

PROMOTING NATURA 2000 NETWORK BENEFITS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES BY PRACTICING ECOTOURISM AND AGROTOURISM

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Abstract

This paper presents the benefits of the local communities across Natura 2000 sites. Human activities in these areas should take into account the economic, social, cultural, and environmental protection. It examines the most common problems encountered in forests, pastures and hayfields in the area of Natura 2000 sites. There are some examples of good practice exemplified by the activities of farmers living on the radius of Natura 2000 sites in different European countries. Natura 2000 sites are suitable for development of eco-tourism and agro-tourism based on tradition and organic products, which may lead to a brand. Tourism and specifically eco-friendly tourism industries (ecotourism, agrotourism, etc.) are encouraging development areas at regional and national Natura 2000 sites as a sustainable opportunity for people and nature.

Key words: *benefits, communities, Natura 2000, rural development, tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Natura 2000 is a network of protected areas in Europe, whose aim is to find solutions to allow "environmentally friendly" economic activities and simultaneously protect biodiversity, but without limiting the right to property, without banning human activities and free movement of people.

Natura 2000 sites ensures the development of ecotourism activities, grazing and mowing in moderation, organic agriculture, which increases the value of local products. In Romania have been reported so far 530 Natura 2000 sites. [8]

Natura 2000 aims at maintaining or restoring the natural habitat types. [10]

Each State member shall contribute to the expansion of Natura 2000 in proportion to the representation within its territory of the natural habitat types and the habitats of species.

Declaration of Natura 2000 sites does not mean strict protection but the promotion of sustainable development and support to enable conservation. [7]

Natura 2000 network provides an excellent basis for funds and allows labeling of natural products in an area (site logo) and will probably help increase sales of these products.

Declaring an area as a Natura 2000 site is evidence that the area has a great natural value and can generate revenues from ecotourism and other associated activities.

Hunting, fishing, tourism and other recreational activities can continue if they are conducted in a sustainable manner and do not affect rare species and habitats.

Ecotourism is a model of rational and sustainable exploitation of tourism resources. Unlike other forms of tourism, ecotourism provides a direct and close connection with the natural and cultural history. [4]

Rural tourism in specificity, largely meets the ecotourism requirements.

The relationship between tourism and the environment is required to be placed under the sign of harmony, meaning protection, conservation and restoration of the tourism potential.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methods used in this research are documented study, theoretical analysis and synthesis of information. This type of documentation aimed to identify and review the main issues that arise in the management of Natura 2000 sites, with direct reference to the issue raised by forests, pastures and hay included in Natura 2000.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Under the Habitats Directive implementation process of Natura 2000 should take into account the economic, social and cultural rights, promoting development of economic activities of Natura 2000 sites.

Natura 2000 designation creates certain obligations, but offers a number of benefits and opportunities for local communities and landowners.

Benefits:

- ecological label for local products and services;
- support to access EU funds;
- creating jobs;
- extra income by promoting eco-tourism;
- sustainable use of resources.

Duties:

- avoid activities that could significantly affect the species or habitats for which the area was designated;
- take measures necessary for the conservation of species and habitats.

Main message is that the Natura 2000 network does not mean scrapping the land, but to preserve the traditional agro-pastoral and forestry practices that do not harm existing heritage.

There are differences depending on the type of the area. In the following we will present details of forest areas for grazing and hay.

Forest areas

Forest Natura 2000 implementation does not make changes to forest norms in force, but will bring changes to their application.

The principle of sustainable development is incorporated into forest areas carried out at the

base unit as production units on the massive complex of forests with large areas [5].

Regulations to planning studies - conducted on small areas where forests belonging to individuals – they cannot answer satisfactorily any requirements that impose functional principles of continuity and effectiveness, nor the specific principle of conservation of biodiversity of forest ecosystems.

Forest management remains focused on promoting natural regeneration of trees, a prerequisite to maintaining forest biodiversity and main production functions. In this way the natural forests will promote intensive treatment and natural regeneration. [6]

Forest certification in Natura 2000 sites - assessment is a very costly process and condition of timber export to the European Community –they are supported in accessing funds from the European Union.

