

Conflict Resolution Mechanisms on the Contested Kara Art Pasture

Utilization conflict on the Kara Art Pasture

In Kyrgyzstan, a majority of the rural population relies on the use of natural resources, especially pastures, for their livelihoods and household economy. Livestock husbandry has been the most important activity in the past and represents an important pillar of the rural economy of the country (Wilson 1997: 57). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, mismanagement and weak institutions led to overexploitation and utilization conflicts on several pastures throughout Kyrgyzstan (Dörre 2012: 129). The case study area of the pasture *Kara Art* provides a case in point and has undergone a major utilization conflict. The aim of this paper is to analyse this conflict in terms of the actors involved, using geographical conflict research as explanatory framework.

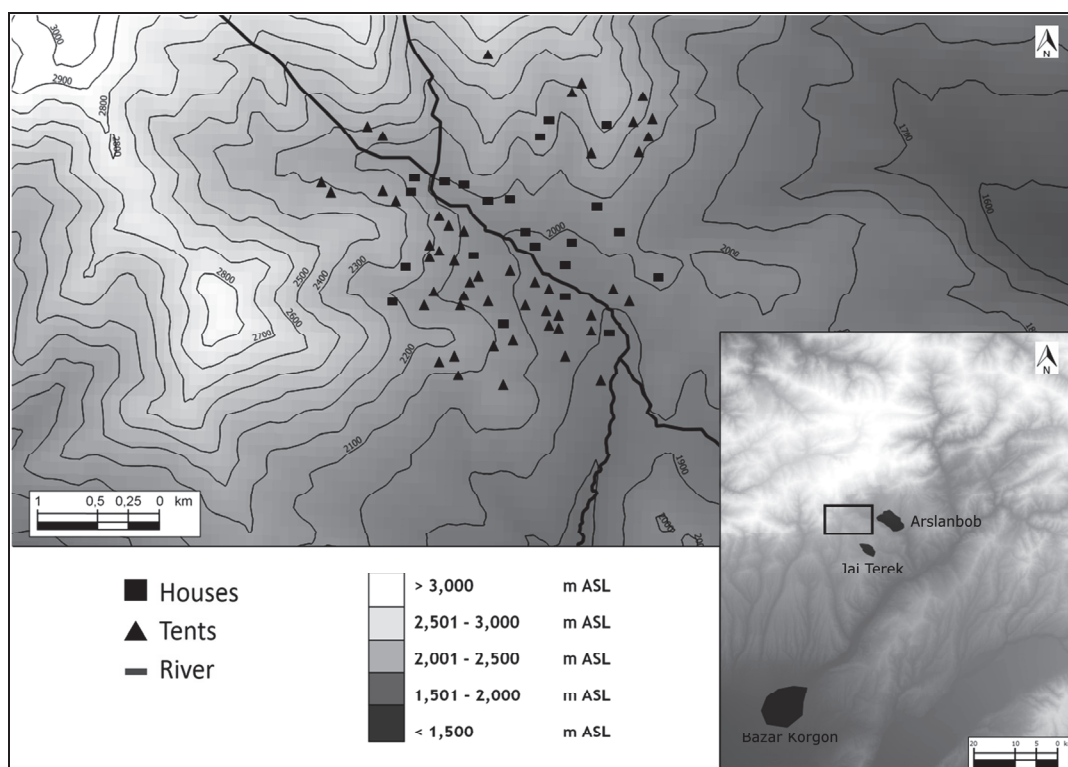


Fig. 4.1: Overview of the investigation area, *Kara Art Pasture*

Draft: Nordhausen & Paul 2014

Kara Art (krg. for ‘high’ or ‘big pass’) is located at the southern edge of the mountain range *Babash Ata* in the western part of the country. It is a heavily used summer pasture, situated within the forest fund territory close to the two settlements of Jai Terek and Arslanbob in the *rayon* Bazar Korgon (Fig. 4.1). With over 13 km², the major part of the pasture belongs to the forest district of Jai Terek (Dörre 2014: 182-183). After 1991, the former herdsmen informally took over the pasture for private purposes. The inhabitants of Jai Terek and Arslanbob also took possession of that same territory in search of arable land or grazing grounds. Consequently, a competition between farming households cultivating

land and households relying on animal husbandry has occurred. This competition has evolved into an open conflict fuelled by informal allocation practices and maladjusted use and further compounded by overexploitation and ecological degradation (Dörre 2012: 138).

Geographical conflict research as analytical framework

The concept of ‘geographical conflict research’ developed in the frame of Political Geography offers a methodology to achieve a deeper understanding of the prevailing conflict. Conflict research focuses on the actions of stakeholders in the context of disputes over “power and space” (Reuber & Wolkersdorfer 2007: 756). The core idea of this concept is that spatial conflicts represent a kind of variation of human interaction or social action (Reuber 2012: 117). The concept focuses on the actions of individual stakeholders, perceiving those actions as products of individual preferences, social rules, and spatial conditions (Reuber & Wolkersdorfer 2007: 761). Consequently, in order to analyse a conflict according to the ‘geographical conflict research’, three fundamental elements need to be examined (Reuber 2012: 119; Fig. 4.2):

1. Spatial patterns - Which spatial structures and linkages provoke the spatial conflict?
2. Sociopolitical determining factors - How do interactions between the stakeholders, the relevant institutions, and the socio-political structures influence the spatial conflict?
3. Individual stakeholders - What are the the strategies pursued by different groups of stakeholders within space-related disputes?

