmühltal in Germany

The Nature Park Altmühltal is a big one in Germany and a good example that good projects supporting nature conservation AND regional development need time. In this region there are many areas that need special management measures – in this case grazing by sheep. This traditional form of land use was

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nearly disappeared and all those open grassland areas were endangered to get overgrown with forest.

The Nature Park started an initiative to graze these areas with sheep again. In the beginning this was a hard job because it was very hard to sell the meat. The quality was really good, but there were not the sales that would be needed.

After a participative process in which the Management of the Nature Park tried to find out the reasons of the situation the following came out. The cooks and the owners of the restaurants of the region weren't used to buy half or whole sheep any more. Usually they buy their meat without any regional connection well prepared in small pieces, optimally only filet steak.

The solutions were on the one hand side education in preparing and using a whole sheep again. If a cook is able to do so, it is also a good price of very high quality of a regional product. On the other hand consciousness rising with information, events etc. were done.

Nowadays after ten years all people know the Nature Park Altmühltal as the Nature Park of sheep and grazing areas. The restaurants are proud to cook with local meat. This is an example that it can be very important to keep patient and to look for reasons if something doesn't work before changing the uniqueness of a protected area.

### 3.13 Effect of Nature Parks for regional development

A region is embedded in international, national, cultural, economic and social relations that are dynamic and are connected to each other. Different regions are competitors according to future options as discussed in the study "Wer macht's, wer zahlt's, was bringt's" of the association of Austrian Nature Parks. Of course the establishing of a Nature Park influences the opportunities for development of regional economics. One outcome of this study was that especially the meaning of "soft" economic factors in a Nature Park is very high. A maximum of participation of all regional interests ensure continuity and sustainability in regional economic effects of Nature Parks as well as the integration of all regional and local models, development goals and funding possibilities or a positive image of the Nature Park in the region. Effective management is the basis for communication to ensure know how transfer, creation of strategic synergies, regional marketing and optimizing funding. The planning of the Nature Park ensures bigger unity, clearance for all participants, early solutions for conflicts and risks, clear defined targets for Nature Park.

### 3.13.1 Large scale protected areas as catalysts?

All Austrian Nature Parks should be model regions for sustainable development. Different projects in this field (Nature Park active – new places of work in Nature Parks in Lower Austria etc.) and new opportunities of financing with money from the federal state and the EU brought a push of activity in the Nature Park Ötscher-Tormäuer that led to enlargement of the Nature Park and a new development strategy. As mentioned in the study “Wer macht’s, wer zahlt’s, was bringt’s” of the association of Austrian Nature Parks all in all this Nature Park is not catalyst but more a part of regional development measures in the region. There was also done a questionnaire. 80 % connected the Nature Park with economic attraction for the region and had a quite positive image of the protected area. Attributes given to the Nature Park were very natural, interesting, inviting, various, lively or intimate.

It’s a pity that this Nature Park didn’t take part in the questionnaire of my personnel study work about USP creation. It would have been interesting if the positive image was created after defining a unique selling proposition. However a positive image of a Nature Park in my opinion can strengthen regional development, play an active part in new development or be catalyst through a kind of model effect. I think, being motor or catalyst need some time and successful projects that have already been translated into action. Interesting is the fact that persons that took part of the questionnaires of the Ötscher-Tormäuer study expected the Nature Park to be motor of regional development. The positive image and the acceptance of the local population on the other hand can be gas for the motor effect.

### 3.13.2 Nature Park as regional economic impulse

In Germany Nature Parks cover already 25% of the surface and as discussed before play a big role for rural and economic development in rural areas. As shown in the study “Wer macht’s, wer zahlt’s, was bringt’s” of the association of Austrian Nature Parks Nature Parks are a quite young part of economic impulse for a region. One successful example is the small Nature Park Obersauer. On the one hand side this protected area created a regional brand, on the other hand side regional increase in value through certified products as beef, sausage, ham, special cereal, beer. Therefore also the value of the cultural landscape could be strengthened. Beside the positive economic influence a part of the earned money flows back to nature conservation measures. In my opinion this example shows perfectly the heterogeneous field of activities of a Nature Park and the

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establishment of real sustainable development. Anyhow Nature Parks in actual times have to look for new opportunities to create funds and finances.

One way could be economic activities, especially the marketing of regional products! A study in Germany's Nature Parks showed up that Nature parks - especially in the field of regional products and new marketing cooperation - play an important role for regional marketing strategy and therefore also ensure cultural landscape and its further sustainable development. In future the activities in the field of regional products should be enforced, not to forget quality checks to keep high quality standard of Nature Park products and the positive Nature Park image.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Discussion of the results

One main focus of this study work was the questionnaire that was sent to a sample of Nature Parks in Germany and Austria. The choice wasn't done at random but it was reduced to the Nature Park with email contact. Unfortunately the sample of responses wasn't too big (16 from Austria and Germany together). Therefore the results will be discussed only qualitatively.

