

ONE NATURE – MANY VALUES FOR ALL: GAUJA NATIONAL PARK

VIENA DABA – DAŽĀDAS VĒRTĪBAS KATRAM: GAUJAS NACIONĀLĀ PARKA IEDZĪVOTĀJU DABAS VĒRTĪBU IZPRATNE

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Abstract

The ideas underlying nature conservation have changed over time, from a very narrow view regarding the protection of specific species to the integration of nature conservation into the context of global development. Different coexisting perceptions of natural values can also be observed within the same area, in this case the Gauja National Park. The establishment of the park was implemented within the framework of a different political regime, in the 1970s, in which the protection of cultural landscapes was prioritised. While today the state's official stance represents the modern ideas of nature conservation, public opinion about nature protection is ambiguous. By studying the historical context and implementing other research methods, an insight was gained into the society's coexisting, often different visions of what is valuable in nature. Ethical considerations, which are often expressed both in the media and in the opinions of the residents, show a lack of understanding of the existing nature protection system and its methods.

Keywords: *Gauja National Park, nature conservation, Kellert's values, public participation*

Title reference to the inscription "One law, one truth for all" on the wall of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia in the title.

Introduction

The understanding of nature's value and the need to protect certain species or ecosystems has changed over time. The first conservation activities were related to the implementation of the privileges of the materially prosperous part of society in relation to game animals. Today, protected areas represent efforts to preserve declining biological diversity and ensure the regulation of environmental processes. For implementation of nature protection goals set out in various international and regional planning documents, the most frequently used tool is the creation of protected areas (Adams et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2020). Since the 1970s, as anthropogenic impact on the environment has become more visible, the proportion of protected areas have begun to increase significantly (West et al., 2008). In 2020, the total share of protected areas in the world reached 16.64% (Protected Planet, 2020). The rapid pace of creating new protected areas is starting to raise questions about the maintenance of protection in

those that already exist and their impact on reversing the course of general environmental degradation.

The Gauja National Park (GNP), with its various protection regimes that form a cartographic mosaic, for reasons including its establishment within the framework of a different political regime, in the first half of the 1970s, is a complex example of conservation governance. According to Aija Melluma, one of the researchers involved in the creation of the park, the inspiration for the establishment of the GNP came from Yosemite National Park's centennial materials (Melluma, 1971). Yosemite Park served as a global precedent (Gillespie, 2020) for the rapid development of national parks in other countries. In the national parks created at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the protection of various values of nature was implemented (Harper et al., 2012). The aims of the creation of the GNP, along with the protection of ecosystems, were also largely related to the protection of the local cultural landscapes and traditions related to them (Latvijas PSR Mežsaimniecības un mežrūpniecības ministrija, 1977; Генеральная схема национального парка "Гауя", 1973) from inconsiderate transformations. Today, the main goal of GNP as an area included in the Natura 2000 network is the protection of biological diversity. Considering the historical shifts in the GNP's goals, as well as changes in nature protection policy in the country, what versions of "valuable nature" or "multiple natures" (Lorimer, 2015) regarding conservation coexist in society today? Does public perception of these values differ from the official position?

By using the framework of social constructivism to conduct the research, the results can be compared to a photograph depicting part of the currently relevant nature values for the residents, the media and the institutional space. Values are one of the most important elements in what determines the choice in favour of one of the actions (Minang 2018), and their analysis can serve as a tool in the management of problems of various scales. Various methodologies (Jones et al., 2016) have been developed to categorise nature values into scientifically and practically applicable units. The version of typology of nature values developed by S. Kellert (1996) is based on the biophilia hypothesis by Wilson (1984), which claims that individuals have a predisposition towards nature and the processes taking place in it. Over time, experiencing several clarifications and changes (Ross et al., 2018), Kellert's division of nature values into ten classes is applied in case studies, covering various topics.

