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# Transition from a Traditional Nature and Game Reserve to a National Park: the Case of Khunzhrav Valley in Northern Pakistan

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## Abstract

Governance systems aimed at protecting natural resources, and especially their biodiversity, offer a huge gamut of conservation approaches, tools and intervention patterns, including the management of nature reserves. Set in this scenario, the paper follows the transition process that took the Khunzhrav<sup>1</sup> valley, a traditional nature and game reserve of the former Hunza State, to a protected area in the form of Khunzhrav National Park (KNP). Dissolved in 1974, the Principality of Hunza was declared part of the Northern Areas, known at present as Gilgit-Baltistan Region (Pakistan). In April 1975, the communal pasturelands within the valley were converted into the Khunzhrav National Park, which was the first such park notified in the Region of Gilgit-Baltistan. The abolition of the Hunza State, and the following transformation of the valley into a national park had a double effect: the transition process led the local community to new conditions hampering over their ancestral rights to natural resources, particularly grazing and forest rights; concomitantly, their social transition from an old royalist towards a new democratic system of governance was affected by a row of multilevel changes. The challenges and strategies that emerged as consequences of the KNP notification process are examined in the paper along with the forms of mobilisation that have been adopted by the relevant stakeholders, namely the Khunzhrav community and the local government: similarities and differences in values between the traditional model of the former Hunza State, and modern conservation patterns of the IUCN Worldwide park model (International Union for Conservation of Nature), introduced

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1 The name of the valley, *Khunzhrav*, has been distortedly written as *Khunjerab* in documents of various professional fields (scholarly, journalistic, or else publications): this terminological distortion has never been acknowledged by the indigenous people of the area who felt it as an "offense" to the historical and natural heritage of their valley. The meaning of *Khunzhrav* in Wakhi Pamiri language is "home stream" referring to the belongingness of the indigenous community to the valley; the second derivative takes us to *Khonzhrav*, viz. "Mir's stream", recalling thus the former Hunza State that the valley was a part of as a nature and game reserve, hosting also the pasturelands of the indigenous people. In contrast, *Khunjerab* seems to be a mixture of Wakhi and Urdu words, interpretable as "house of socks" having no meaning contextually. At the request of educated community members, we decided to comply with the indigenous term (*Khunzhrav*) of the toponym, while giving up its distorted version (*Khunjerab*).

by the Government of Pakistan on the same valley, are comparatively explored with particular attention to the issue of communal rights as predicted by the related customary laws addressing the governance of natural resources. Being mainly founded on empirical research, yet underpinned by relevant bibliographic sources, the contents of the present study bring original fieldwork results, especially in terms of experiences, perceptions and opinions expressed by local community members with regard to the phenomenon of conservation models as applied to their native land, the Khunzhrav valley.

**Keywords:** Khunzhrav valley; natural resources; customary natural resource governance; modern conservation patterns; communal rights; community mobilisation

## Introduction

Before merging the erstwhile princely states of Hunza, Nagar, Skardu, Shigar, and Khaplu in the northernmost territory of Pakistan within the Federation in the first half of the 1970s, communities across this culturally diverse region used to abide by their own valley-based customary laws regulating their daily life within sociocultural, economic, political, and environmental realms. It further means that the local people had – and still have – their centuries-old rights of using the available natural resources.

The set of organisational and administrative patterns adopted since the 1970s on has brought about a misunderstanding between traditional and newly introduced hybrid-value systems (government and local community) of governance. In fact, the concept of nature conservation<sup>2</sup> itself may not be defined as unusual to the local communities since traditional forms of conservation were applied in the region before notifying Khunzhrav valley as a protected area. Nonetheless, the concept of modern protected area system was, in a sense, new for the communities and for the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan (the then Northern Area): as the concept of protected area (with different forms and typologies) had recently developed on a global scale, the Khunzhrav National Park (KNP) was the first national park notified in the region. In order to get a complete picture of the phenomenon, it is important to recall a definition of the main concept, namely “protected area”, which is termed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as “*an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means*” (Dudley 2008: 4). Focusing on it as

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2 “The protection, preservation, management, or restoration of wildlife and of natural resources such as forests, soil, and water” (Free Dictionary by Farlex).

“an area of land”, the IUCN-designed definition of protected area broadly applies to Khunzhrav valley.