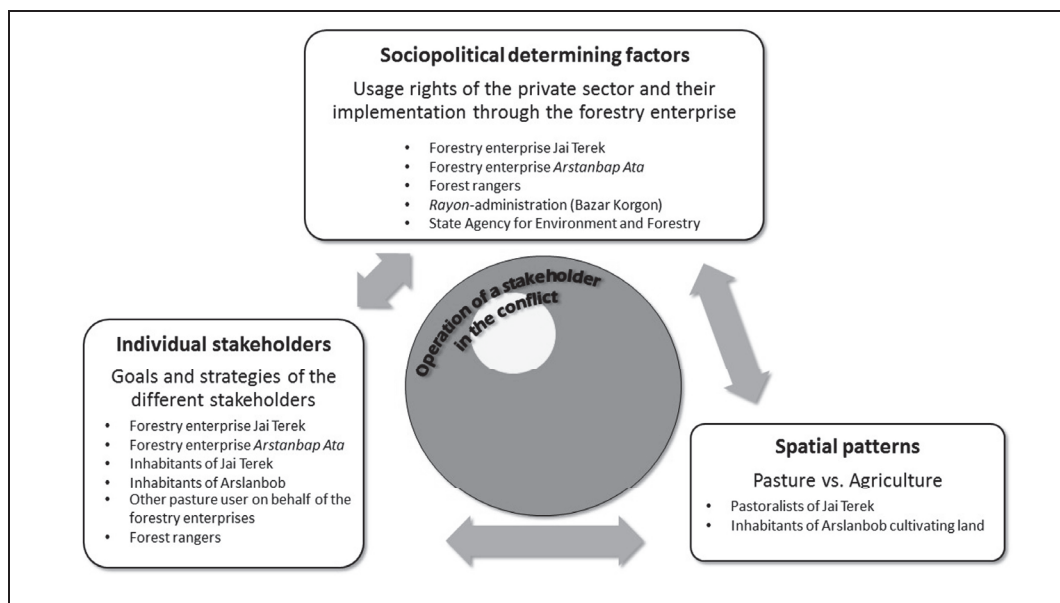


Fig. 4.2: Operation of a stakeholder in the conflict on the *Kara Art Pasture*

Draft: Nordhausen & Paul 2014 modified according to Reuber & Wolkersdorfer 2007: 760

This paper builds on this understanding of conflict research and applies its toolbox to the case of *Kara Art Pasture*. It is evident that spatial patterns in the usage of *Kara Art* are significant for understanding the conflict. The construction of spatial structures will be investigated through two interrelated levels of analysis: First, the subjective perception of

the initial situation by different stakeholders. And, secondly, actor-specific spatial and conflict-related visions (Reuber & Wolkersdorfer 2007: 761).

The research interest of this study is to illustrate the current situation of the conflict and to reconstruct its past course of events. The elaborated theory provides a guideline for the detailed historical reconstruction of the conflict (Reuber 2012: 117). Building on this, the socio-political factors determining the conflict are analysed by focusing on the prevalent institutional setting framing pasture usage in Krygyzstan. The study aims to obtain a better understanding of the goals and strategies of individual stakeholders, as well as the role of groups of stakeholders, and how both aspects determine the spatial conflict. To achieve this goal, a stakeholder analysis including a stakeholder mapping is conducted. The analysis focuses on how different stakeholders perceive the course of events, who has been involved or affected, and how their opinions differ.

The (key) stakeholders in the conflict have already been identified prior to fieldwork. They include the forestry enterprise 'Jai Terek', the forestry enterprise 'Arstanbap-Ata', the inhabitants of Jai Terek and Arslanbob, as well as non-local and other pasture users on behalf of the forestry enterprises. They further include forest rangers, the State Agency for Environment Protection and Forestry and the district administration in Bazar Korgon (Dörre 2014: 279-296). The study illustrates the different perceptions of the conflict made by these stakeholders and the diverse interests they pursue. Besides, the different power positions and the connections and cross-linkages of the stakeholders are demonstrated in the study. A major purpose of this research centers on the stakeholders' perceptions of the conflict, always taking into consideration the so-called constructivism premise, which forms an important fundament of geographical conflict research. According to this premise, the basis for action or the 'reality' that is perceived by a stakeholder, always represents a construction that emerges from the socially existing spatial representations, symbolisms, and interpretation patterns. It is assumed that actor-specific perspectives and spatial interests explicitly form the starting point of any conflict (Reuber & Wolkersdorfer 2007: 761). In terms of the conflict on the *Kara Art* pasture, this is also evident because it only appeared when different stakeholders pursued interfering interests. In order to assess the issues concerned, 31 problem-centred, guideline-based interviews with stakeholders on the pasture were conducted and were supplemented through interviews with officials from different government departments, focusing on the just described three thematic blocks proposed by 'geographical conflict research' concept.

Components of the conflict on Kara Art

Applying the toolbox of conflict research to the case of *Kara Art*, the results of the field work have to be analysed from three different perspectives. First of all, the current situation of the conflict is characterized and its past course of events is reconstructed. Then, the contribution of the institutional setting to the existing conflict is analysed. The last part of this chapter is about the prevailing constellation of the stakeholders.

