

### 3.2 *Hohe Tauern & South Tyrol - Paragliding effects on wildlife*

**Date:** 06.10.2017,

**Location:** Lienz, OstTyrol (AT)

#### Summary of the workshop

The aim of the workshop was to discuss with different kind of stakeholders the potential impact of paragliding activities on deer and chamois disturbance, which can have a negative effect on forest regeneration. The topic was brand new for the area and the invited stakeholders were gathered for the first time to discuss this issue. The general approach and atmosphere was very good. Participants had the aim of understanding the different needs, issues and interests of the other groups and find a common solution. Sport activities in these areas are of great economic importance, therefore this workshop got the attention of several institutions and interests groups.

The workshop was conducted with a general introduction by Eurac, followed by a presentation on the potential impacts of sports activities and paragliding on wildlife presence, movements and behavioral changes - although not reliable scientific sources are currently at disposal to sustain this hypothesis.

The general discussion was organized dividing the participants into small groups, according to their belonging category (paragliders, foresters, hunters, nature protectionists) - so that each group could build its own position.

After that, a general discussion was conducted, where new issues emerged that were discussed in two new working groups, one about the knowledge that needs to be generated and one on the specific issues related to the most used valley of paragliding utilization.

#### INTRO

The Project Working Region of Hohe Tauern National Park (AT) and South Tyrol (IT), expanded on each side of the Italian/Austrian border. This PWR is constituted by two different national areas that share the same language. The National Park Hohe Tauern is located in the administrative regions Osttirol (East Tyrol) in Austria. Due to the close proximity with South Tyrol (Italy), the two regions have a long history of cooperation in terms of wildlife monitoring, nature protection and touristic activities. A common transnational topic was chosen, that allowed to gather the stakeholders around the same table of discussion. The Hohe Tauern National Park is an attractive destination for outdoor sportspeople to enjoy peace, experience nature and find some balance to everyday life. Natural and near-natural cultural landscapes are coming under strong pressure due to the increase in settlement, traffic and infrastructure construction and the intensification of agriculture and forestry. The habitat for plants and animals is getting ever scarcer. The area is famous for its predisposition to sports activities, especially to paragliding, due to its extension and wideness. This central alpine region attracts a significant amount of tourists, both from the surroundings and from other countries. The National Park administration and the paragliders' groups have a mutual interest in preserving the attractive natural landscape in the Hohe Tauern area. In order to avoid potential disturbance of the wildlife, guidelines and maps showing also no-fly zone (See Fig. 5) were drawn up by topics in consideration of the special requirements and vulnerabilities of protected

species. The workshop was the opportunity to raise awareness of the different categories on their potential impact on nature - so, not only for paragliders. On one hand, paragliders claim that there are only 15 days per year with favorable weather conditions for their activities. On the other hand, there is an increasing number of people using nature for recreation, with increasing tendency for future years, if no strict limitations will be adopted.



Figure 5 - No-flight zones in Hohe Tauern National Park

### Proposed conflict issues

The stakeholders' survey in this PWR (Fig. 6) highlighted the concern about the increase of recreational activities and the negative interaction between predators and economic activities. The activity of paragliding has recently started to spread in the Hohe Tauern/South Tyrol area. Paragliders' routes usually start from South Tyrol in Italy to land in Hohe Tauern in Austria, mainly in the Deferegggen Valley (Fig. 7)