The former principality of Hunza has been no exception in this process of political and administrative transformations. Accordingly, the phenomenon produced diverse outcomes in form of disputes and conflicts: intra- or inter-communal disagreements between individuals, families, villages, and communities; between the indigenous communities and the new administration. The main issue were the protection of natural resources, along with their ownership and ancestral rights pertaining to grazing in lowlands and highlands (pastoral rights to pasturelands and rangelands), using forests and waters, treating the wildlife (hunting rights), and so on. And the relevant variances emerged from the process of declaring the valleys a national park, and from concomitant approaches to the question of nature conservation: it actually lacked a proper consultation with local communities, resulting thus in taking no customary laws and local needs into consideration.

On these grounds, the paper follows the process that took the Khunzhrav valley, a traditional nature and game reserve of the former Hunza State, to a protected area in the form of Khunzhrav National Park (KNP). More specifically, the challenges and strategies emerged out of the KNP notification process and introduction of national park model are analysed along with the forms of mobilisation around conservation within the KNP that were adopted by the relevant stakeholders, namely the Khunzhrav community and the local government: similarities and differences between traditional and modern conservation patterns are explored on the background of communal rights and governance pertaining to natural resources.

For the purposes of a better understanding, a month of intensive field-based data collection was undertaken, whereby in-depth interviews with more than 40 key informants and focus group discussions were conducted in the region of Hunza valley. Such a methodological choice was functional to exploring experiences, perceptions and opinions, concerning the question of rights over natural resources, as expressed by the related social actors, namely the local community and the Park Administration. The study further builds on the main author’s extensive fieldwork on the subject of natural resources within national parks and their conservation in the region of northern Pakistan. Thereby, the contents rely to a great extent on the primary sources, without neglecting though relevant literature.

## Contextualisation of the Khunzhrav Valley

### A Basic Orientation within the Area

The Khunzhrav valley (now: Khunzhrav National Park, KNP) falls within the territory of Hunza district: evolved from the former principality of Hunza, it is nowadays a part of the Gilgit-Baltistan Region in northern Pakistan.

Being located in the border area between Pakistan, China and Afghanistan, the position of the Khunzhrav valley within the Hunza district is of international strategic importance: externally, it borders the Tashkurghan county (Xinjiang Region) in China, and the Pamir-e Khurd (“Little Pamir”, Badakhshan Province) in Afghanistan; internally, Hunza borders the upper Nagar and Ghizer districts through Ishkoman valley via Chillenji Pass to Chipursan valley.

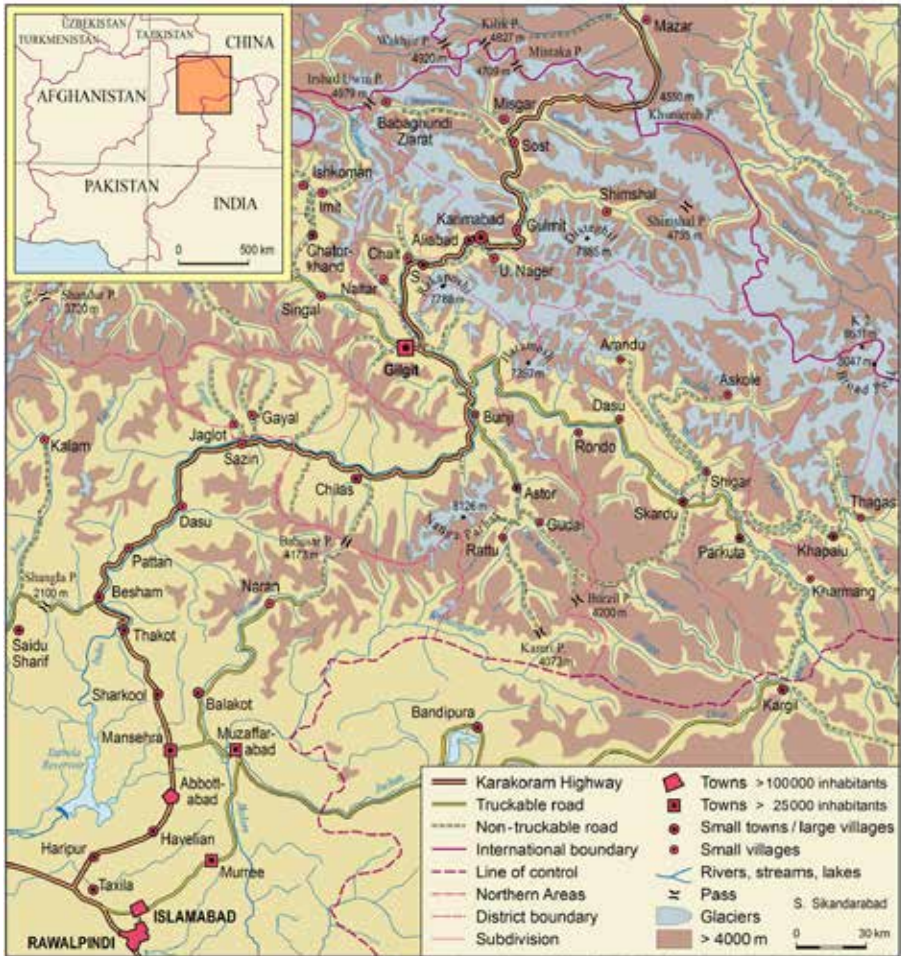
In 1974, Hunza was merged with Pakistan as a sub-district. Since then, it has been territorially subdivided into three geographical areas: Upper Hunza named Gojal (over 75% of the territory), Central Hunza (generally termed Hunza), and Lower Hunza or Šhinaki.