### 4.2 Content and output of the questionnaire

Focussing on nature parks in Austria and Germany this work deals with the question of positioning a protected area – in this case different nature parks – in the wide market field of protected areas. What do these nature parks need to handle marketing aspects? How much sense does it make to create a USP for a nature park? When should a USP be created and should it be done by the PA management itself? How can a USP get created? How much value should be related to an USP? Even USP creation for nature parks has quite a young history in Germany and Austria. This work tries to give an overview of the status quo based on questionnaires and interviews and to create a kind of guideline for finding a unique selling proposition for each nature park.

The first question of the questionnaire was "Do you know what a unique selling proposition is?" Before going on answering the questions it seems to be important that everybody knows what I was speaking of using this term. Therefore when answering with "no" there was a short description or definition of the term unique selling proposition before continuing in answering (see questionnaire in the Annex). Most of the interview partners knew already the meaning of a unique selling proposition. Only two didn't know the definition and one heard already about but wasn't sure where to connect it.

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The next four questions deal with the problem if marketing is an important factor for the long lasting existence of a nature park, if nature park managements should deal with marketing internally or externally and to whom this agenda could be delegated? Nearly all Nature Parks of the survey see a big role of marketing in the long lasting existence for a Nature Park. Only one was thinking that it make no difference for sustainable existing if a Nature Par is dealing with marketing issues or not. As another interesting point nearly all Nature Parks think that marketing issues should e handled and solved within the Nature Park management. The question if the Nature Park management should deal with marketing externally wasn't answered that clear. A quarter of the Nature Parks would give marketing to external experts. Also a quarter would keep it within the own management agenda. The main group answered this question with very concrete point according to their Nature Park. In several Nature Parks there exists cooperation with tourism associations for dealing with marketing issues. Another opinion pointed out that it strongly depends on the budget can be used for marketing and a decision to handle it internally or externally has to be found individually. A critical comment was the threat of external experts that after some time not the Nature Park itself but a professional marketing agency is creating the content of the Nature Park and the main focus on the four pillars of Nature Park development would miss. Another answer was to leave some marketing issues internally and to give other parts to external experts. Discussing who such experts could be the main answer was tourism associations, but also marketing agencies were chosen. Nature protection departments of the federal government are the worst fitting marketing experts within the answers of this study.

The next question tried to find out if the positioning of a single nature park on the big market of protected areas and leisure offers is important? The most Nature Parks think that a positioning of the market of protected areas is very important for single Nature Parks. Two critical opinions are not sure if Nature Parks have even the chance to find a position on the market of protected areas because National Parks and Biosphere Reserves as big brothers are hard to deal with. Another comment was how far Nature Parks are a "same level protected area" than the other two or more an instrument for regional development.

The next block of questions asked for if the development of a unique selling proposition is important for a nature park, if there does exist a USP in the nature park someone is working for, if someone has been involved in the development of the USP and who has created it? When has the unique selling proposition been developed and when is personally meant the optimal time for it?

Most of the Nature Parks see the importance of creating a unique selling proposition for the development of a Nature Park. One critical comment is the question when the market of (Austrian) Nature Parks will be saturated. The



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opinion of this interview partner was one of the strength of Austrian National Parks their amount is more or less fixed with actually six. Another one mentioned that USP development is harder the more Nature Parks are dealing for a market position and that political will plays a quite big role. All of the Nature Parks are sure that creating a USP for a Nature Park can be an advantage according a sustainable positioning of a Nature Park on the market of protected areas.

Two third of the interview partners have a unique selling proposition in the Nature Park they work for. Two Nature Parks are without a USP and for two a USP is being developed at the moment.

The question from whom the USP was developed could be answered only from about three quarter of all participants. In nearly all cases of this amount, the manager of a Nature Park was involved in the process of USP finding. Very often also the planning team of a Nature Park was working for USP creation. Participation of all relevant stakeholders was also mentioned quite often as important factor.

Also the question when the unique selling proposition was developed could not e answered by all of the interview partners. Those who answered were quite different. The time for creating a USP in the Nature Parks differs from planning phase once to mostly second to fourth year and after the fifth year. It is interesting that the first year of being a Nature Park seems not to be relevant for USP creation. Asking for the optimal point of time for USP creation the answers were also very different. This fits quite well to the very specific situation and uniqueness in each Nature Park and shows up how difficult it is to define one single solution.

Most of the Nature Parks answering the questionnaire were or actually are involved personally in USP creation for the Nature Park. Most of the Nature Parks see a high importance to involve many stakeholders and to focus on participation by creating a unique selling proposition. The question if a strong USP of each single Nature Park can strengthen the association of all Nature Parks together was answered only partly with yes, some of the Nature Parks were not sure how to answer this question.