Grazing practice will be in accordance with the law to avoid over-grazing and to protect habitats of interest.

Pursuant to the exploitation of timber from certified forests no 1% fee is charged by the Environment Fund Administration, calculated as the value tendered / negotiated.

Measures will be taken to prevent damage to habitats and wild species listed in Annexes of the Habitats and Birds. In this way, any investment will be preceded by impact on habitats and community species for which the site was declared of European interest.

Hunting

Hunting activities will still take place respecting the Law of hunting base for crops to remain true between optimal number and the ratio of the true number of individuals.

In some species such as carnivores, the proposed harvest will be increased compared to the last two years, based on new assessment methodologies.

Will significantly increase the proportion of revenues from hunting tourism, Natura 2000 sites with carnivores offering great opportunities.

Forest products

Through good promotion interest on wild fruits and mushrooms will grow, interest in more efficient use of resources of medicinal

plants based on accurate assessments without populations being significantly affected.

Increments the value of rapsbarry honey, harvested from areas in Natura 2000 sites are considered natural, without pollution.

Government Emergency Ordinance no. 139/2005 on the forests of Romania approved with amendments and completions by Law no. 38/2006 stipulates that by ownership, forest districts are:

a) state forest districts - the set of institutions of state. They provide forest management of public property and ensure forestry or forest management services to other owners on contract;

b) private forest districts - the set of administrative units, legal entities or individuals. They provide forestry services and public property forest management administrative units and private forests to those who have established and for other owner, on a contract basis. Many owners may associate to establish a detour on the principle of effectiveness.

For all forests are that subject to forest development, forest management plans are made.

(2) Forest management plans are drawn at the base unit.

(3) The forest is of two types:

a) arrangement of type I - made a single arrangement for all forest properties smaller than 100 ha/owner, contained in the administrative territory of a municipality;

b) Type II arrangement - made by a forest management plan for each property exceeding 100 ha/owner or owners of each surface resulting from the association if it is greater than 100 ha.

Article 6. - The central public authority responsible for forestry support from state budget expenditures for the development of forest management, under the law, as follows:

a) for all plannings type I;

b) Type II plannings if fitted surface comes from properties of individuals and/or businesses associated with forest management purposes, if each property is less than 100 ha.

Pasture and hay

The main problems encountered are:

-Overgrazing - with serious implications for biodiversity loss of habitats due to the impact of degrading specific anthropomorphic zoogen, the load lands much organic matter from manure, the soil erosion is often skeletal, in this case creating ago rainfall drainage gullies, etc. In this sense, species characteristic of natural grasslands are replaced by *Nardus stricta* [2].

Since 1999 pastures were taken back by local councils after they had been administered by the forestry based silvopastoral management plans which regulated grazing.

By taking by local councils, management plans silvopastorale provisions have not been complied with. Pastures began to be sublet by their managers, persons other than the owners. Pastures administrators have not been able to exercise effective control of these activities, which often led to overgrazing.

Not grassing - in pastures where this activity is traditional, while developed high specific biodiversity including many species that need protection. Without this practice, these habitats tend to become forests and many species disappear after habitat modification; Clearing junipers and wooded meadows by shepherds and locals;

Burning junipers caused by shepherds;

Shepherds complain that the natural extension of junipers is not unjustified, given their protective role and that large areas of mountain pine was liquidated during time caused by deforestation and fires;

Grazing before 1 May [3], the vegetation is tender and easily destroyed by animal hooves before this date (popular says that the lawn cools);

Mowing before 15 June, if this activity is done too early rare species do not get to exploit, and if practiced too late weeds grow on hays;

Transformation of grassland to arable land;

Lack of consistent management of these habitat types;

Replacement of cows with sheep and goats (significant change in land use), occurring risk of overgrazing and grassland degradation, leading to loss of biodiversity;

All these problems can be solved by placing them in the management plans of Natura 2000 sites.

Examples of good practice for including ecotourism and agrotourism in the circuit of Natura 2000 sites in different European countries

Germany

Prackendorfer Moos in northeastern Bavaria [9] was the last one of the largest and best preserved bogs in Germany. In time, however, most of the peat was extracted for use as a fuel or was affected by other land uses. The past 50 years did not offer economic advantages and it appears that peat is no longer attractive. However, even in this stage of degradation it continues to be an important wildlife sanctuary, capable of regeneration.