### A Demographic Outline

Various communities inhabit the Hunza valley of Gilgit: aside from sharing a general dimension of being pastoral mountain communities and Hunza valley dwellers, they can be further viewed through the prism of their linguistic, sociocultural, and religious diversity.

Linguistically speaking, Hunza is defined by four language communities including Wakhi (predominant in Gojal valley), Burushaski (mainly employed in central Hunza, though counting significant numbers of speakers in upper and lower Hunza too), Šhina (predominant in Šhinaki), and Ďumaki (a significant population living in central Hunza, though being found in small numbers in upper and lower Hunza as well).

In terms of their faith, the inhabitants of Hunza are Muslims. More in detail, the Ismaili Shias are the most representative religious group of the valley, following prince Karim Aga Khan as their 49th hereditary imam (spiritual leader) in the line of Prophet Muhammad through Ali, the Prophet’s paternal cousin and son-in-law. Concentrated mainly in central Hunza, the Twelver Shias (*Ithna’ashariya*) form the second religious group of Hunza; these two communities are followed by the Sunni Muslims placed at the third tier of demography.



Source: based on map "Northern Pakistan" published by Culture Area Karakorum Research Project 1999

Source and courtesy: Hermann Kreutzmann, *Field Manual for Karakorum Traverse*, 2008, Part I.

At present, Hunza-Nagar district is among the top ten districts with high literacy rate with over 77.8% for both male and female populations (SDPI-Alif Ailaan 2013: 15). Hunza could be termed as the valley of civil society organisations as several of them are active in the area.

### Forms of Indigenous Community Organisation within the KNP

The indigenous people of KNP area are generally known as *Avgarchik*, i.e. “people of Avgarch”, the latter being the name of a small place where their ancestor at first arrived and settled. In the idiom of Gojal (Upper Hunza), the term *Avgarchik* extends to the native communities having their indigenous rights in Khunzhrav valley (KNP), as well

as to other local communities including a significant number of Burushaski speaking population. A number of villages, namely Ghalapan, Murkhun, Jamalabad, Gircha, Sarteez, Nazeemabad, Sost, and Hussainabad, falls into this toponymic entity. Another village community having pastures in KNP is called *Ghulkin* (a twin village with Gulmit, the headquarters of Gojal).

Accordingly, when referring to the Avgarch community (*Avgarchik*), the designation is being used in relation to the inhabitants of the aforesaid villages; the Ghulkin community would refer, instead, to another indigenous people still having legitimate rights within KNP.

Today, both communities have their umbrella organisations, that of Avgarchik (as a strong civil society organisation) being named Khunzhrav Villagers Organisation (KVO), while the umbrella forum of Ghulkin community is called Ghulkin Educational, Social Welfare and Nature Conservation Association (GESWANCA).

## Becoming a National Park: Khunzhrav Valley between Traditional and Modern Conservation Systems

### Traditional Governance Patterns

The former princely state of Hunza was governed by local hereditary rulers known as *Mirs*<sup>3</sup> (lords, princes). The Mir had his governance team composed of *wazirs* (ministers) and *tranphas* or *arbobs* (chiefs or headmen at village and areal levels). As far as the domain of animal husbandry and related pastoral functions was concerned, important actors were the Mir's *yarpas* (livestock heads) and *šhūpūns* (shepherds).

In the Hunza State, lands and pastures were owned by the local residents with ownership and use rights; on their side, the Mirs of Hunza held their personal cropping lands, pastures and game reserves too. Moreover, the Mirs had the authority of conferring (giving or taking) pasturelands to members of the local communities on varying reasons. As for the revenues, they were mainly generated by levying taxes on agricultural produces, livestock products, by-products, and grazing taxes of the pasturelands.