According the question which contents could and should be base for defining a unique selling proposition answers are very heterogeneous and interesting. Protected plants or animal species are nearly not mentioned as focus for USP creation, protected landscape and habitats are mentioned quite often as well as regional products and cultural uniqueness of a region. A point to discuss is the regional product as basis for USP development that seems to be important in many cases. Even in the case of Nature Parks the uniqueness belongs to natural specifics, without them the region would never get the label Nature Park. Also the unique selling proposition should maybe focus on natural values as landscape

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or species. Of course local products can play an important role for Nature Parks but mostly also these products are based on specific landscape structures. What is coming up by answering the questions according to the content or focus of a USP it is getting clear that there are many possibilities to create a Unique selling proposition and that it can be focussed differently. Nevertheless the relation to the landscape and to natural values should not be forgotten.

Is there a brand or a motto to support the unique selling proposition of your nature park? The answers to this question are also interesting. Two thirds of them have an additional brand or motto for the Nature Park that support the USP, in some others there is one in development at the moment. Summarizing there can be said that Nature Parks recognize an added value in creating also a brand or a motto to strengthen the USP.

Are there advantages or disadvantages in creating a USP? Advantages in the opinion of the participants for sure are better cooperation opportunities by defining what a single Nature Park can offer, what image it is living. Also the situation by searching for new sponsors can be seen more professional with a well defined USP. There were not really mentioned disadvantages but there was stroke out the threat of focussing on only a small part of the complex building Nature Park by creating a unique selling proposition.

#### 4.3 Definition the strength of a protected area

The strategy must be to define first all the strengths and weaknesses of a nature parks before defining visitor's demands. After that the unique selling proposition can be defined. What does the nature park make special, unique?

In the questionnaire there was the question what could be basis for a USP. The possibilities of answers were protected landscape or habitat, protected animal or plant, local products, special offers for special target groups as seniors or children, cultural features.

In my opinion the real uniqueness of a nature park should be something based to nature. In the case of nature parks that can either be single protected plants or animals or whole landscapes. The label nature park is given to a special valued piece of cultural landscape that needs a specific conservation category below. Without that uniqueness of natural value there neither could be any protection category nor any nature park label. Therefore also the creation of the unique selling proposition shouldn't be reduced to a product or some special offers but should focus on this natural uniqueness. Based on this also visitor's needs and demands can be defined and special offers can be created as well as local products based on the typical landscape and its species can be developed. The

strength of a nature park should always be the high value of the cultural landscape with its natural features and man use that may differ from region to region and makes each park unique.

#### 4.4 Vision development and USP creation

Vision development and good management is quite an important step in regional development as well as in protected areas. It is necessary to define it - optimally in a participative way to integrate as many opinions of different stakeholders as possible. It would make sense to create it in a common process (e.g. with workshops or other methods) and if needed also with external moderation. It should be made sure that all relevant opinions and stakeholders are heard and that all of them are integrated in a common vision. After that I see the chance that all of them will support the vision and work for the common targets.

As shown in Davey (1998), within each country the fundamental aim of conservation should be the care of all land and water. Thus, while these guidelines relate to protected areas, it is important not to lose sight of the many links to land use planning and sustainable economic and social development at a broader scale. Bio-regional planning provides a means of making those connections. This approach looks beyond the boundaries of strictly protected areas, to include the establishment of buffer and support zones around them, the creation of corridors of ecologically-friendly land use between them and the restoration of areas which have lost their ecological value. In this way, bio-regional planning can help to strengthen protected areas and place them within a national strategy for conservation and a real sustainable development.

If a common vision is worked out sustainable development is ensured and high support by nearly all stakeholders is guaranteed. Regional development as well as the management of a protected area has to be seen as an ongoing process and nothing that is finished just after creating a vision or a target. Nevertheless the vision and the strategic plan are the important basis for creating a USP that will last in a sustainable way. Nature Parks as protected areas where nature will be protected through wise land use by men are part of the economic world, not something external. A unique selling proposition can help the management of a protected area to strengthen the position of a single nature park in the field of Nature Parks and protected areas but also in their surroundings. It is important for a Nature Park to define its own character and its uniqueness. On the other hand knowing who you are may help to cooperate and to find synergies with similar protected areas. Common targets can be worked on together in umbrella associations.

#### 4.5 Fundraising and sponsoring – better chances with a USP?

One question in the questionnaire was if someone does think that a strong unique selling proposition can it make easier to find new sponsors for the nature park? In my opinion there is a quite strong connection between the image a nature park creates and the chance of finding sponsors. The more this image is a professional one that fits also in the world of economics the better are the chances in find new cooperation partners or sponsors!