Characterization and reconstruction of the conflict

In order to understand the conflict, both spatial patterns of the pasture as well as the historical background of the investigation area are significant. Therefore, in this chapter,

both are going to be examined, analysing the circumstances that led to the current situation.

Spatial patterns on Kara Art

Kyrgyzstan's ecological structure is dominated by grasslands that cover nearly 46 % of the country's total surface area and around 90 % of the agricultural surface (Dörre 2012: 129). Because of topographic and climatic limitations,

“the natural environment for agriculture in the Kyrgyz Republic is nowhere very favorable and in some areas can be extremely hostile, and the growing period is everywhere rather short” (Wilson 1997: 58).

As previously mentioned, *Kara Art* is a heavily used summer pasture located near the two settlements of Jai Terek and Arslanbob at an altitude between 2,000 and 3,000 m (Fig. 4.1). Due to the rather small distance to both settlements and the existence of a navigable path, the use of *Kara Art* involves only low temporal and material costs and allows spontaneous errands into town (Dörre 2014: 286). One can get to Jai Terek and Arslanbob in less than half a day's walk from the pasture. Because of its easy accessibility, people of both settlements are asserting their claims to use the area. Indeed, all interviewed pasture users hail from either Arslanbob or Jai Terek which is why in this study pasture users are generally divided into two groups pertaining to their settlement of origin. These groups, however, are not in the least homogenous groups, since each member of each household has its individual history and characteristics. Nevertheless, in some respects they exhibit similarities or similar interests, e.g. regarding the type of utilization of the pasture. With respect to the pasture utilization, the two groups significantly differ from each other. Actors of each settlement are aware of their unique natural resources and the resources they lack. Since Arslanbob has little arable land, the people use *Kara Art* for cultivating crops to ensure their subsistence. On the contrary, being well endowed with farming land, the Jai Terekis face a more serious scarcity of pastures. Consequently, the latter use *Kara Art* solely as grazing area for their animals. These conflicting forms of land use led to the emergence of conflict.

The field work shows that in 2013 the people from Arslanbob still use *Kara Art* for cultivating most people from Jai Terek use the pasture to feed their animals. In order to protect their crops from the animals, the people from Arslanbob built fences around their fields. This causes the main problem since the animals of the people from Jai Terek do not have sufficient area to live and graze. Feeling constrained, the animals frequently destroy the fences and eat the cultivated crops of the people from Arslanbob. When this happens, the animals run the risk of being forcibly evicted or physical harmed. For instance, the farmers hit the cows, take them into custody until the owner comes to pay a fee, and sometimes even kill them. Since the land officially belongs to Jai Terek and it is forbidden to use pasture area for agriculture, the people from Jai Terek want the fences to be destroyed so that all area is accessible for their animals.

Historical background and current situation on Kara Art

During the Soviet Union the *Kara Art* pasture belonged to two collective farms - the *kolhozy* 'Engel's' and '60th anniversary of October'. The utilization of the pasture was

centrally planned and it was only used for feeding livestock. Other economic uses of these grazing areas by the local population were prohibited and did not take place during this time (Dörre 2014: 249). Livestock husbandry was based on production systems with so called 'State Breeding Plants' to achieve the maximum output. During the summer months, sheep were transported to remote summer pastures like e.g. *Kara Art*. The rest of the year, the livestock was kept on spring and autumn pastures, and during winter in stables and raised with concentrate feed (Wilson 1997: 58-59).

The collective farms were dissolved by the 1990s after the Soviet Union collapsed and all livestock was privatized. The radical change from a centrally planned economic system to a free market economy led to serious consequences for the national economy. Many of the former pastoralists were left with very few farm animals and were often forced to sell their animals to be able to purchase food for the remaining livestock. This caused a rapid decline in livestock numbers at the beginning of the 1990s. The national sheep flock fell from over nine million in 1991 to three to four million towards the end of 1995 (Schmidt 2001: 109). The winter months exacerbated the decline due to food supply shortages, a lack of food imports, and the overall limited availability of winter pastures (Blank 2007: 15). Since 1996, flock numbers have increased but still have not reached the pre-independence level (Steimann 2012: 149).

The general historical changes had a great impact on the utilization conflict on the *Kara Art* pasture. After the dissolution of the USSR, the Kyrgyz government did not have enough resources to take care of the region and its people. Ludi's statement that "as a consequence of the individualization of agricultural production, combined with decreasing support, farmers are more dependent on natural resources close by" (2003: 121) became also valid for the walnut fruit forest region. For instance, many households started to use rangelands near villages for diverse agricultural practices. The inhabitants of Jai Terek were particularly poor and most of them had to sell their animals in order to survive. At this point in time, there was no need for them to use the *Kara Art* pasture. At the same time, in 1992, the forestry enterprise of Arslanbob induced to permit usage of limited areas of *Kara Art* for agriculture - despite its designation as a pasture area - because of the economic crisis, demographic pressure and growing scarcity of arable land (Dörre 2014: 281). Many people from Arslanbob came to the pasture, starting to cultivate the land. The field work shows that this can also be attributed to the fact, that during the time of the USSR most of the persons of authority in the region were located in Arslanbob. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union these persons of authority gave the usage rights to *Kara Art* informally to the population of Arslanbob. Around ten years later the lives of the population generally improved, including those in Jai Terek. The people of Jai Terek started to come to *Kara Art* with their animals, but, from their point of view, there was not enough space due to the agricultural activities of the people from Arslanbob. Additionally, the overall quality of the pasture declined.