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3 The title *mir* derives from the Arabic word '*amir*' meaning "commander", "leader", "chief", or "lord", "prince".

Although the indigenous people of Khunzhrav *de jure* had their pastures within the Khunzhrav valley and *de facto* paid various taxes including grazing taxes to the Hunza State, the Khunzhrav valley was designated as a nature and game reserve by the Mirs with the goal of protecting the flora and fauna, more specifically dense forests and wild ungulates. By bringing in use the customary laws, the governance and management teams of the former Hunza State committed to protect the natural resources available within the villages and pasturelands under their rule.

### Notification of the Khunzhrav National Park

In 1974, the princely state of Hunza was dissolved and declared part of the Northern Areas (now known as Gilgit-Baltistan Region). Soon after the abolition of the Hunza State, the Khunzhrav valley was notified in April 1975 as one of the national parks of Pakistan (under the then Prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto): the notification was basically aimed at protecting the Marco Polo sheep as a top priority.

*Although the Khunzhrav valley was literally under the Mir's custody, he had already bestowed upon the community the pasturelands within the restricted Khunzhrav valley, described the respondents.*

In this decision, the local community had no say, which ultimately led towards deprivation of their ancestral and indigenous rights over the natural resources for which they had paid taxes, and defended the international borders bestowed upon them by the Mirs: in fact, as local governors, the Mirs used to grant grazing rights to the local residents, and in return collect taxes in form of livestock and livestock products (Mock 1997: 2).

More in detail: disestablishment of traditional political entities and systems was followed by a power regulation vacuum as the new administrative setups seemed alien to the local customary laws. On their side, the mountain communities of Hunza – rooted in the old set governance values of their respective cultures – were sceptic to the outsiders, that is other than native community members.

### The Transition Has Begun

The end of the Hunza State in 1974, and the following decision to convert the communal pasturelands within the Khunzhrav valley territories into a national park in 1975, had a double effect: the transition process led the local community to encounter challenges hampering over their ancestral rights to natural resources (with a particular reference to the rights pertaining to grazing and using forests); furthermore, it slackened



the paths of their social transition from an old royalist towards a new democratic system of governance, as shared by one of the key informants on June 12th, 2015.

The transition was illustrated by a socio-political activist as follows:

*Although the native communities already went through a number of related experiences as subjects of the former Hunza State, the practices enacted within the new politico-administrative setup were felt more suppressive than those applied by their old lords.*

What is more, when the KNP was notified, local communities initially had no awareness of modern conservation concepts, such as national park, wildlife sanctuary, and community-managed conservation areas. Unlike customary conservation practices, the majority of modern concepts tend to limit or eliminate the resource ownership and the management role of local communities. Some informants describe as, going to the pastures in Khunzhrav valley, they noticed the KNP signboard: yet, they would not deliberate upon its significance. With the passing of time and after experiences of the Avgarch community with the Park Administration (cfr. later on), members of other communities learnt the notion behind it.

In the initial days, the park administrators used to meet concerned community members; nevertheless, the notion of national park was poorly communicated by the former, being their main emphasis placed on restricting the community from grazing in the Core Zone, i.e. a 12km zone in the vicinity of the Khunzhrav top area, locally known as *Wiyinsar*.

More specifically, the approaches implemented by the Park Administration proved *not* to be effective nor trustworthy as the relevant statements had been communicated verbally (Khan 1996: 2). The situation is still remembered by the key informants and other respondents who recall the memories of government officials making verbal commitments with the indigenous instead of opting for a communication based upon written documents and practice-oriented strategies of community inclusion. Having produced the feelings of doubt, distrust and scepticism in local population, these approaches had finally developed into a series of disputes between the indigenous communities and the respective Government departments (esp. the Park and Local Administrations) that had lasted for more than one and a half decade (1975-1992).

### Indigenous Rights and Resistances

In 1976, the native community members took their livestock to the Khunzhrav National Park (KNP) up to the Core Zone. The Park Administration brought the grazers down in order to have the Government's writ on the KNP. Community members though descended from the Core Zone that year; the next year (1977), they decided to reach the Wiyinsar (Core Zone) again. One of the influential persons, named Khudo Burdi of Murkhun, being a *yarpa* (livestock head) of the Mir of Hunza, strongly resisted against expelling the livestock of the community from their ancestral pasturelands. He thus remained up on the Wiyinsar. The Park Administration charged him of poaching the Marco Polo sheep, hence the *yarpa* was sent to prison for six months.