Data and methods

Various spatial and temporal factors influencing the research area determined that it is necessary to carefully, but at the same time, multifacetedly select the data and methods to be used to discover what are the understandings of protected nature values. Using the paradigm of social constructivism, the basic principle of which is that reality and knowledge are socially constructed (Mertens 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018;

Guba & Lincoln, 1989), the research was largely initiated and further developed based on the opinions and observations expressed by society (Figure 1). In-depth, semi-structured interviews with the residents of the GNP were conducted while analysing the current regulations and planning documents. Based on the various statements of the residents, aims for field observations were developed. To supplement the interview materials and gain insight from a wider part of society, a media content analysis was carried out. Further interpretations were complemented with historical context analysis using materials from the private archive of one of the founders of the GNP, Aija Melluma, which contains unpublished studies and the first nature protection plan of the GNP.

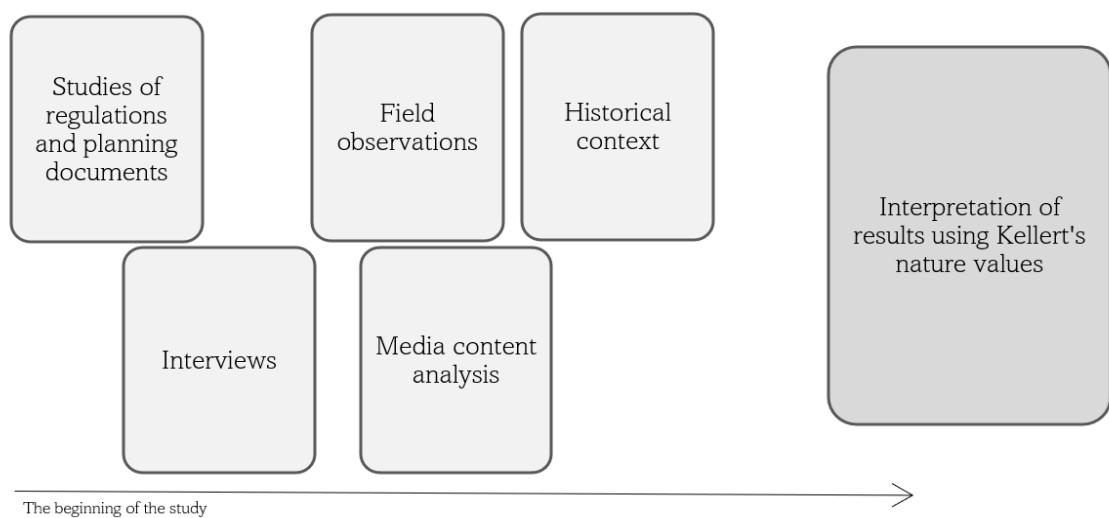


Figure 1. **Timeline of research** (author's figure)

The selection of respondents was done by posting a call on social media for GNP residents to apply for an interview. Ten interviews were conducted, with an average duration of about an hour. Regarding respondents' education and occupation: for three participants these were related to natural sciences, while the rest were engaged in business, or worked at private or state-owned companies or NGOs. The archive of the national information agency LETA, which is the largest online media archive in Latvia, was used in the media content analysis. The keywords "Gaujas Nacionālais parks" were used for the search, and articles from 2004 to 2022 were selected from the results. This archive includes both national media articles available in print and available online. From more than 2,000 records, 30 records of unique conflict situations were chosen. The reflection of conflicts was chosen because such situations represent clashes of different values (Redpath et al., 2013). The period chosen for the selection of articles, the beginning of which marks Latvia's entry into the European Union, can be considered a turning point in the process of adopting new,

international nature conservation policies and practices. The main goal of the field observations was defined considering the statements of the respondents, the majority of whom claimed that the area of the park does not differ from areas outside of it. To study these statements photographs of the GNP boundaries were taken every 7 km, showing both sides of the boundary.

Interviews and media content were coded using the software MaxQDA. Interview analysis was conducted deductively using Kellert's typology of nature values (see Table 1). The coding of articles was done following an inductive approach, noting the themes reflected in the conflicts and later linking them with types of values in Kellert's typology.