Kyrgyzstan's summer pastures are characterized by a high biodiversity of vascular plants, being most of them endemics. The effects of land use change on the biodiversity of this mountain habitat are immense (Borchardt 2011: 196).

Before 2007, around 30 households (more than 100 people) from Arslanbob were using the *Kara Art* pasture for agriculture during the summer months. A lot of people from Jai Terek complained to different governmental authorities about the lack of space and food for their animals and about the bad conditions of the pasture. This led to the abolishment of the toleration of agriculture on *Kara Art* by order of the Director of the State Committee on Environmental Protection in 2007 (Dörre 2014: 285). Around nine persons from the province (*oblast'*, rus.), district (*rayon*, rus.) and republic administration came to *Kara Art* to talk to the inhabitants of Arslanbob about this change of the legal situation. The area officially belongs to the 'Jai Terek' Forestry. Therefore all people from Arslanbob who cultivated land on the western river side of the pasture, where agriculture is forbidden, had to leave or move to the eastern river side, where agriculture is still tolerated (Fig. 4.3). In order to ensure that the people from Arslanbob obeyed this law, the people from Jai Terek destroyed the fences the people from Arslanbob kept around their fields on the western river side without waiting for official permission of the forestry enterprise. According to field work, this led to additional tensions between both populations.

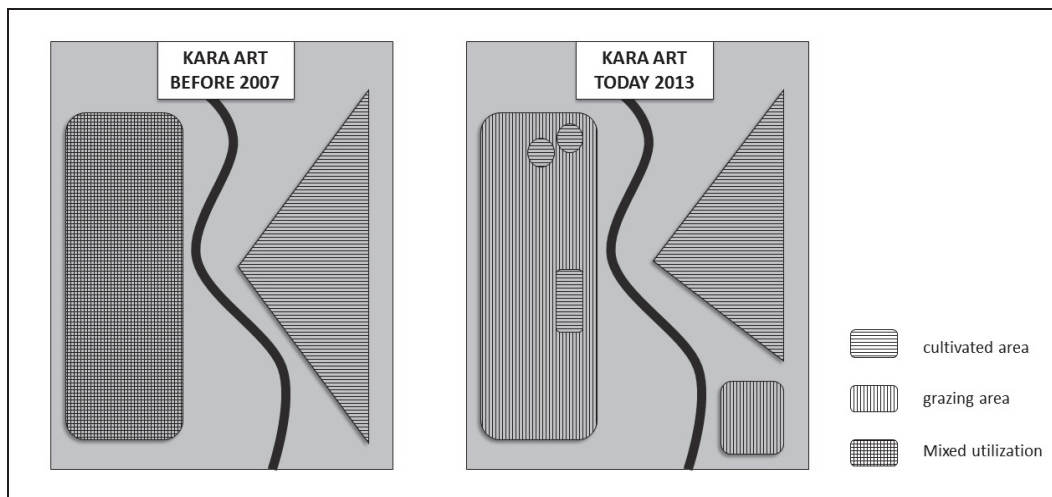


Fig. 4.3: Cultivation systems on the *Kara Art* Pasture before 2007 and today

Draft: Nordhausen & Paul 2014

In 2013, only two households from Arslanbob live on the western river side of the pasture, using the area for agricultural purposes. Besides, a beekeeper from Arslanbob still cultivates an area of seven hectares on the western river side. Also, on the eastside of the pasture, there are less people from Arslanbob than before 2007. Only seven of the 30 households stayed to cultivate the land on the other river side; the rest of them went back to Arslanbob. People from Jai Terek are now using on both pasture sides, herding their animals (Fig. 4.3). In 2013, there were in total 49 tents and 22 houses on the pasture (Fig. 4.1). The number of tents has increased from year to year. However, the maximum number of tents permitted by the forestry enterprise 'Jai Terek' is 50, so there is not much room for growth in the future. Even with the current amount of 49 tents it can be questioned whether a sustainable use of the pasture is possible. The forestry enterprise wants to more strictly enforce and restrict the future access to the pasture.

Institutional setting

The authority for the *Kara Art* pasture is concentrated at the forestry enterprise level because it is located on forest fund land. After the dissolution of the USSR, all responsibilities were reallocated to the state-owned forestry enterprise 'Arstanbap-Ata'. The forestry enterprise based in Jai Terek became a new stakeholder because of the secession of the forest district 'Jai Terek' in 2000, of which *Kara Art* is a part. Since then, this enterprise is the main stakeholder regarding legal arrangements for this particular pasture.

The field research shows that there is an enormous miscommunication between the pasture legislation and its actual implementation. It starts with the registration process that every user must do in the forestry enterprise of *Jaj Terek* prior to using the pasture. In reality, however, a lot of pasture users use the pasture without any leasing contract, paying the fees during or at the end of the usage period.

Competition between cultivation and animal husbandry as the main cause of the pasture conflict likely would not occur if the legislation was properly implemented; there is a law that prohibits agriculture on pasture areas. However, the forestry enterprise has no interest in displacing the people from Arslanbob since they pay high fees for cultivating the land. It is evident that a weak institutional setting contributes to the existing conflict. This is further compounded by the fact that neither the State Agency for Environment Protection and Forestry nor the *rayon* administration was able or willing to provide any useful information about the *Kara Art* pasture.