*Once entered the world of a "modern state", like other natives of Hunza, the indigenous community of the park had gradually acquired a considerable experience in order to orient and adjust themselves within the new governance system, on one hand; and to find their way with regard to their ancestral rights to natural resources and their communal governance in a legal context, on the other, states one of the key informants.*

In the second half of the 1970s, another case was noted: two siblings from Murkhun were arrested and charged with cutting trees in the natural forest in the KNP.

Succeeded in late 1970s after the Bhutto administration, Zia-ul Haq's government was not much oriented towards the national parks. Since the needs and opinions of the indigenous population kept being not included in the governance programmes, in the 1980s the local communities showed their resentment against declaring the pastures as state-owned and removing thus their ownership and use rights.

In the first half of the 1980s, another event occurred: the forces captured dozens of yaks of the Avgarch community and community members were taken to the police station in order to register First Information Reports (FIRs) and file cases against the owners.

*Ironically, the local administration of Gilgit-Baltistan and intelligence agencies charged our peace-loving people, demanding for their ancestral rights to natural resources in the KNP, with separatism, and the like. In such an environment, based upon the tactics aimed at subjugating a community, what could be done in such a situation?, shares one of the respondents on June 27th, 2015.*

Despite the existing circumstances of the KNP, more invigorated steps are observed since 1986 on, especially during the semi-civilian government of Muhammad Khan Junejo, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan under General Zia-ul Haq. The indigenous people of the park area used to gather untidily to express their strong voices in favour of their rights, particularly their ancestral rights to pasturelands, and against the formulated charges on them.

In 1990, the Avgarch community in the KNP area planned a long protest march of both male and female with the goal of clarifying their rights and compensation against the withdrawal of their ancestral rights in the national park. The procession departed from the village of Sost: it had travelled for over 10 kilometres towards Gilgit, when the community leaders of Hunza intervened to stop the procession, which was growing in size and risking to turn into a mob. The situation was however controlled and settled in time when the Regional Ismaili Council of Hunza intervened and played the role of mediator between the community and the Park Administration where the latter agreed to discuss on demands and options for compensating the communities.

### **Towards an Agreement**

In June 1989, on the initiative of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a team of experts from the USA, Canada, China, Nepal, and Pakistan gathered in order to formulate the Management Plan of KNP. On that occasion, the rights and inclusion of the native communities were also discussed (Khan 1996: 3).

In August 1990, another workshop was planned under facilitation of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), when Pakistan took into account the community concerns in the national park. During the workshop, the participants learnt that the Avgarch community had brought a suit against the Park Administration in the Court of Law regarding their rights (Knudsen 1999: 6): the Court bestowed the “Stay Order” upon the community, justifying its right to stay in the Core Zone of the park for the time being, unless the judgement comes up after a thorough examination of the case.

As a result of the Gilgit Workshop (June 1989), WWF Pakistan was tasked of preparing a comprehensive management plan for the KNP. Considering the continuum of variances between the Park Administration and indigenous communities, it was not possible to opt for the assignment without a process of conflict management and resolution (Khan 1996: 3).

In January 1992, a decision was finally taken (thanks also to the facilitation of WWF) in the form of a mutual agreement between the local community and the Park Administration: by reaching this agreement regarding the KNP management, the communal rights were accepted and incorporated into the plan, though with limitations and reinterpretations. Some of the main decisions were the following: 1) one hundred yaks of the community would graze for a limited period in winter keeping in view the caring capacity of the Core Zone's vegetation with priority to the Marco Polo sheep's grazing right; 2) the indigenous population, particularly the grazing communities, would have the largest share (80%) in the accumulated revenues generated from the entry fee of the park; 3) the community would get the employment benefits (80%) with the related government departments provided the concerned community members have the required capacity; 4) minimum 5 students will be sent on scholarship to study the related subjects (B.Sc/M.Sc.) from the Pakistan Forest Institute (PFI), Peshawar.

By signing the agreement, the 17-year controversy between the local community and the Park Administration was settled. This positive move has finally paved the way for devising the KNP Management Plan: the appointed expert, Ashiq Ahmed Khan, did a detailed fieldwork and prepared a comprehensive Management Plan of the Khunzhrav National Park (cf. Khan 1996).