Table 1. **Kellert's relational values in social-ecological systems** (Kellert, 1996; Kellert, 2012)

Nature value	Description
Aesthetic	Aesthetic experience of nature <i>Function:</i> inspiration, harmony, peace, security
Dominionistic	Desire to master the natural world <i>Function:</i> mechanical skills, physical prowess, ability to subdue
Ecologic/scientific	Systematic study of structure, function and relationship in nature <i>Function:</i> knowledge, understanding, observational skills
Humanistic	Strong affection, emotional attachment, love of nature <i>Function:</i> group bonding, sharing, cooperation, companionship
Moralistic	Strong affinity, spiritual reverence, ethical concern for nature <i>Function:</i> order and meaning in life, kinship and affiliational ties
Naturalistic	Satisfaction from direct experience/contact with nature <i>Function:</i> curiosity, outdoor skills, mental/physical development
Negativistic	Fear, aversion, alienation from nature <i>Function:</i> security, protection, safety
Spiritual	The pursuit of meaning and purpose through connection to the world beyond our selves
Symbolic	Use of nature for metaphorical expression, language, expressive thought <i>Function:</i> communication, mental development
Utilitarian	Practical and material exploitation of nature <i>Function:</i> physical sustenance/security

“Gauja Park is not a jungle”

The national park movement in the Soviet Union was facilitated by various factors, e.g., rivalry with Western countries in the conditions of the Cold War, opportunities for scientists to obtain more information about nature conservation practices (Roe, 2016; Zaharchenko, 1990), as well as the need for places created by rapid urbanisation to experience direct contact with nature (Melluma, 1971). In contrast to the form of *zapovedniki* – “protected areas or nature reserves” – which had been widespread in the Soviet Union until that point, recreation is an essential

component in the idea of national parks. The use of nature for tourism also coincided with the hegemonic discourse of the Soviet Union. This was based on the supremacy of man over nature, and in the event of its implementation, nature produces new meaning. From “numb emptiness”, “guardian of wealth” (Bolotova, 2004) and “jungle” (Skudra, 1975), it becomes a resource.

The founding materials of the GNP also show this producing of new meaning for nature through the framework of a national park. In the scientific research materials published before the establishment of the park, the main goal for the establishment of the GNP is mentioned as being “to protect the selected areas from progressive, but unplanned and often casual transformation” (Melluma, 1971). The ill-conceived transformation of areas during the Soviet period, introducing new agricultural and dwelling practices, tended to change cultural landscapes made up of farmsteads (Figure 2), which had a close relation to issues of national identity. Publicly, this “preservation of picturesque, typical landscapes and historical structures” (Latvijas PSR Mežsaimniecības un mežrūpniecības ministrija, 1977) was interpreted rather negatively. The preservation of cultural and historical elements would, by maintaining the architecture of a specific historical period, serve as a point of comparison to the growth of socialism.



Figure 2. **The landscape of the Gauja National Park in the 1970s** (Melluma, 1977)

When creating the GNP, an example was taken from the experience of other countries in the development of zoning, in which national parks mostly consisted of two parts – central zones and buffer zones. This factor was the reason why the so-called “inner park” and “front park” were differentiated in the original zoning. The

existing agricultural use was preserved in the buffer zone, with certain restrictions regarding landscaping. The main goal of this area was to reduce the anthropogenic load on the central part of the park, creating additional recreation opportunities in the protected zone, as well as higher requirements for the construction of new facilities (Latvijas PSR Mežsaimniecības un mežrūpniecības ministrija, 1977).