As pointed out in Liesen & Köster (2004) a basic financing for nature parks is provided by a budget which is put regularly at disposals and exists in very different amounts in the countries of Europe. For example in Germany in 2004 only 10 out of 14 federal states with nature parks receive direct or indirect basic financing. Financial backer of the basic financing is often the state, the regions, the federal states or the local authorities. In addition to the basic funding nature parks finance themselves through project based EU funds, national funds and funds from the regions and local authorities. More and more some nature parks support their financing through own revenues or through private sponsors. Another important fact is the output of a questionnaire done by Liesen & Köster (2004) that stressed out financing as one of the weakest points of nature parks beside personnel. The more private sponsors are getting important the more a professional entrance with a well defined USP will be important.

As discussed by Stoll-Kleemann (2001) the funding of protected areas is regarded as insufficient to ensure the integrity of nature conservation measures. For example for German nature Parks the funding for management is not only low but also unstable and decreasing, so that prolonged and comprehensive intervention, protection and management, is impossible.

Managing a protected area like a nature park means dealing quite a huge amount of different cost areas. Besides the main aim of nature protection education and recreation play a crucial role being handled by management. One important challenge for the management is ensuring to finance all these fields of cost to save long term protection of the site. In Austria financing protected areas mostly is done by public money from government. Of course there can be mentioned various levels of potential funds: international (e.g. international NGOs, multilateral financial institutions etc.), national (taxes, national environment funds etc.) and regional/local (e.g. local customers, user fees, individual donations etc.). Optimally possibly many of the different sources of finances should be used. Sustainability as a term means a balance between ecology, social aspects and economy. Global movement and development needs also global solutions although development to get more global means also to get more local. One crucial point is that thinking about protected areas is impossible

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without thinking about finances. In Protected areas very often the main issue is how to raise money but not to think about how to use it most efficiently. To answer this question it is very important to know the exact costs of the PA. Also influencing the financial plan are the potential benefits to the local community due to the PA (e.g. job creation, selling products and services, increasing infrastructure, ecosystem services etc.). Another point of view to look at is the willingness to pay that is very often in a big difference to real paying. Even this point may be influenced positively by a well defined USP that increase acceptance and identification. All these factors are influencing finance planning.

And one thing is sure in my opinion: Without business plan there is no chance to check the opportunity of the PA to be commercialized. It is important to get out the commercial options of the very specific PA to create an optimal finance plan and to ensure long term conservation as well as sustainable economic ongoing. The real challenge is to handle and combine both interests: conservation as a public interest and business with its main issue to make money. The best way to do that will be the integration of the management of the PA in the regional development plan and not to see the PA separated.

As shown by Emerton et al (2006) categorizing PA financing mechanisms according to how funds are raised and used can be divided into three groups depending on the way in which the funds are raised and used. All the different mechanisms can play an important role within sustainable financing of protected areas and should be taken into consideration to create the "optimal" business plan for a PA to ensure long term protection.

Actually protected areas mostly are not financially sustainable because funds are mainly coming from public money and nearly not from other sources being more connected with the whole region and the regional development. Of course one opportunity for sustainable financing the protected area is building up a USP and a brand that will improve the possibilities to strengthen acceptance by locals and visitors and to find new cooperation partners and donors. As discussed in Dudley et al (2005) one of the goals within the programme of work on protected areas is to ensure financial sustainability of protected areas and national and regional systems of protected areas. The target by 2008 is sufficient financial, technical and other resources to meet the costs to effectively implement and manage national and regional systems of protected areas are secured, including both from national and international sources, particularly to support the needs of developing countries and countries with economies in transition and small island developing states. Even for counties in the "golden West" it will be important to ensure financial sustainability also from new sources besides the "classical" public funds. One first step could be to do studies of the effectiveness in using existing financial resources and of financial needs to optimize it long term seen. Also the CBD focuses on this idea as shown in Dudley et al (2005) to identify

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options for meeting these needs through a mixture of national and international resources taking into account the whole range of possible funding instruments, such as public funding, debt for nature swaps, elimination of perverse incentives and subsidies, private funding, taxes and fees for ecological services. The CBD is interested in building up networks of countries developing and implementing sustainable financing programmes for national and regional systems of protected areas. Information in Protected areas financing should be increased. Another point of view is the needed integration of protected areas needs into national AND regional development plans, as mentioned above, to focus on financing strategies and development cooperation programmes.

