



# Science for Environment Policy

## Post-communist countries may struggle more with Natura 2000 implementation

**Natura 2000 sites may not be adequately protected in Eastern Europe,** according to a recent publication. Researchers in the Czech Republic found that, despite being designated as a Natura 2000 site, environmentally damaging activities continued in the Šumava National Park. They recommend that good environmental education is needed to help post-communist countries implement Natura 2000 and better recognise its value and importance.

**Natura 2000 is a network of protected sites in Europe** that aims to safeguard valuable and threatened species and habitats. EU Member States must provide legal protection for these sites in their national legislation. However, some countries experience problems with the implementation of Natura 2000 due to problems such as poor environmental education of local communities or a lack of quality control in Environmental Impact Assessments.

In this publication researchers looked at the practical difficulties of implementing Natura 2000 protection in a new Member State, the Czech Republic. They used the Šumava National Park as an example, and collected scientific literature on the biological condition and conservation history of the park in relation to Natura 2000 since 1991.

The Šumava National Park was designated as a Natura 2000 site because of important habitats such as unspoiled marshland and bog woodland, as well as populations of iconic species such as the capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*), a large grouse, and the freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*). The authors found that despite its Natura 2000 designation, and the fact that the park is the most strictly protected area in the country some environmentally damaging activities continued, such as canoeing in areas where freshwater pearl mussels were growing, and proposals for a ski lift through capercaillie habitat.

Although many countries experience problems with the implementation of Natura 2000, this is particularly difficult in post-communist countries because of recent political instability, the researchers suggest. They refer to other examples in Slovakia and Romania, where conflict over environmental management decisions makes the implementation of Natura 2000 more difficult than in some other countries in Western Europe. This difficulty may stem, in part, from factors such as visions of economic growth and poor environmental education.

The authors conclude that the EU needs to recognise that policies such as those underpinning Natura 2000 were designed by and for states with a strong history of democracy. They recommend that environmental education should be more strongly enforced and that, while financial support for the implementation of Natura 2000 should be available for EU Member States, it should be conditional according to the fulfilment of each state's obligations.



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**Contact:**  
[pavel.kindlmann@centrum.cz](mailto:pavel.kindlmann@centrum.cz)

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