RECENT TRENDS IN NATURE CONSERVATION

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Increasing human pressure on the environment increases the counteraction – the quest for designation of more land and sea areas for protection. The accelerating trend of designating more sites of protection has been noticed in the last 50 years in Europe (EEA, 4/2009) and worldwide (Chape *et al*., 2005). Despite the increasing number, however, the increase of territory of the protected areas does not follow the same pace. The area that could be designated as protected to balance the economic pressures is becoming scarce. Two reasons could be surfaced in the European context. Firstly, over 175 years of history of nature conservation in Europe, the best examples of natural and cultural heritage have been already designated. Secondly, the steep increase of the network of protected areas in the last decade largely corresponds to the mandatory designation of Natura 2000 sites in the EU member states. Due to its wide scope and rigid legal liability, EU-wide Natura 2000 network has also changed the paradigm of nature conservation in Europe. According to the Habitats Directive, certain types of ecosystems (eg old growth forest, coastal meadow or a salmon river) have a value of their own, independent of their area, location or socio-economic implications on the maintenance cost. The large number and area of designated sites under the Natura 2000 network scheme, 26,807 sites (Natura 2000 Barometer Dec 2008) and up to 17% of EU-27 terrestrial land (EEA 4/2009), respectively, has resulted in a situation where the extension of the network has become questionable. The growing unavailability of substitute areas for the adversely affected Natura 2000 sites has been referred by Therivel (2009). Followed by the difficulty to increase the number and area of natural areas in highly urbanised Europe, coupled with the failure to meet the challenge of halting of biodiversity by any politically agreed date in the future, the traditional paradigm of nature conservation has to be changed. Lockwood&Kothari (2006) refer to the need for the shift from the traditional way of management paradigm (ie protected areas are set aside for conservation) to an 'emerging paradigm' which claims that protected areas are to be run in parallel to social and economic objectives. But even more importantly, a holistic or sustainability approach to maintain the life supporting natural systems still left for today's and future generations is needed. This means that nature conservation would become the responsibility of all sectors and authorities, not only of those designated for nature conservation. Nature conservation, if not integrated into all policies and not engaging people, will eventually become isolated and thus left unsupported by the wider society. The progress of ICT has contributed to the advancement of evidence-based decision making (eg planning, permitting) and better involvement of sectors and people. Data on land use and biodiversity combined with data on risks associated with human activities has increasingly become available on the web and used in decision making almost on routine basis, also in Estonia. Recent survey (Peterson, 2010) demonstrated, however, that despite the continuous upgrading of the ICT tools and data quality, the management of protected areas has not improved in the same pace. On the contrary, the distancing of administration (into the web) from the practical management and supervision in the field are creating more problems than actually can be resolved. Thus, progress of ICT tools independently would not compensate the personal communication and engagement with people and communities that directly or indirectly are affected by the nature management.

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