### Roles and Rights of the Ghulkin Community in the KNP

As the main authority of the former Hunza State, the Mirs had the power to take or give pasturelands to the communities under their rule. In conformity with this regulation, the last Hunza ruler, Mir Muhammad Jamal Khan, conferred the pastures of Qarachanay in Khunzhrav valley to the Ghulkin community. There are two Qarachanays locally known as *Chap Qarachanay* and *Rost Qarachanay* (Left and Right Qarachanays). One of the several ravines in Chap Qarachanay, called *Wüloghdhur* (*Wüloydur*), meaning the "cattle ravine" in Wakhi, is of high significance due to the presence of Marco Polo sheep as testified by Ashiq Ahmed Khan (1996) during his extensive fieldwork in the KNP.

Initially, not all of the local communities were aware of the processes that had emerged out of the KNP notification. Gradually, and especially after the experiences underwent by the Avgarch community with the Park Administration, other communities became more familiar with the situation:

*The case of the Avgarch community with the Park Administration was mainly on the Core Zone, but, despite this fact, our elders and village representatives, hiring*

*a van, would meet with the Avgarch community representatives at that time if any help was required. The Avgarch representatives answered that the case concerned the 12km of the Core Zone (Wiyinsar). However, if the case spread downward from the top, the Ghulkin community would be informed and asked for necessary actions, described a community leader.*

The Ghulkin community though did not apparently have a role in opposing the KNP: according to its representatives, the community was in close contact with the stakeholders, especially the WWF Pakistan office in Gilgit. The Ghulkin community collaborated with WWF on various conservation projects in the village through the forum of Ghulkin Educational, Social Welfare and Nature Conservation Association (GESWANCA).

#### From Avgarchik to Khunzhrav Villagers Organisation

The identity of being *Avgarchik* (*Avgarch-ik*, natives, dwellers or community of Avgarch) is mainly associated with the descendants of Bobo Sufi, the apical ancestor of a Sufi clan. As time went by, this regional identity extended to other clan groups (whether or not they embraced the regional term for them) which immigrated in the valley area representing now the six villages from Ghalapan to Sost.

The second half of the 1980s witnessed the emergence of a new identity for the Avgarchik when the respective community members joined hands together for their ancestral rights to the Khunzhrav National Park in order to make the Government and the administration realise that KNP is not heirless: there was a community owning lands and resources. They firstly formed an informal forum of the concerned communities under the name of Khunzhrav Committee or Khunzhrav Action Committee with the goal of organising meetings, keeping records of their progress, giving accounts to the people, and – most importantly – collecting findings from each household in order to sue the case in the Court of Law. When the agreement between the community and the relevant Government bodies took place (1992), the informal forum evolved into the Khunzhrav Villagers Organisation (KVO). Now, the people of Avgarch (*Avgarchik*) are known as KVO community (emerged in result of the KNP process) before the outsiders, esp. in front of development-related organisations.

After bringing the KVO into existence, it was registered with the Government of Pakistan in 1993. Since its inception, the Organisation has been working in close collaboration with all social actors inside and out of the valley. As a community organisation, the KVO has its governance share in the KNP. Being an effective and

outstanding civil society organisation, the KVO safeguards not only the natural resources of the KNP, but also works for the preservation, mobilisation and promotion of any other resources under its jurisdiction.

### Comparative Perspectives of Conservancies

As remarked by Somuncu (et al), the “history of preserving particular areas for specific purposes goes back to dawn of civilizations. Land areas set aside specifically for protecting wildlife is not a new concept in the area of present day Pakistan” (Somuncu, Khan, Wasim 2009: 4). Accordingly, the concept of nature conservation in the context of the former Hunza State in general, and in Upper Hunza in particular, is not a new phenomenon: what may relatively differ are the patterns in terms of ownership, use of rights, and management structure. With regard to the Khunzhrav valley as a protected area, the issue offers interesting outcomes when the status of the said protected site (KNP) is cross-historically analysed and compared.

### Traditional Nature and Game Reserve of Khunzhrav

Taking into account the biodiversity of the region, the Mirs of Hunza, who traditionally held authority over all kinds of natural resources, declared the Khunzhrav valley as their “nature reserve”. The resultant customary laws were devised by the same Mirs, and observed by the population of the principality. These laws used to be enacted and communicated to the population through local representatives called *arbobs* (chiefs or headmen at village and areal levels) selected by the Mirs. The following are main customary regulations regarding natural resources in the Khunzhrav valley under the rule of the Mirs:

1. no one was allowed to cut any fresh/living tree in the Khunzhrav valley. Only those plants that were dried up naturally or came under flooding could be used as timber within Khunzhrav valley when the few pastoralists would stay in the valley for some months in a year;
2. no one shall carry along with him any kind of weapon, and hunting in the Khunzhrav valley was strictly prohibited. In case of any violation, the violator was given penalty of ox, sheep or goat;
3. the selective pastoralists would graze the livestock on rotation basis depending on the seasons, weather conditions and altitude.