A lot of pasture users complained about the lack of intervention of the forestry enterprise. For example, the forestry enterprise promised to build a proper bridge crossing the wide stream crosscutting *Kara Art* several years ago but have not yet started construction, reportedly because of the lack of funds. That is not the only promise the forestry enterprise has reneged. Since the abolishment of the toleration of agriculture on pasture area in 2007, the enterprise has promised to implement the prohibition of agriculture on *Kara Art*. In the end, formal institutions still take money from the people cultivating subsistence crops and tolerate their violation of this regulation. In an interview, the current director of the forestry enterprise 'Jai Terek' claimed that in 2014 the pasture law will finally be implemented and cultivation prohibited on *Kara Art*. The probability of that happening is however very low as Dörre noted:

“[...] it is lucrative for the forestry enterprise to allow certain harmful practices not in spite of but because of their legal ban.” (2012: 140)

The problem hereby is based on the fact that the enterprise foregrounds its commercial advantage of the current situation instead of incorporating the interests of the pasture users from Jai Terek even if it is against the legal basis. Through its management strategies, the forestry enterprise causes both social conflict as well as ecological pasture problems. Even though nothing has changed yet, the people from Arslanbob are scared that in the future they might not be able to continue with cultivating the areas they have been using for several years. The forestry enterprise of Arslanbob tries to advocate for the rights of the people from Arslanbob. But since the individual forest authorities largely work

for themselves with only very loose cooperation between the two agencies, the forestry enterprise of Arslanbob cannot guarantee the future use of *Kara Art* to its people. Just once a year the two agencies have an official meeting to discuss official matters. An employee of the forestry enterprise 'Arstanbap-Ata' based in Gumkhana¹ mentioned in an interview that he hopes in the near future closer cooperation will be possible. For instance, an alignment of the forestry districts is being discussed, as every 10 years the maps are being reallocated. The next time of reallocation will be in 2014. Making the eastern river side of *Kara Art* part of the area of influence of the *leskhoz* 'Arstanbap-Ata' would ensure the people from Arslanbob the right of disposal of *Kara Art* in the future. Therefore, it is in the interest of this forestry enterprise, as well as of the pasture users from Arslanbob, to support this suggestion. The forestry enterprise 'Jai Terek', however, does not agree with this proposal. The director of the latter enterprise claims that the pastoralists of Jai Terek require the entire pasture for feeding their livestock. The forestry enterprise is aware of the lack of grasslands and tries, together with the State Agency on Environment Protection and Forestry, to get the usage rights of an area of *Kyzul Unkur* for the people of Jai Terek and that way to ease the conflict by trying to reduce the number of pasture users on *Kara Art*. Thus, it can be said that the two forestry enterprises both make small efforts to support the people from Jai Terek and Arslanbob respectively. Although these forestry enterprises are relatively powerful organizations, the implementation of consents they have been made is very slow to nonexistent.

All in all it can be said that the institutional setting largely contributes to the maintenance of the conflict, since the socio-ecological pasture problem partly results from the economic needs of the forestry staff, the unreliability of the legislation and enforcement authorities as well as the weakness of the public administration.

Stakeholder constellation

In terms of national composition, Kyrgyzstan is one of the most diverse republics in Central Asia, even though the structure of the population always fluctuated due to migration (Abazov 1999: 240).

“Throughout the Soviet era the proportion of the Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan fluctuated between 10 % and 12 % of the population, making the Uzbeks the third largest ethnic group in Kyrgyzstan after the Kyrgyz and Russians. [...] Under conditions of low living standards, socio-economic crisis and political destabilisation, interethnic tension [between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks] erupted due to inter alia increasing intergroup competition over resources (land lots)[...] and a struggle to gain control over power structures.” (Tishkov 1995: 134)

During the past decades, there have been some conflict escalations in form of mass riots, intercommunal clashes and violence directed against Uzbeks, as for example in 1990 and 2010 mainly in the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad (Tishkov 1995: 134). The conflict on *Kara Art*, though, is not at all related to these ethnic tensions as the interviewed persons did not express any provenance or ethnic related issues between the users but rather a utilization conflict.

¹ In order to ensure the anonymity of the interviewed persons, no real name is being used in this study.

On *Kara Art*, cross-linkages between the pasture users are vast (Fig. 4.4). Pasture users are both located close to each other and geographically isolated from other users. Regardless, some of the pasture users have frequent contact with their neighbours, others hardly talk. Most people from Arslanbob utilize separately the eastern side of the river. Only two households from Arslanbob are close to the tents from Jai Terek on the western river side. Additionally, some of the people who practice different land-use types did not express any conflict at all and even mentioned cooperation with each other. For example, one household from Arslanbob on the western river side offers their neighbours the use of their oven, animal shelter, and let them leave tents in their house during the winter.