Values of nature and (also) biological diversity

Moralistic values were mentioned most often during the interviewing process. The respondent's ethical considerations and sense of responsibility towards nature were often associated with the intensive forestry practices observed in GNP: "The nightingales don't sing here anymore. There is no place for them to sing. Everything was cut down." In the context of political ecology, protected areas are defined as political projects that change the right of use and access to an area (Adams, 2017), and from the perspective of residents, such areas are most often associated with prohibitions and restrictions (Aastrup, 2020; Bauer et al., 2017). The frequent clearcut landscapes (Figure 3) create contradictions with society's assumptions; the importance of forests and individual trees is an essential part of the identity of the Latvian nation (Schwartz, 2007). The clearcut landscapes in the GNP are also one of the reasons why residents often mention the feeling that the area in the GNP does not visually differ from the area outside it. When conducting the boundary survey, in 17 out of 24 images taken, it was observed forest and other management practices didn't differ significantly within the park limits and outside them.



Figure 3. GNP border before Līgatne (GNP on the left) (author's photo, 2022)

Residents mention the direct use of natural resources in both positive and negative contexts. Forms of business supported in the GNP are those that are small in scale, such as logging for personal use and responsible tourism practices. Large-scale resource extraction, such as intensive forestry or industrial agriculture, is evaluated neutrally or negatively. In the media, especially in the conservative newspaper

Latvijas Avīze, restrictions on resource extraction are characterised as unfair, and nature conservation practices compared to a form of business. Such opinions and similar views in the media, which depict the “inefficient use” of natural resources for the implementation of nature protection, are related to the nature discourse highlighted by K. Schwartz (2006): agrarian nationalism. This took shape during Latvia’s first period as an independent state in the 1920s, and its central element is the homeland, in which the owner of the land is the determining factor in shaping the landscape. The basic provision of well-being in this discourse is served by utilitarian values.

Scientific nature values take primary place in the institutional nature protection system, which is due to the location of the GNP within the Natura 2000 network. Both GNP nature protection plans (accepted in 2004 and 2023) which include the overall vision of the area’s development, include very little information about other natural values in the area except scientific. The wide resonance in the media of the project “Forest Habitat Restoration within the Gauja National Park” (2011–2016) illustrates the inconsistency between the nature values existing in society, and the opinions of the decision-making authority, where scientific values dominate. Due to strong public opposition a nature protection method that is little-known and rarely practiced in Latvia today, prescribed burning, was not implemented. During the media analysis, not all types of nature values were found, and a clash between utilitarian and scientific values was most often observed. In the interviews, reference to scientific values as personally important was recorded mostly in cases where residents had received education related to ecological issues.

In cases where local inhabitants referred to personally important species or ecosystems, they were mostly not related to institutionally protected nature values. Expressing deep respect and reverence handed down from generation to generation, humanistic and spiritual nature values are associated with species such as nightingales, frogs and squirrels, whose populations have been observed to decrease in number compared to respondents’ childhood. Symbolic values are not often mentioned; moreover, they are usually closely related to spiritual or moral values, for example, when expressing concern about intensive forestry practices, the respondent quoted a folk song about pine trees. It was also often observed that the respondents refer to a general connection with nature, which is not related to any of its constituent elements. This tendency can also be observed in the media, where public opinions are expressed through emotionally intense statements: “Any burning is incomprehensible to the mind and unacceptable to the heart, let alone intentional burning” (Krivma, 2014).

A close relationship between dominionistic and negativistic nature values was observed. Manifestations of superiority are often interpreted as responses to fear and lack of control experienced in nature. The desire to make nature accessible and easy to understand is illustrated by the Nature Observers’ Garden created in Līgatne in 2020, where its visitors are given the opportunity to “see, feel and get to know the nature of

the region more closely” (ALPS Ainavu darbnīca, S.a.). Līgatne is surrounded by countless protected habitats, where it is possible to experience the nature of the region. From the point of view of the respondents, negative nature values are most often associated with an increase in the amount of fallen deadwood in forests, as well as possible threats to forest animals. Fallen deadwood, which was recognised as the habitat of the year in Latvia in 2023, can be compared to the “new black” of nature conservation in protected nature areas, which confronts the traditional utilitarian use of deadwood and the understanding of aesthetic values.