Despite the regulations, episodes of poaching were not missing: the reported examples speak of poachers hiding their weapons under their beds, or on the horses' or yaks' back. In the former principality, two figures were in charge of law-breaking individuals: the border security forces, called *levies*, or rather *libi* as pronounced by the natives; and *garey*, an agent, a monitoring official, appointed by the Mir to supervise his livestock heads (*yarpa*) and shepherds (*šhūpūn*), as well as other related matters. He was supposed to be informed about any violation of the rules in the Khunzhrav valley.

Important historical divide in this panorama was given by construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH, 1966-1978): before it started, the Khunzhrav valley was not easily accessible due to its highly dangerous terrain, which hindered the access to the area and the mobility of local community members. As pointed out by some informants, only those who were strong enough to cross the Khunzhrav river, as hunters (*paliwon*) or swimmers (*ašhnowar*), could enter the valley.

According to the personal experiences of our respondents in diverse side valleys and rangelands of the Khunzhrav Valley in relation to the period before the Karakoram Highway existed, the local plant and animal life was characterised by some exemplary species, including: forests of juniper (*yarz*), birch (*fürz*), salicaceae (*tērghoq*), multiple varieties of willow (*wūnük*, *mūzhūr*), along with wild ungulates, predators, and diverse bird species.

During and after construction of the Karakoram Highway, period embracing the abolition of the princely state of Hunza (1974) too, dense forests of the Khunzhrav valley were depleted by the Chinese labour forces, Pakistani security forces, and local communities. In the light of road construction, the wild ungulates, particularly the Marco Polo sheep locally known as *rūsh* and the ibexes, were of no exception to get spared.

### Traditional and IUCN Model of Conservation in Comparison

Interesting similarities and differences we can find between both the traditional (the Nature Reserve of the Mir) and the IUCN models (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and approaches of nature conservation. Some of them are highlighted as follows:

***Conservation focus.*** Within the traditional model, special focus was put on preservation of wild ungulates, natural forests, and rotational grazing. Although the attention was mainly paid to a selective fauna (wild ungulates), predators had also got

safe havens. The Nature Conservation of IUCN Model (through KNP) focused on all natural resources (with Marco Polo sheep as a top priority).

**Conservation approach.** The traditional model privileged the top-down approach allowing and/or rewarding few pasturelands to the local community as tools for conserving the nature reserve. A combination of both top-down and bottom-up approaches was adopted by the IUCN-KNP pattern, being it added by recreational and environmental education as a further conservation tool.

**Weapon regulation.** Strong regulation and restriction was in practice with regard to carrying weapons in the Khunzhrav valley except for the game purposes through the Mir's permission (traditional model). Consequently, these regulations implied less or no violation of the customary laws. In contrast, although the same regulations are in theory comprised within the IUCN and KNP administration model, they are violated by the Khunzhrav Security Forces (KSF) having their permanent encampment inside the national park, which itself is a violation of KNP regulations as according to IUCN regulations for category II of protected area, resource use and establishing permanent infrastructure is not allowed except for subsistence or minor recreational purposes (IUCN 2015).

**Fauna conservation.** The aim adopted by the traditional model was to fully protect the wild ungulates, particularly *nīsh* (Marco Polo sheep) and *yukšh* (ibex), while the restriction on carrying any weapons in the valley automatically implied the protection of predators. While a full protection of all wildlife is characterising the IUCN-KNP approach, endangered Marco Polo sheep remains a top priority.

**Flora conservation.** Restriction on deforestation for timber or fuel-wood was the core of the traditional approach; accordingly, the use of dead and naturally fallen trees was allowed. Likewise, in the IUCN-KNP approach, strong restriction on deforestation is in place, which encourages reforestation of indigenous species within the sites of the valley.

**Pasture management.** The strategy of the traditional approach, placing great emphasis on rotational grazing, was adopted by the KNP administration too.

**Livestock population.** In the traditional approach, increase in the number of livestock was not discouraged: accordingly, farmers would rear a huge number of livestock, such as sheep, goats, yaks, cattle, or else. Contrariwise, the IUCN model on KNP,



discouraging this approach, emphasises instead on decreasing livestock population, particularly yaks.

***Abiotic component.*** Although concrete and detailed information on traditional approaches regarding abiotic aspects of natural resources would be required, generally cautious utilisation of land and water resources, as highly valued elements, could be attested among local communities. In the IUCN model on KNP, great emphasis is unquestionably placed on conserving the abiotic components.