As mentioned by Emerton et al (2006) a key condition for securing public funds for protected areas also in future will be the ability of Protected areas manager to justify their funding requests in term of socio-economic objectives. It is equally clear that conventional sources of PA funding will not be sufficient to maintain and expend PA networks in the future or to meet the growing demands placed upon them. Financing mechanism with high potential for sustainability include fiscal and financial instruments long used in other sectors of the economy, such as taxes, subsidies and credit schemes, and devolution of cost and benefit-sharing mechanisms for PA management and facilities. Payments for ecosystem services also have high potential as mechanisms to generate funding for protected areas and biodiversity conservation generally. Efforts to enhance PA funding should capitalize on the growing diversity of funding sources. PA managers should particularly seek to mobilize increased resources from private and non-governmental sources, through commercial and extra-budgetary channels. This diversification of funding may be seen as prerequisite for ensuring the long term financial sustainability of protected areas. Optimally it would be to integrate this diversification of funding in a well designed regional development plan. Both the financing and the regional development plan around a protected area or a nature park can be supported by a well designed unique selling proposition of the nature park.

As discussed in Müller (2008) creating a brand for a protected area may support successful sponsorships. This somehow closes the circle to the thoughts in the beginning of this work where the importance of marketing, USP creation in common and for nature parks in detail and brand as a support for a unique selling proposition have been discussed. One outcome of the Work of Müller is, that if the protected area has a brand with a "good image" this fact is one of the success factors according to sponsorship beside personal network and availability of projects within the park. The brand has to be of high quality and embedded into a clear management strategy. Based on this also a sponsorship strategy can be worked out. The suitability of sponsors is another key factor. To find the right sponsor needs first a clear vision what a single nature park is standing for, which

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values the nature park offers, where the uniqueness is. Sponsors can for sure also have high impact on the park's brand image. Therefore sponsors have to be chosen as well as target groups. Marketing is needed to define services and benefits of nature parks in order to reach and attract potential and fitting sponsors.

#### 4.6 USP as important factor

Provided unique selling proposition for a Nature Park has been created in a strong connection to uniqueness of nature and landscape one outcome of the study was the importance of a USP in the role of professional communication. Communication and participation are necessary elements even in the field of Nature Parks to ensure sustainable acceptance of the locals and to develop the area together.

A USP is needed to make one nature park special and to tell locals and visitors why a nature park with its characteristics is special and how it brings specific benefits to them. It is not enough to have unique nature but a place in the market of protected areas have to be defined. The management of a Nature Park has the challenge to communicate the unique image of a specific Nature Park – internal and external!

The creation of a unique selling proposition in theory should take place already in the planning phase. As shown out of my personal experience and the outcome of the questionnaires most of the Nature Parks are creating a USP not in the planning phase or the first year but later. I think that is a typical example that theory and praxis don't have to fit. In reality the establishing and development of a Nature Park is strongly shaped by the interaction with locals. It is hard to foresee how this process will go on. Defining a USP means to list all the characteristics and unique elements of a protected areas and for sure that can be done already in the planning phase, for example with a SWOT analysis.

On the other hand creating a unique selling proposition needs the definition of the main target group and their expectations. This point may be more difficult because it depends very strongly of the development a Nature Park together with its management and the locals go.

However, the USP of a Nature Park should play an important role already in the planning phase but has to be evaluated and if needed adopted during the first years of existing. The image that is drawn with the unique selling proposition then can strengthen the acceptance of the locals and visitors.

#### 4.6.1 Guideline for creating USP for Nature Parks

Every Nature Park is unique and has its own history. Therefore also creating the unique selling proposition cannot be handled with one single best solution but there are defines some guidelines to define a USP for Nature Parks below:

##### **Main steps for creating a unique selling proposition of a Nature Park**

- Think about what a USP is for in general (drawing a concrete image of uniqueness, strengthening of the acceptance, instrument for internal and external communication, find a position on the market of protected areas) and what it could be a specific Nature Park
- Define main characteristics of the Nature Park – e. g. with a SWOT analysis
- Define target group(s) – the concreter target groups are defined the easier it will find out their expectations
- Define specific benefits for locals AND customers of the Nature Park
- Develop the unique selling proposition (USP) with as much participation as possible
- Support USP with brand and/or motto
- Communicate USP and brand internal and external consequently – the drawn image has to be filled with content and life!
- Evaluate the content and effect of the USP in several times to ensure credibility and acceptance!



## 5. CONCLUSION

Developing a unique selling proposition is dealing with the natural beauties and the uniqueness of landscape of a Nature Park and with the concrete expectations of locals and visitors coming to a protected area.

Nowadays it seems to be quite modern to see also protected areas with their management as a part of economics. I think this is on the one hand side really necessary because all of us are living and dealing in an economic world and also protected areas have to deal with managing, marketing and finding finances. It makes no sense to keep those aspects out of contemplation. Even in my opinion it is very important to keep the main issue of Nature Parks – especially nature and landscape protection together with human using of it in a sustainable way – in mind.