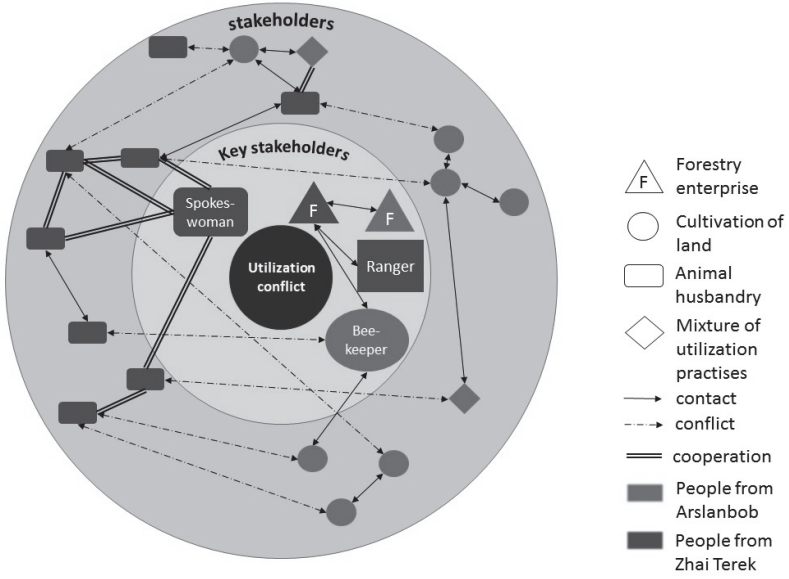


Fig. 4.4: Stakeholder mapping of the utilization conflict on *Kara Art*

Draft: Nordhausen & Paul 2014 based on Zimmermann 2006: 15

Organized cooperation could be identified among the people from Jai Terek. For several years there was only a temporary bridge that connected the two riversides. The crossing was dangerous for both people and their animals. In the last few years, three calves and three donkeys drowned in the river as well as a close call for a little boy who almost drowned. The forestry enterprise ‘Jai Terek’ promised to build a proper bridge but it never did. Therefore, people from this settlement organized themselves to push the process further and to build the bridge by themselves without the enterprise. In order to arrange this process, they decided to collect money. They would need 1,500 KGS per tent and they elected a leader who is responsible for the collection of the money. But, so far, only three households have paid the fee.

Although cooperation is evident, problematic relationships sometimes build between the users. Most of the pasture users perceive a utilization conflict on the pasture. Distinct signs of insufficient land resources, such as the frequent incidences with cows eating crops, make the conflict even more evident. The diverse goals and strategies of the different stakeholders provide a deeper understanding of the prevailing conflict.

As previously mentioned, all people from Arslanbob on the pasture cultivate fields and most of them face similar problems. Cows, usually belonging to the people of Jai Terek,

destroy their fences and consume their harvests. It is indeed a fact that doing agriculture on pastures is illegal in Kyrgyzstan. The forestry enterprise responsible for monitoring and ensuring compliance with the legislation for the pasture *Kara Art* permits the illegal activity in return for payments. As a result of this behavior, the people of Arslanbob become entitled to grow crops on the pasture even though it is legally prohibited. This strengthens the position of the people from Arslanbob against the people from Jai Terek which provokes resistance. About two-thirds of the interviewed persons from Jai Terek emphasize the informal character of these arrangements. The people from *Arslanbob* accuse the people of Jai Terek to be responsible for the pasture problem because of their excessive use of land. They take the view that in their district there is not enough arable land to meet their basic food needs and demand that the people from Jai Terek should use other pastures higher up the mountains to feed their animals, as they used to do in the past. The people of Arslanbob blame others for being too lazy to walk that distance. They do not understand why every household of Jai Terek must send members to the pasture if they have only very few cows. If they collected the animals and sent herdsmen instead, the pasture would not be as crowded and as resource deficient (e.g. water and firewood). Above all, the conflict escalation in 2007 where many households from Arslanbob had to leave the pasture irritates them. The often expressed claim of the exclusive usage right by the people of Jai Terek results in great uncertainty and fear on the side of the people of Arslanbob.

The people of Jai Terek claim the exclusive right to use the pasture for themselves, because officially the area belongs to their forestry enterprise. Even after 2007 when the people of Arslanbob had to leave the entire western part of the pasture there was not sufficient space for all their animals. The people of Jai Terek are of the opinion that the people of Arslanbob possess much more land and that they could use other pastures as an alternative to *Kara Art*. They hold that apart from having access to additional pastures, the people of Arslanbob benefit from tourism. The people from Jai Terek believe that *Kara Art* is the only pasture they can use and they depend on it. There are different perceptions of the conflict. For a deeper understanding, two exemplarily pasture users' daily activities as well as their perceptions of the conflict are described in more detail in the textbox below.

Box 4.1: Pasture users' daily activities and perceptions of the conflict

Oruchan, 56 year old woman from Arslanbob

Oruchan has been coming to *Kara Art* for 20 years during the summertime between May and August. During that time she lives in a small house on the eastern part of the pasture. She grows mostly garlic, corn, and small amounts of potatoes on a 0.04 ha plot. In 2013, she spends the summer on the pasture with her youngest son. Her husband and the other two children are working in Russia (Moscow) to contribute some money to the household's livelihood. In Arslanbob she does not earn enough money to make a living. Thus, her household depends on the food she grows in *Kara Art*. Besides growing crops on her land, *Oruchan* also owns two cows and 15 chickens. To protect her harvest from the ravenous cattle she has established a wooden fence around her plot. Nonetheless, she has had several

problems with her neighbour's livestock. In her opinion, the people from Jai Terek do not look after their animals. Their negligence leads to the fact that the cows are frequently destroying her fence and eat parts of the harvest. She feels very angry about this. She is of the opinion that the people from Jai Terek, in general, are making an excessive use of the existing land. She remembers the time right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union when just a few people from Jai Terek used the pasture and none of these problems occurred. "Step-by-step they took over the land. Since 2007 the entire western part of the pasture belongs to them." From 2005 to 2007, *Oruchan's* household also had a plot of arable land on the other side of the pasture but had to abandon it after the people of Jai Terek claimed it as their own. *Oruchan* does not understand why these people request the exclusive usage right of the pasture. She believes that people from Arslanbob have the right to use the pasture as well. Doing agriculture on the pasture is also not a problem, she argues, because she pays for it. *Oruchan* is certain that she will defend herself against this process. For example, she and some other people of Arslanbob are planning to block the road to Arslanbob if the people from Jai Terek tell them to leave the pasture. This would be a problem for the people from Jai Terek since a lot of them sell their products at the market in Arslanbob - stealing income opportunities from the people from Arslanbob.