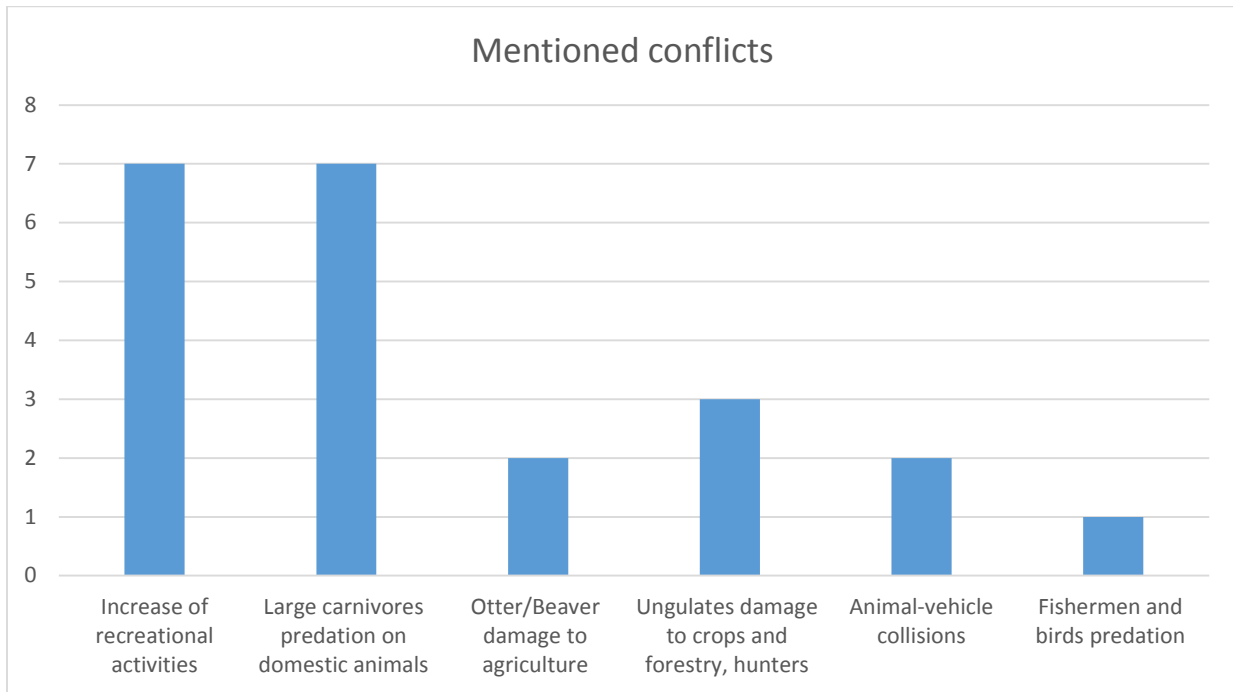


Figure 6 - Proposed conflicts in the Hohe Tauern/South Tyrol Project Working Region

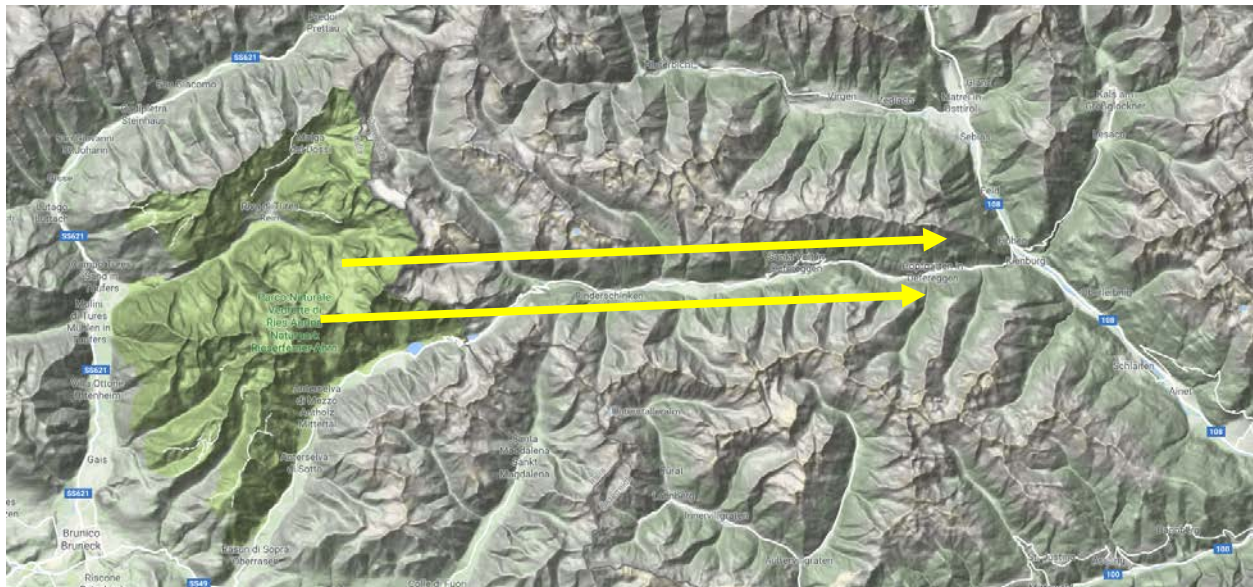


Figure 7 - Main flight route from South Tyrol to Hohe Tauern

The potential chain reaction of the paragliding activity impact was highlighted. There is a general concern about this activity regarding the fact that paragliders frighten terrestrial wildlife, pushing it down the valley or inside forests, where it will ultimately create damages to economic activities. It would also result in decreasing the level of protection that is assigned to some forest areas. Different categories of stakeholders (e.g. hunters, foresters) reported some negative disturbance of their activities due to the presence of paragliders disturbed deer.