Otherwise there is the threat to loose the connection to the basis and to reduce actions only to economics. In case of Nature Parks this could mean to forget why these areas have been established as a protected area and why they have got the special label of a nature park. They are cultural landscapes of outstanding beauty that was created through a traditional interaction of nature and land use by men. This interaction is needed also in future to keep Nature Parks as outstanding landscapes that play an important role in ensuring biodiversity of habitats and landscapes. Therefore Nature Parks in my opinion have to be seen as model areas for sustainable development and within this framework the creation of the unique selling proposition has to be settled.

The better the USP will fit expectations of local population and visitors the better it will work in an economic way and the better it will work as motor for sustainable regional development and nature conservation!

### 5.1 Threat of developing a USP

The main voice of the answers coming back with the questionnaires clearly was the importance of developing a unique selling proposition for each Nature Park. Some crucial point in my opinion is the partly different understanding of marketing terms and using them in a standardized.

As every thing also creating a unique selling proposition has to be seen on two sides and has to be used in a wise way. One of the main threats also worked out within my interviews is the fact that creating a USP means to focus strongly on characteristics and uniqueness of a protected area and than to develop uniqueness in corresponding unique benefits for customers or visitors of a Nature Park.

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It might happen that focussing only on the specialities of a Nature Park will bring an imbalance in the whole “construction” of the protected area. In my opinion an ongoing evaluation and analysing of the image and the unique selling proposition of a Nature Park, the effects out of it and the credibility is needed to ensure real sustainable development of the protected area and the region around and to be able to stay dynamic and flexible if needed. If Nature Parks should be kind of model landscapes for sustainable rural development also the creating of unique selling propositions should be handled wise. Only then this marketing instrument will bring benefits to the protected area!

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**APPENDIX – QUESTIONNAIRE IN GERMAN AND ENGLISH**

**FRAGEBOGEN**

**„USP Entwicklung (Alleinstellungsmerkmal) in Naturparken als Instrument erfolgreichen Marketings?“**

*Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren, liebe Kolleginnen und Kollegen!*

*Dieser Frage wird im Rahmen meiner Diplomarbeit des Masterstudiums „Management of Protected Areas“ der Universität Klagenfurt nachgegangen und ich bin hier auf Ihre/Deine aktive Unterstützung durch die Beantwortung folgender Fragen basierend auf Ihrem/Deinem Erfahrungsschatz als Naturparkakteur angewiesen! Herzlichen Dank, dass Sie sich/Du Dir ein paar Minuten zur Beantwortung dieser Fragen Zeit nehmen/nimmst! Der Fragebogen ist in zwei Teile gegliedert, im ersten ist bitte jeweils nur eine Kategorie/eine Antwort anzukreuzen, im zweiten Teil haben Sie/hast Du die Möglichkeit, offene Fragen mit eigenen Worten zu beantworten. Ich freue mich auf eine Rücksendung per Email oder Fax bis spätestens 18. April 2008 unter [info@naturpark-weissbach.at](mailto:info@naturpark-weissbach.at) oder +43(0)6582 8352-32. Herzlichern Dank!*

*Christine Klenovec*

*Naturparkbetreuerin im Naturpark Weißbach*

Name des Naturparks	Datum	InterviewpartnerIn inkl. Telefon und Email	Funktion im Naturpark

1) Wissen Sie, worum es sich beim USP (unique selling proposition) handelt?

- ja                     nein
- habe schon davon gehört, kann es aber nicht zuordnen
- keine Angabe                     Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

*Falls diese Frage mit nein beantwortet wird, bitte vor der Beantwortung der folgenden Fragen die Definition zum USP am Ende dieses Fragebogens lesen, herzlichen Dank!*

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2) Spielt Marketing für das erfolgreiche und langfristige Bestehen eines Naturparks eine Rolle?

ja       nein       egal       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

3) Sollen sich Naturparke Ihrer Meinung nach selbst, d. h. innerhalb ihres Managements mit Marketingfragen beschäftigen?

ja       nein       egal       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

4) Sollen Marketingfragen ihrer Meinung nach im Management eines Naturparks berücksichtigt, allerdings in ihrer Abwicklung ausgelagert werden?

ja       nein       egal       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

5) An wen könnte ihrer Meinung nach die Abwicklung von Marketingfragen für einen Naturpark ausgelagert werden bzw. mit wem könnte kooperiert werden?

gar nicht       an Tourismusverbände       Marketing-/Werbeagentur

Naturschutzabteilung des Landes       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

6) Denken Sie, dass eine ökonomische Positionierung auf dem Markt von Schutzgebieten und anderen Freizeitangeboten für Ihre Arbeit im Naturpark wichtig ist?

ja       nein       egal       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

7) Denken Sie, dass USP/Alleinstellungsmerkmal für die Entwicklung eines Naturparks wichtig ist?

ja       nein       egal       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

8) Denken Sie, dass USP/Alleinstellungsmerkmal-Entwicklung für die nachhaltige Positionierung eines Naturparks am großen Markt der Schutzgebiete und Freizeitangebote vorteilhaft sein kann?

ja       nein       egal       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_



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9) Wurde für den Naturpark, in dem Sie tätig sind, ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal/USP entwickelt?

ja       nein       weiß ich nicht       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

10) Wenn ja, von wem wurde ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal im Naturpark entwickelt?