Adashka, 44 year old woman from Jai Terek

It is the seventh year that *Adashka* has come from Jai Terek to *Kara Art*. From May to August she and her son share a tent on the pasture. Their three cows are the reason that they spend the summertime on the pasture. With the milk from the cows, *Adashka* produces different local products which she sells at least twice a week in Arslanbob. Besides that income source, *Adashka's* family collects walnuts in the forest in autumn and they sell them in Bazar Korgon. The time on the pasture plays an important role for the livelihood of her household. Nowadays it is more difficult to find enough food for their animals on *Kara Art*. When she first came here seven years ago, the condition of the pasture was much better. Now she has frequent problems with neighbours because her cows destroy their fences in order to get food. Then she must pay penalty fees to compensate the damage her cows have done to the neighbour's crops, which she does not seem to be willing to accept. She does not understand why the people from Arslanbob have to use this pasture since they have five other pastures. For Jai Terek it is the only one. This is why she holds the opinion that the people from Arslanbob should leave *Kara Art* and the usage rights should be given exclusively to the people from Jai Terek. She is aware of the fact that *Kara Art* officially belongs to the people of Jai Terek so she spoke with the forestry enterprise 'Jai Terek' about her problems. They told her that they are willing to support her and that they are finally going to implement the usage rights of the people from Jai Terek for *Kara Art* next year. But, since the forestry enterprise always promises things and does nothing in return, *Adashka* and a lot of people are tired of waiting for state intervention and would rather take action themselves such as destroying all fences of the people from *Arslanbob*.

These two examples reveal different perspectives and spatial interests of two exemplary persons of the two stakeholder groups. During the period of field work, the antagonistic relation between the two groups became evident, with neither group understanding the perspective of the other. The only vague and contradictory involvement of state institutions contributes to the lack of conflict resolution.

Taking a closer look at the official key stakeholders of the conflict reveals further problems. The forestry enterprise 'Jai Terek' as the responsible authority regarding the legislation and its implementation has wide influence. As local state representatives the forest rangers are entitled to enforce the interests of the enterprise on site. Rangers control the adherence of the legislation while they register and punish any kind of defiance to formal rules. They are also responsible for briefing the administration about any occurrences. Through their control and power, rangers play an important role as gatekeepers. Even though they are not in possession of the pasture resources, they control its access and use in the interest of their employer, the forestry enterprise. Twice or three times a week they monitor and patrol the pasture.

Despite the small salary (Dörre 2014: 290-291), the job as a ranger is of great importance, embedded in a particular social environment. Pasture users might be relatives, acquaintances, or friends of the ranger who pursue interests that contradict the interests of his employer. Taking this into consideration, the inconsistent implementation of the provisions including all informal arrangements are easier to understand. Beyond that, the economical aspect plays an important role. The ranger knows about the dependency of the pasture users on accessible land plots. He also has knowledge of the financial situation of most pasture users. Many are able to pay a higher fee for the land and are willing to do so because of the privileges they get from the informal arrangement. This causes a situation where the ranger profits from the current situation and therefore makes a significant contribution to the maladjusted utilization practises.

The forestry enterprise 'Arstanbap-Ata' is an important economic stakeholder within the conflict. Its economic activities range from forestry to marketing of forest products (walnuts, honey and burls) to animal husbandry. Even though *Kara Art* is located outside of their territory after the secession of the forestry district, the forestry enterprise still uses land area on the pasture. The reason is the scarcity of grassland and arable land resources plus the continuation of the utilization practices of the USSR. Because of the economic power that the forestry enterprise possesses, its administration has the ability to extract usage rights from its neighbouring forestry enterprise. For instance, it receives a large area (eight ha) from the Jai Terek-based forestry enterprise in order to provide a beekeeper with sufficient area for his bees. This agreement is financially very attractive for both enterprises. On the one hand, the forestry enterprise 'Jai Terek' gets a significant additional income. On the other hand, the forestry enterprise 'Arstanbap-Ata' which uses the pasture not itself, but by pasture users on its behalf, realizes important revenues through this agreement. Moreover, the latter enterprise significantly influences the utilization practices of the pasture. Based on the applied (resp. commissioned) utilization practice, it provides pasture users from Arslanbob with a reasonable basis for argumentation. They can appeal to the forestry enterprise 'Arstanbap-Ata' and demand

the same usage rights for themselves. An interview with a *leskhoz* employee has resulted in the commitment of the enterprise to support the remaining people from Arslanbob on the pasture *Kara Art* by trying to reallocate the forestry district and that way acquiring the usage rights of *Kara Art* for the people of *Arslanbob* in the future.