As Natura 2000, the peat bog could be financed through a LIFE project to regenerate the natural hydrology. Although the peat bog did not bring economic gains, people opposed the project from the beginning, they did not understand why so much effort and money should be put into this "barren" and fearing that an increased level of water would make access to the area harder.

The project decided to deal with these fears. Locals had known only the degraded peat bog, so the project wanted to show them how it was in the past and its importance in the region. They collected information about local history and have published a book - the first book about the area, illustrating the natural diversity of this country that is part of the Natura 2000 ecological network. The result was that the project began to organize guided tours and the area began to be increasingly well integrated in tourist circuits. Locals began to see the benefits of peat lands and farmers in the area have agreed to reduce the intake of fertilizers to help regenerate the area.

Finland

The combined area of all Finland's Natura 2000 areas measures 49,000 sq. km or 15% of Finland's territory. Almost 80% of the area covered by the motion is state-owned and maintained by Metsähallitus.

Conservation of Natura 2000 areas can be ensured by governmental legislation, by

administrative orders or by voluntary agreements. For the most part conservation leans on the Nature Conservation Act and the Wilderness Act, but nature is also conserved with laws such as the Forest Act, the Water Act, the Outdoor Recreation Act, the Land Use and Building Act and the Earth and Soil Act. Any activity which does not compromise conservation efforts can be permitted in these areas. [11]

In central Finland is the biggest timber industry in this country. Most forests are privately owned and any restrictions on logging derived from the designation of Natura 2000 are received with great reluctance. So in the beginning of the implementation of Natura 2000, the regional environmental authority has decided not to start directly with restrictions, but preferred an indirect variant, requiring landowners to obtain operational approval. They then made a partnership with the Forest Centre to test this procedure in 10 Natura 2000 sites through an EU project.

The project offered the advantage to forest owners to achieve their management plan that takes into account the natural values of the area. This brought a clear picture of what is allowed and approved in advance of the works they wanted to perform.

Project staff chatted with each forest owner to walk along the plot and show the owners how to preserve the natural characteristics and implications that need conservation. Although this work was demanding time and effort, this exercise was an important result: increased confidence, the owners were relieved to learn that Natura 2000 meant not decommissioning the entire forest.

Great Britain

For this country we present some details about Peak National Park - Natura 2000 site. EU funds have helped to develop an ecological quality brand specific to the area ensuring better marketing of local products. This mark also increased farmers and small entrepreneurs access to financial incentives and agri-ecological sustainable development of EU funds.

Oates family - Oates family is a farming family with a long tradition that lives inside a chain of Natura 2000 sites. They manage to work a large arable land and sell dairy and beef premium products for having access to a land that meets organic standards because management that takes into account biodiversity values, as a special area of bird conservation. In addition to traditional production with European funds, the family managed to diversify its business and to open their own store with natural products. In this way goods can be directly capitalized, their customers are both locals and tourists who make tours of "safari" in the Natura 2000 sites. [12, 13]

Another example is related to the Fal estuary. It is a Natura 2000 site, sea estuary on the south coast of Cornwall region. By linking to other boat operators tourism and leisure industries, River Links project aims to promote car-free travel in the estuary, to access restaurants, beaches and other tourist areas. Links River project has received financial support to assist in the interpretation of the natural environment and some of its main attractions such as the Maritime Museum Falmouth received support from the European Structural Funds. [14]

Another example is the Mead family who lived on the same farm for generations, but they managed to add extra value to their product mainly milk by producing high quality cheeses that are distributed at national and international level. With the help of EU structural funds they have built a new production facility and storage, high standard and quality through careful monitoring and maintaining environmental standards in their farm, they managed to promote a strong brand image that has brought many awards. [15]

Austria

"Opportunities for Nature and Economy: Steirische Grenzmuir" is the title of a grandiose project that is developed in this country with the aim of highlighting the Natura 2000 sites. [16]

Austria has fulfilled its obligations to implement two European Directives related to nature, declaring most valuable natural areas

as part of the European network Natura 2000. Approximately 16 % of Austrian territory was included in Natura 2000.