NaturparkleiterIn       Naturparkvorstand/-gremium       Planungsteam

gemeinsam mit relevanten InteressenvertreterInnen       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

11) Wann wurde ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal im Naturpark entwickelt?

Planungsphase       Aufbauphase (im ersten Jahr)  im 2. bis 4. Jahr

im 5. Jahr oder danach  keine Angabe       Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

12) Waren Sie persönlich in die Entwicklung eines Alleinstellungsmerkmals im Naturpark involviert?

ja       nein       Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

13) Welche Inhalte oder Schwerpunkte wurden für die Entwicklung des Alleinstellungsmerkmals „Ihres“ Naturparks besonders genutzt?

geschützte Tierart       geschützte Pflanzenart

geschützte Landschaft/Lebensraum       regionale(s) Produkt(e)

Angebote für spezielle Zielgruppen (Senioren, Kinder etc.)

kulturelle Besonderheiten der Region       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

14) Welche Inhalte oder Schwerpunkte sind Ihrer Meinung nach allgemein für die Entwicklung eines Alleinstellungsmerkmals für einen Naturpark besonders geeignet?

geschützte Tierart       geschützte Pflanzenart

geschützte Landschaft/Lebensraum       regionale(s) Produkt(e)

Angebote für spezielle Zielgruppen (Senioren, Kinder etc.)

kulturelle Besonderheiten der Region       keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

15) Wurde für „Ihren“ Naturpark ein Motto oder eine Marke entwickelt, um das Alleinstellungsmerkmal/USP zu unterstützen?

ja    nein    ich weiß nicht    keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

16) Denken Sie, dass ein starkes Alleinstellungsmerkmal/USP Kooperationen mit Projektpartnern und anderen Schutzgebieten erleichtern kann?

ja    nein    egal    keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

17) Denken Sie, dass ein starkes Alleinstellungsmerkmal/USP die Unterstützung durch neue Sponsoren für den Naturpark erleichtern kann?

ja    nein    egal    keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

18) Wann sollte Ihrer Meinung nach ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal/USP optimaler Weise für einen Naturpark entwickelt werden?

Planungsphase    Aufbauphase (im ersten Jahr)

im 2. bis 4. Jahr    im 5. Jahr oder danach    keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

19) Denken Sie, dass für die nachhaltig wirksame Entwicklung eines Alleinstellungsmerkmals/USP die Einbeziehung wichtiger Interessenvertreter – also ein partizipativer Ansatz – wichtig ist?

ja    nein    egal    keine Angabe

20) Denken Sie, dass die Entwicklung eines Alleinstellungsmerkmals für jeden einzelnen Naturpark das gesamte Erscheinungsbild aller Naturparke stärken kann?

ja    nein    egal    keine Angabe

Sonstiges \_\_\_\_\_

*Bei den folgenden Fragen bitte ich Sie um eine Beantwortung mit ein paar kurzen Worten zur ganz konkreten Situation im Naturpark, in dem Sie tätig sind:*

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21) Sehen Sie Vorteile in der Entwicklung eines Alleinstellungsmerkmals/USP für einen Naturpark und wenn ja, welche?

22) Sehen Sie Nachteile in der Entwicklung eines Alleinstellungsmerkmals/USP für einen Naturpark und wenn ja, welche?

23) Wie sehen Sie die Position „Ihres“ Naturparks auf dem Markt der Naturparke und anderer Schutzgebiete?

24) Was macht „Ihren“ Naturpark besonders für Einheimische und BesucherInnen?

25) Ist es Ihnen bzw. Ihren Mitarbeitern gelungen, für „Ihren“ Naturpark ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal/USP oder ein Motto/einen Brand zu entwickeln, mit dem sie sich erfolgreich auf dem Markt positionieren können und wenn ja welches?

26) Wie und mit wem haben Sie das Alleinstellungsmerkmal/USP für den Naturpark entwickelt, welche Methoden oder Instrumente haben Sie verwendet?

27) Wie kommunizieren Sie das Alleinstellungsmerkmal nach außen?

28) Kennen BewohnerInnen und BesucherInnen das Besondere in Ihrem Naturpark und wie erkennen/überprüfen Sie das?