Box 4.2: The beekeeper as a pasture user on behalf of the forestry enterprise

The beekeeper is a pasture user on behalf of the forestry enterprise. He is held in high esteem as a long-established user of *Kara Art* with a good social reputation. For 20 years now he has made his living through the production and sale of honey alongside with agriculture and animal husbandry. He runs a territory of about one hectare on the eastern riverside plus another territory on the western river side of about seven hectares. On this comparatively large plot he mostly cultivates potatoes and collects grass to feed his six cows and calves. Additionally, he manages 100 bee colonies while 60 of those colonies belong to the forestry enterprise 'Arstanbap-Ata'. In return, he must pay a fee of 300 kg of honey per year (equal to five kg per bee colony of the *leskhoz*). The *leskhoz* advocates to ensure that the beekeeper gets a license continuously from the forestry enterprise 'Jai Terek'. For the forestry enterprise 'Arstanbap-Ata', the delivery of honey is a crucial sector of the economy that prevents the enterprise from financial difficulties. For the beekeeper, it is important to know that this actor stands behind him. However, that would not be of any use if he had not a sufficient amount of financial capital. As demonstrated before, the beekeeper has a comparatively high income and is relatively wealthy. Recently though, the beekeeper has faced some difficulties with honey extraction. In the last few years it has rained a lot and there have not been enough flowers for pollination. This compelled him to bring the bee boxes to the cotton flowers in Bazar Kargon. The beekeeper's solid financial capital resources, his facilities with social capital through the linkage with other actors, plus his social position make him a key stakeholder within the conflict. He holds a strong position and a lot of power to act within the pasture land ratios.

Reportedly there are also non-local pasture users on *Kara Art* (Dörre 2014) that however have not been encountered during fieldwork. Instead, an emerging key stakeholder could be discovered during the time on site: The *spokeswoman* for an amalgamation of several people from *Jai Terek* regarding a bridge project on the pasture. It is the only unexpected key stakeholder on the pasture which could not be identified prior to the fieldwork. Due to the already mentioned problematic situation regarding the river crossing and the inaction of the forestry enterprise on that score, a group of pasture users (around 15 households) felt compelled to take action by themselves. They voted in an informal organized meeting for *Haptiza* to collect the money for the self-construction of the bridge as well as to express the opinion of the group to authorities. *Haptiza*, a 50 years old woman, is highly valued in *Jai Terek* for frequently supporting and helping households from this settlement with arising problems. Due to her high social acceptance and her disposition to commit to responsibility she is predetermined to conduct this task. It is the first time on the pasture that some kind of self-organization has occurred. Dörre (2014: 291) came to the conclusion that no evidence of self-organized structures existed on the pasture in due course. Indeed,

the current form of self-organization does not refer to pasture management in particular but it shows the willingness of the people to develop and implement autonomous forms of organization. Because of the pooling of interests and the representation in form of one person, the spokeswoman holds great bargaining power. This could certainly have an increasing effect of the pasture management and existence of the conflict in the near future if the self-organization applies also in other fields of the pasture users than the bridge project.

Through the analysis of the different (key) stakeholders, one gets insights and a deeper understanding of the different aspects of the conflict. The actions of each stakeholder can be perceived as the product of their individual preferences, the social rules in Kyrgyzstan, and the spatial conditions of *Kara Art* as proposed by the ‘geographical conflict research’ (Reuber & Wolkersdorfer 2007: 761).

Conflict resolution – a difficult task to undertake

The conducted study resulted in the prolonged existence of the utilization conflict between the people from Arslanbob and Jai Terek on the pasture *Kara Art*. To this day there is a lack of arable land and easily accessible pastures. In the year of 2007, an escalation of the conflict occurred. Several people from Arslanbob were expelled from the pasture because of not following the instruction to stop protecting their crops with fences. Since then, the situation has calmed down but subliminally still exists. There are still areas on the pasture where people from Arslanbob are cultivating crops. It is very difficult to forecast what will happen on the pasture in the future. The people from Jai Terek claim the exclusive right to use the pasture and want all fences to be destroyed. They hope that the legal basis will finally be implemented by the responsible authorities. There are rumours that the forestry enterprise of Jai Terek will destroy all fences in 2014 so that only animal husbandry will be practiced. This plan has existed for several years², but has not yet been implemented. On the other hand, the people from Arslanbob hope that they can carry on growing crops on the pasture. The uncertainty about the permanence of their acquired rights of disposal weakens their position in the conflict since their practices are illegal and their existence depends on the corruption of the forest administration.

In order to identify the interests and perspectives of the different stakeholders that are involved in the spatial conflict, a detailed stakeholder analysis has been executed. As a result, a better understanding of their objectives and actions as well as their different perceptions of the conflict and their relationships to each other is obtained. In doing so, the ‘geographical conflict research’ provided an appropriate theoretical and methodological framework to understand and describe the conflict more accurately.

The institutional setting constitutes a crucial role within the conflict constellation. As previously mentioned, the socio-ecological pasture problem is the result of an interplay of the economic needs of the users and forestry staff, but also the unreliability of the legislation and enforcement authorities and weakness of the public administration. A situation arose where the forestry enterprise profits from the status quo, therefore a

² Dörre (2014: 287) mentioned the same observation.

conflict resolution is not in their least interest. The informal agreements certainly bring along uncertainties about the duration of the usage rights for the pasture users because it is impossible to sue for a land plot acquired informally. As a result, short term and maximum resource extraction oriented forms of valorisation occurred. Informal agreements foster resource related social conflicts between the local population as well as ecological damage of the pasture.

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