The border areas are often the most favored regions of Europe in terms of biodiversity. There are well-preserved natural values and landscapes, the influence of economic activities being limited to one. One of these examples is along the border between Austria and Slovenia, an area of 2,122 hectares, of great European ecological importance. It is part of the corridor of 1,000 km of flood plain of the rivers Mur, Drava and Danube. This Natura 2000 site contains pictures with a huge diversity of plants and animals: eight habitat types, 13 species of birds, 26 species of animals, all included in the annexes of European nature.

But this region is not only a natural gem, but where many people live their lives. Their income situation is not easy. There are a few ways to find a job and economic growth is weak. The big challenge is to harmonize the interests of both parties, both those related to nature protection and economy. Cost-benefit analyzes in other border areas in Austria showed that Natura 2000 sites can bring positive momentum for long-term economic development. This concept is used as Natura 2000 environmental policy and incorporated into regional development strategies and community.

Local companies are involved in planning and implementation, and locals are actively involved. In "Steirische Grenzmuir" future is in ecotourism. It leverages the trend of weekend holidays and health tourism. Routes in the Natura 2000 information materials and exhibitions contribute to educational activities and tourism of "adventures in nature".

The region is of national importance to the white stork, and therefore brings together the energies of species protection and tourism, the festival stork or the idea of "region certified to observe storks". These synergies are used in agriculture: organic market is growing and the brand Natura 2000 can contribute to the development of direct marketing and the promotion of regional products. An example is the pumpkin used for years and years as

food for humans and animals. By promoting traditional products, developing new recipes and innovative marketing, pumpkin is considered a trendy food that tourists are willing to pay for.

CONCLUSIONS

To solve problems related to grassland management in our country we made following conclusions:

-Lack of chemical fertilizers on meadows and pastures resulting in products that are ecologically pure; these products are very popular on the European Community market and the prices are much better.

-Traditional grazing and hay led to a development of grassland which covers most of the important areas as protective aspect. In this case the land use and operating practices that have existed until now, traditional grazing methods and procedures for obtaining hay meadows led to the current development. The richness of species in meadows contains a mixture of Mediterranean flora, Carpathian flora and steppe flora;

-Combined with traditional practices planning pastures and hayfields (pruning bushes and shrubs) are required to maintain grassland in favorable condition.

-A particular threat is the poor state of the local agricultural economy. Traditional farming is unprofitable, massive emigration of rural population led to the abandonment of marginal land and intensification of use of easily accessible land. Because biodiversity of grasslands is dependent on traditional land use, land use changes have the effect of biodiversity degradation and loss of many threatened species of flora and fauna. In this respect, Sighisoara ADEPT implemented many projects to inform the local population about the inestimable value of the potential of natural grasslands.

The area of Sighisoara SCI-Târnava Mare ADEPT:

-created local producer groups, supporting people in making the step from domestic production to commercializing, making, packaging and labeling, and making

connections between producers and local market;

-solar dryers designed and built using a simple technology that will improve the preservation of fruit and vegetables and provide products that can be made available on the market.

These dryers are built by local carpenters;

-has formed Slow Food groups in the area, bringing consumers (hotels, restaurants, international buyers) and farmers and local producers together;

-contribute to the development of a "box scheme" (daily delivery direct to home) that provides small local producers markets for the sale of fruit and vegetables;

-contribute to the production of quality cheeses to add value to cow and sheep milk, the main source of cash income in the area. Survival depends on the continuation of livestock pastures.

However, the activities in order to create a brand image we have to try to create an identity to symbolize the connection in the minds of residents and consumers of nature conservation and prosperity of communities, and the proper management of the environment and high-quality local products. [17]

Management plans of Natura 2000 sites should include a range of agronomic and traditional rules. In the old arrangement silvopastorale pastures were divided into functional categories. Pastures in the category I had restrictions for soil protection. Grassland category II was established during the grazing season, the number and duration of grazing cycles, during vegetation restoration, loading, grazing capacity, etc.. These criteria can become sustainable grazing management recommendations.