*Definition USP: Als Alleinstellungsmerkmal (engl. unique selling proposition, USP) wird im Marketing und in der Verkaufspsychologie das Leistungsmerkmal bezeichnet, mit dem sich ein Angebot deutlich vom Wettbewerb und somit von den anderen Anbietern abhebt.*

Herzlichen Dank für Ihre/Deine Zeit, die zur Beantwortung dieses Fragebogens zur Verfügung gestellt wurde!

**Questionnaire – English version**

**„Development of USP (unique selling proposition) in Nature Parks as an instrument of successful marketing?“**

*Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues!*

*This question should get answered within my master thesis of the master study „Management of Protected Areas“ at the University of Klagenfurt nachgegangen. I ask you for your support by answerinf the following questions out of your experience as a protagonist in a nature park. Thank a lot for taking some time. The questionnaire has two parts, the first on eis to be answeres with one single answer per question, the second one gives you the possibility to answer with your own words. I look forward to get your return via email or fax till 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2008 ([info@naturpark-weissbach.at](mailto:info@naturpark-weissbach.at) oder +43(0)6582 8352-32). Thanks a lot!*

*Christine Klenovec*

*CEO of Nature Park Weißbach, Salzburg, Austria*

Name of the nature park	Date	Who has answered?	Position in nature park

1) Do you know what the USP is? (unique selling proposition)

- yes       no       have heard of it but don't know how to handle
- no comment       other \_\_\_\_\_

*If you answer this question with no, please read the definition of USP at the end of the questionnaire before going on, thanks!*

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2) Is marketing important for a successful and long lasting existence of a nature park?

- yes       no       the same       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

3) Do you think that nature parks should deal with marketing questions within their own management?

- yes       no       the same       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

4) Do you think that nature parks should deal with marketing questions but delegate it to external experts?

- yes       no       the same       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

5) To whom could the dealing with marketing questions be delegated, who could be cooperation partner for the nature park management?

- no one       tourism associations  
 marketing/advertising agency       department of nature protection  
 no comment       other \_\_\_\_\_

6) Do you think that economic positioning on the market of protected areas and other leisure time offers is important for your work in the nature park?

- yes       no       the same       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

7) Do you think that the creation of a unique selling proposition (USP) is important for the development of a nature park?

- yes       no       the same       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

8) Do you think that a USP for your nature park can help positioning it in a sustainable way on the big market of protected areas and leisure time offers?

- yes       no       the same       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

9) Has there been created a USP for the nature park you work for?

- yes       no       I don't know       no comment
- other \_\_\_\_\_

10) If there is a USP, who has developed it?

- CEO of the nature park       board of the nature park
- planning team       together with relevant stakeholder       no comment
- other \_\_\_\_\_

11) When was the USP of the nature park developed?

- planning phase       during the first year       from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year
- in the 5<sup>th</sup> year or afterwards       no comment
- other \_\_\_\_\_

12) Have you been involved personally in the development of the USP?

- yes       no       other \_\_\_\_\_

13) Which content or focus has been used for the development of the USP in „your“

nature park?

- protected animal    protected plant       protected landscape/habitat
- regional product(s)       cultural feature of the region
- offers for specific target groups (seniors, children etc.)
- no comment       other \_\_\_\_\_

14) Which content or focus should be used for the development of the USP in general?

- protected animal    protected plant       protected landscape/habitat
- regional product(s)       cultural feature of the region
- offers for specific target groups (seniors, children etc.)
- no comment       other \_\_\_\_\_

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15) Is there a brand or a motto for the nature park you are working for to support the USP?

- yes       no       I don't know       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

16) Do you think that a strong USP can make cooperation with project partners and other protected areas more easy?

- yes       no       the same       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

17) Do you think that a strong USP can make finding new sponsors or donors easier?

- yes       no       the same       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

18) When is the best time to create a USP for a nature park you think?

- planning phase       during the first year       from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year  
 in the 5<sup>th</sup> year or afterwards       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

19) Do you think that a sustainable USP development does need a participative starting point by integrating important stakeholder?

- yes       no       the same       no comment

20) Do you think that the USP of a single nature park could strengthen the whole association of nature parks?

- yes       no       the same       no comment  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

*The following questions may be answered with your own short words:*

21) Do you see advantage in develop a USP for a nature park and if so which one?

22) Do you see disadvantage in develop a USP for a nature park and if so which one?

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23) How do you define the position of „your“ nature park on the market of other nature parks and protected areas?

24) What does the nature park you work for make special to locals and visitors?

25) Have you already developed a USP and a brand for a successful position on the market and if so which?

26) How and with whom did you develop the USP, which methods and instruments did you use?

27) How do you communicate the USP?

28) Do locals and visitors know the characteristics of the nature park and how do you check it?

*Definition USP: The unique selling proposition is the characteristic of a product or a service that makes it special for the customer, brings specific benefit and makes strong against competition.*

Thank for your time answering the questionnaire!