The distance (200-300km) and the duration (10h) of the flights are questioned in their impact on wildlife presence and dispersal.

### Hohe Tauern/South Tyrol issue in WP5

Even though there is a lack of scientific data confirming the phenomenon, the impact of disturbed wildlife on economic activities is acknowledged and experienced among stakeholders (i.e., Cremer-Schulte et al., 2017). As for other fashionable outdoor activities, paragliding is attracting more adepts every year, which might increase disturbance. The advance in the use of social networks and their potentials to reach increasing numbers of people, is suspected to strongly participate in opening the access to this discipline to more people who are less trained or whose practice is less mindful. New routes of flight are also likely to be created. The flight traffic related issues go beyond wildlife disturbance but regards mountain area conservation and use in general terms. There is already a will to develop a common understanding of the problem with the interested parties and enhance a transnational cooperation. According to local partners and employee of the National Park Hohe Tauern and of South Tyrol Provincial Parks, only a first discussion table took place but no further encounters followed afterward. The purpose of this workshop was therefore to re-engage a conversation that could be sustained in the future in order to find agreed solutions and adapted means to overcome the issues.

### Involved stakeholders and workshop approach

Twenty-five people attended the workshop from both Italy and Austria (Table 3). The great number and high representation of stakeholders' categories demonstrate the great importance this topic has for the region, either locally, and in a transnational way.

Table 3 - Participants to Hohe Tauern / South Tyrol Workshop:

Federica Maino (EURAC)	Filippo Favilli (EURAC)
Prune Claire Giatti (EURAC)	Markus Lakuner (National Park Hohe Tauern)
Herbent Siess (Chello AT)	Andreas Agreiter (South Tyrol Hunting Office)
Markus Kantioler (South Tyrol Hunting Office)	Margaret Pallhuber (South Tyrol Parks' office)
Mauro Pianaro (Para Club FD)	Kurt Eder (Para Club FD)
Christian Gasser (Para Club FD)	Sara Vezzaro (EURAC)
Horst Mitterberger (Lienz city administration)	Martin Burger (South Tyrol Forest Office)
Günther Pörnbacher (Forest Office Welsberg)	Alois Messner (Hunting Office Antholz)
Fabian Pallhuber (Techem)	Karl Kleinlercher (Forest office Osttirol)
Robert Ladstätter (wildlife manager St Veit)	Wendelin Ortner (Paraglider)
Stefan Fercher (paraglider)	Daniel Kofler (paraglider)
Alois Resinger (Paraglider)	Martin König (Hunting office Osttirol)
Gunther Gressman (National Park Hohe Tauern)	

Local partners of the PWR Hohe Tauern / South Tyrol decided to discuss with local stakeholders using the "thematic groups" approach. After a plenary with the general introduction to the ALPBIONET2030 project, the topic of wildlife disturbance was introduced by an external moderator. Distance paragliding (which is allowed in the protected area of Rieserferner-Ahrn and Nationalparks Hohe Tauern) is generally taking part at certain heights, but sometimes it

can happen that while searching for thermic currents the paragliders fly not very high and close to the mountains.

After the introduction, stakeholders were divided into groups of interests with the aim to define a clear position and vision of their category on this issue. After a new plenary, stakeholders were again divided into two small groups, one focusing on the main used valley by paragliders, and one discussing the potential environmental impact of sports activities in the area. The workshop wanted to point out the new issues related to an increased use and presence by tourists and paragliders.

### Report of the meeting

The different categories of stakeholders explained their concerns and issues related to paragliding. A general fear is, of course, the fact that an increased presence of paragliders may jeopardize traditional activities. Paragliders consider it very important to raise awareness on their topic towards other land users. For them, it is fundamental that people know what they are doing and what paragliding is. They are aware of the fact that paragliding can have a problematic impact, but up to now information are not fully reliable. There is the need to know when and where their activity may create higher impacts on wildlife.

Hunters, in particular, expressed their concerns, highlighting the fact that they have quota to reach in term of number of prey and that they have a responsibility in forest protection. The multi-use of nature (paragliding is just one of them) is a general problem for them. Hunters' managers claim that they are responsible for the damages caused by deer on forest and crops and that hunting is an activity that also requires an investment. Summing all these concerns, hunters would like to concentrate the uses and the users in specific areas and time, creating protected areas for wildlife against paragliders. They ask for financial compensation for killed animals, and for damage caused by deer.

Foresters push for action only on local spots like Defereggental, Zettlersfeld and Kals, since they are directly related to the damages to the protection forests done by frightened deer and chamois. People involved in nature protection ask for more detailed studies on the potential impact of sports activities and mountain use on each wildlife species present in the area.