***Environmental Education Component.*** In the frames of the traditional model, environmental education has been informally handed down through the customary laws/rules, folk songs, folk tales, and discussion gatherings of families and groups. In the IUCN model, it is imparted through formal education, trainings, workshops, and alike events.

***Recreational component.*** The traditional way used to provide a high level of accessibility and regulation issues for people to interact, hence minimum or no recreation has been observed for native people. Conversely, KNP has no accessibility issue as the Karakoram Highway passes through the heart of the national park connecting Pakistan with its neighbour China. In addition, emphasis on recreation/ecotourism is made as per concepts like wildlife sighting, site seeing, trekking, camping, etc.

***Management/administration.*** In the traditional model, care and management of natural resources were run by means of an institutional team including *arbob* (chief or headman at village and areal levels), *yarpa* (livestock head of the Mir), *garey* (monitoring official of the Mir), *libi* (border levies), and other team members. As for the present-day KNP, it relies on an extensive administration team working in collaboration with the local civil society organisations, such as KVO (Khunzhrav Villagers Organisation) and GESWANCA (Ghulkin Educational, Social Welfare and Nature Conservation Association).

***Poaching and clash of security interests.*** Poaching was on a very insignificant scale within the traditional model, while it remains a significant issue within the KNP administration model. The reasons for such approaches are linked to security interests of two main areas: nature versus political or human. There is apparently a clash of security mandate between the two public sector organisations, namely KNP and KSF (Khunzhrav Security Forces). KNP urges towards nature conservation (*viz.* nature

security) as a top priority, while KSF put human or political security between Pakistan and China as the top concern. KNP strictly advocates and restricts in carrying even a knife along while entering the natural park; quite the opposite, KSF has employed its forces within the park, as shared by a respondent on July 15th, 2015. Poaching of the wild ungulates in particular are reported clandestinely within the park.

***Punishment/Penalty.*** Within the traditional model of natural resource governance and management, the violators of the customary laws were punished by putting penalty on them in form of an ox, sheep, goat, or else by observing contextually the nature of violation. Under the KNP administration, First Information Reports (FIRs), imprisonment, or other types of punishment have been brought in use.

***Regulation mechanism.*** Within the traditional model, regulation mechanism was given by the customary laws whereby the people were held responsible if they violated any related rules. In contrast, within the KNP administration model, it has a full-fledged rules and regulations in place reaching back to the imperial times.

## Conclusion

The idea of conservation of protected areas, fully or partially related to natural resources, seems not to be a new phenomenon in Hunza: in fact, the present-day Khunzhrav National Park (KNP) was predated by the traditional nature and game reserve devised by the Mirs of the former Hunza State. To boot, both models present significant similarities, as well as differences, in conservation approaches and intervention patterns within their mandates.

As illustrated, the variance that emerged between the indigenous community and the Park Administration after the KNP's birth (1975) was based upon a distrust that had grown in local population towards the authorities. Likewise, the new condition had negatively contributed to exploitation of the biodiversity for approximately two decades, especially during the Karakoram Highway construction. After the climax in the second half of the 1980s, the process resumed a more productive communication in early 1990s resulting in an agreement between the primary stakeholders. Thus, the ownership and ancestral rights of the communities inhabiting the Khunzhrav valley were finally accepted. On its side, the local community understood the importance of the Park, and agreed on many points of the agreement in order to preserve the biodiversity related to the community economy.

Inclusive approach in communal matters, based upon acknowledgement of relevant rights and responsibilities, along with promoting a multilevel communication with the concerned communities, leads towards productive forms of mobilisation and reliable outcomes. In the frames of this approach, the native community members should be actively involved in the related public sector organisation and its actions; besides, be they customary or contemporary, leadership and law are fundamental tools in such processes. Failure in implementing this kind of approaches brings about generating negative consequences for all the involved, such as frustration, distrust, uncertainty, disputes, and conflicts.

As evidenced by the case of Khunzhrav valley, building participatory forms of governance starting from the local grass-roots levels, including economic incentives for the involved communities, represents a beneficial modality which may produce an effective and sustainable conservation system. In this very sense, both traditional and contemporary conservation systems should be further explored so as to identify good practices and bring them into a combination that may enhance a better functioning of the Park's conservation.

In conclusion, such an approach calls for a reliable commitment and active participation of the concerned public sector organisations, especially the Park and local administration and the security forces within the Park, as well as the related community organisations, within their mandates pertaining to the nature conservation of the Khunzhrav National Park.

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