Natura 2000 sites are suitable for development of eco-tourism and agro-tourism based on tradition and organic products, which may lead to a brand.

On the example of other countries the local community can create multiple niches so geared every family to be part of an well-oiled tourism and promoting mechanism. Together, these families can promote their best services national and international, traditions and the

natural environment nearby. In this example we mention the tourist village Sibiel or examples from Austria, Britain and Germany. It requires the creation of protected areas where conservation grasslands and mountain meadows must rely on a management plan.

Practices must cease deforestation and burning of juniper trees.

On these surfaces must be rational grazing practice as silvopastorale studies.

It is always preferable meadowa to be converted into hay lands, their biodiversity is higher.

Alpine pastures are poor in species, while the lower attitude is richer in species. In this respect, hayfields from under the mountain are of community interest to them requiring management application that leads to conservation.

Mountain meadows between 500 and 1000 m altitude show a very high biodiversity and habitats that are found in many species of orchids, many protected, the hay land can be an attraction for tourists [8].

For people who carry out activities in Natura 2000 sites as well to ensure a guaranteed minimum price for milk-based products that ensure minimum profitability for manufacturers, with annual correction in the inflation rate.

To support livestock farmers should be paid by direct payment of subsidies per head (at least 50% compared to the system that has been practiced in the EU), and the correlation after 2014, the level of these grants with the EU practice (full) by 2014. It is also necessary to maintain these subsidies in parallel with subsidies provided by the EC LFA, the unit area, at least until the number of animals provided, normally covering area from existing natural pastures and hayfields. [18].

Disinterest factor involved for possible losses of biological diversity is high. Ways have to be found for people to understand and want to be involved in grasslands conservation measures. This should be correlated with factors involved in discussions with a potential tourism development in the area.

Grasslands cannot be separated from the cultural landscape, they constitute themselves

as historical and integrated element. The sites with the most rare and interesting plants, eg. grazing steep slopes are kept clean by burning. *Salvia nutans* grassland and *Linum flavum* have low diversity (about 10 species surveying), but a priceless ecological role and conservation at European level. The number of red list species should not be the only consideration of community or habitat value assessment. [1]

Meadows throughout Europe underwent drastic changes in management and are in a state of flux. Extensive meadows still have their important role in agriculture in our country. Such areas are rare in Europe, are therefore extremely valuable for research and interpretation of the variety.

Protection is necessary to attract investors in certain areas - which would mean a lot in terms of the image of Natura 2000 sites.

Following a study completed in 2013 on how people perceive the Natura 2000 network, the results show that effective communication of the benefits of the Natura 2000 network includes:

- development of ecotourism activities (bird watching, boat tourism)

- development projects may be authorized (fishponds, local crafts)

- labeling of food (cheese, honey, wine, etc.)

- attracting European funds for agriculture/rural development/environment (establishment of Local Action Groups thru the program LEADER +).

- increasing the number of employees in rural areas.

- messaging involvement of opinion leaders for each city / region (eg, mayors, directors of parks, NGO leaders)

- face to face communication (bidirectional, interactive and participatory - adults learn best through dialogue)

- to link culture and nature: how to plant and animal species found represented in the local culture (eg. art, traditional gastronomy)

- use of messages and communication methods tailored to the target group (locals, tourists, investors, etc.)

- creating of innovative and creative communication campaigns that address

NATURE as perspective of a brand to be promoted and "bought" by the public.

The conclusions drawn from this study completed the assessment of communication and information on the Natura 2000 network show that [19]:

- Information events and visits must be continued for representatives of the institutions as an opportunity for networking and exchange of experience.
- Facilitating institutional collaborations - creating a model of meetings that focus mostly on establishing relationships for future collaboration.
- Updating communicated information, wooden language is not to use, signaling better SCI and SPA communities to inform the population.
- Making of materials and online version for communication / information.
- The information campaign should focus on the benefits of protecting biodiversity, economic and social benefits.
- Some tools of information / communication as documentary series and the database must be more publicized.
- Involvement of schools and public libraries in the information campaign: teaching materials for teachers, information specific to students etc.
- Advocacy for stabilizing the legal framework regarding the status of protected sites.

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