### Conclusions and next steps

The matrix (Fig. 8) answers highlighted that:

There is no clear statement however on the possibility to cohabit with wildlife. None of the stakeholder manifested himself as optimistic or pessimistic toward human wildlife coexistence (a). A majority of participants (13/21) said the meeting has enabled them to gain a better and broader understanding of the issue (b). Stakeholders have a general positive attitude towards the transnational nature of the issue since they reckon that such a situation can bring new opportunities of understanding and development (c). Fewer (7/21) asserted it gave them new concrete ideas to overcome the problem. Only one person said the workshop did not bring anything new to the debate (d). Accordingly, the opinion poll showed that at the end of the meeting stakeholders had been able to view the issue that they are facing from another point of view. There is indeed an intention to proceed with other meetings and broaden the exchange with other categories of stakeholders such as tourist representatives

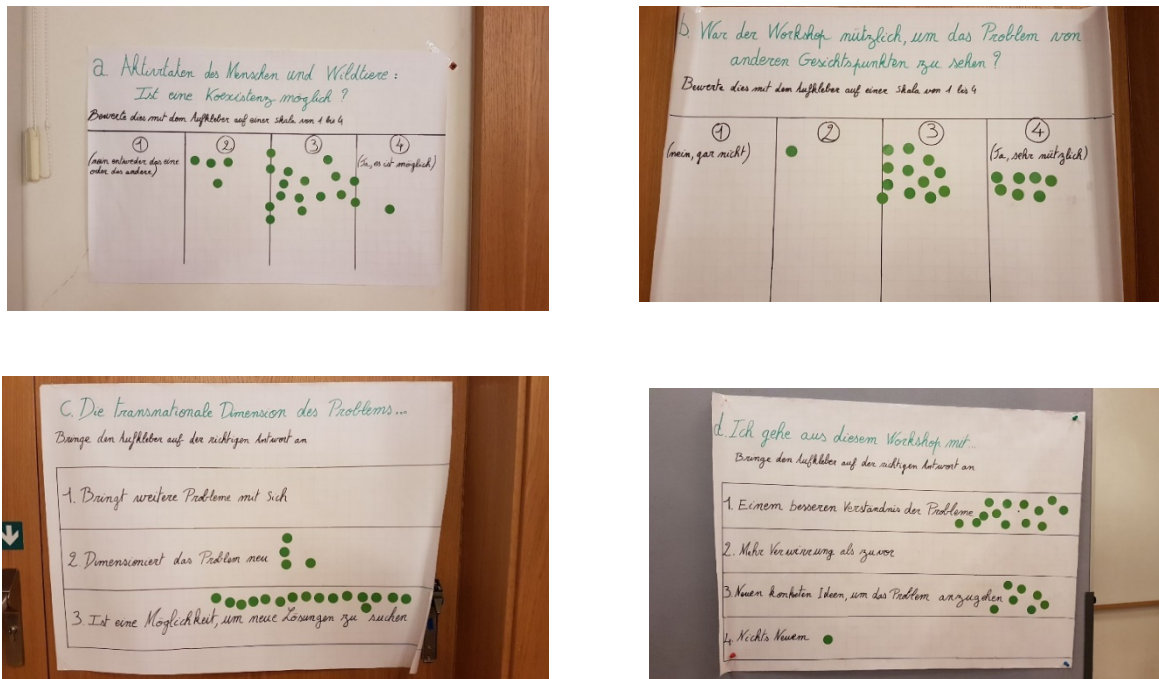


Figure 8 - Answers to the matrix of questions (in order question a,b,c,d, see general introduction)

## Main findings in Hohe Tauern / South Tyrol

- There is a need for data showing the level of disturbance caused by the flight duration, distance and height, but also on the impact of disturbance of chamois on forest conservation
- Data collection could be done by analyzing websites on paragliding, using webcams that take pictures to show how intense the traffic is on certain days.
- The surveys are needed to legitimate and adapt the answer to the paragliding issue in the territory.
- Hunters complain that a recreational activity, such as paragliding, that is likely to disturb wildlife, may also have an impact on their ability to catch the game
- To reduce the traffic, for example, the starting point accessibility should be limited to pedestrians.
- Paragliding should be allowed on a seasonal basis and within a limited duration.
- According to paragliders, a good practice of the sport together with awareness can lead to avoid provoking the "escape response" of deer.
- A course on wildlife presence could be included in the requirement for getting the flying license. This would give the care about wildlife disturbance a prominent and bounding aspect.