Local inhabitants rarely mention naturalistic nature values or mostly describe them sentimentally, referring to childhood memories. This could be related to residents’ perception of the place, a feeling well described by Russian poet and essayist Joseph Brodsky in his book *Watermark* (1993): “Of course, nothing could be further from the locals’ agendas as they scurry and bustle about on their daily rounds, properly oblivious or even allergic to the surrounding splendor. The closest they come to using a gondola is when they’re ferried across the Grand Canal or carrying home some unwieldy purchase—a washing machine, say, or a sofa”. Respondents more often express concern about the growing demand for tourism, which significantly affects the quality of the park. The importance of tourism in the GNP is illustrated by the fact that the official park website is dedicated to describing tourism opportunities.

Aesthetic nature values are more often mentioned in a negative context. For example, the effect of the eight-toothed European spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) on forest landscapes is often pointed out. The chaos and “dirt” caused by bark beetles is comparable to the negative impact on aesthetic values caused by waste pollution. In the nature protection plan of the GNP completed in 2023, attention is paid mostly only to the creation and management of viewing points, which are related to the development of tourism.

Conclusion

A study of the foundation materials of GNP allows us to claim that the purpose of the park’s creation at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s was largely related to the protection of cultural landscapes from uncontrolled and thoughtless changes as a result of the implementation of political ideas. The continuity of the park’s historical boundaries and zoning, which covers an area of more than 90,000 ha, partly explains the difficulty of residents and park visitors in seeing significant differences between the GNP and the areas outside it. Along with the inclusion of the area in the Natura 2000 network in the early 2000s, the protection of biological diversity was defined in regulatory acts as the park’s primary aim.

The prioritisation of scientific nature values through the creation of new norms and behaviours largely neglects the existing understanding of societal values in the GNP. The evolutionary, path-dependent nature of values (Manfredo et al., 2017)

means that the process of their formation is slow. Ignoring these features not only creates a wide range of conflicts, but it also establishes situations where individuals feel redundant, powerless, or without opportunities to shape the further development of the territory (Mathevet et al., 2016). Thus, for example, the increase in the number of fallen deadwood in forests often does not correspond to the aesthetic values of nature, and is associated with the creation of unsafe conditions, which also makes it difficult to implement such widespread recreational practices as mushroom-gathering and berry-picking. Frequent references to moralistic nature values also emphasises the coexistence of different understandings in society due to various ethical considerations raised by the current management of the park. Negative attitude towards restrictions on the use of utilitarian nature values, both in the answers of the respondents and in the media, is mostly related to the discourse of agrarian nationalism still present in the public nature discourse.

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Kopsavilkums

Dabas aizsardzības pamatā esošās idejas laika gaitā ir mainījušās, sākot no ļoti šaura skatījuma uz konkrētu sugu aizsardzību līdz pat dabas aizsardzības integrēšanai kopējās attīstības kontekstā. Dažādu līdzās pastāvošu izpratni par aizsargājamām dabas vērtībām iespējams novērot arī vienas teritorijas ietvaros, šajā gadījumā Gaujas Nacionālajā parkā. Tā dibināšana īstenota citā politiskajā režīmā, kurā prioritāri tika izvirzīta kultūrvēsturisko ainavu aizsardzība. Kamēr mūsdienās valsts politiskās nostādnes pārstāv modernās dabas aizsardzības idejas, sabiedrības viedokļi par dabas aizsardzību Gaujas Nacionālajā parkā nav viendabīgi. Veicot vēsturiskā konteksta izpēti un īstenojot citas pētnieciskās metodes, tika gūts ieskaits par sabiedrībā līdzās pastāvošajiem, nereti atšķirīgajiem redzējumiem par to, kas dabā ir vērtīgi. Ētiski apsvērumi, kuri nereti pausti gan medijos, gan Nacionālā parka iedzīvotāju viedokļos, pauž neizpratni par esošo dabas aizsardzības sistēmu un norāda uz dažādiem vides degradācijas aspektiem.

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