Dr. Joachim H. Spangenberg

Forbidden fruit? –
Biodiversity and Sustainable Consumption

Sustainable development is too often reduced to its environmental dimension—at least in policy circles. But environmentalism alone is not enough, and even less so a focus on eco-efficiency. Meeting human needs while accepting limits to what we can do and have is a more appropriate orientation when making choices.

This has two main implications. First, that “limits” in the quest for sustainable consumption always depend on social organization and technology and there is a social minimum for consumption to be sustainable. Second, as for the environment, and for biodiversity as a part of it, it does not matter how much wealth has been created while destroying it. What counts is absolute, not relative impacts. Thus efficiency is but one aspect of sustainable development and must be complemented by other organizing principles.

For this behalf a trinity of orientations has been suggested:

- **Efficiency.** Motto: “Don’t waste.”
- **Sufficiency.** Motto: “Don’t squander.” (socially unsustainable underconsumption is hardly ever addressed), and
- **Consistency** (low entropy generation). Motto: “Don’t disturb.”

**Sustainable production** is most often focused on efficiency. **Sustainable consumption** most often refers to sufficiency. **Biodiversity** is most affected by consistency but also by sufficiency.

For this discussion it is helpful to look at the state of research on the loss of biodiversity and then speculate on how sustainable consumption could help overcoming these challenges. For this end, it is helpful to use the DPSIR (Driving forces – Pressures – State – Impact – Response) scheme.

**The DPSIR scheme**

(as developed by EEA)

In societal processes Drivers cause specific Pressures (specific concrete interventions) on the State of the environment, which in reaction to them is changing (Impact). This provokes Responses (policy decisions, consumer behaviour, etc.) aimed at mitigating or moderating the changes.

To reflect the challenges of biodiversity loss, however, a few modifications are necessary. On the one hand, there are feedback loops: all elements interact. In particular there are responses to each D, P, and I (usually not to S: not the state itself, but state changes trigger reactions of the socio-economic system). On the other hand, the drivers are so manifold...

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The Adriatic Sea provides valuable habitats for a wide range of marine species, which are however threatened from human activities. The Association for Nature, Environment and Sustainable Development “SUINCE”, a member organisation of CEEweb in Croatia has started a project to mitigate these human pressures and also to contribute to higher awareness and building up the necessary information base.

Read more on pages 14-15: Saving the Sea – A New Project for Marine Protection

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Photo is a courtesy of Association for Nature, Environment and Sustainable Development “Sunce”
that to deal with them properly they have to be disaggregated. A way to do so is to distinguish organisations, processes and policies, and orientations or values. All three are considered to be institutions, and thus institutional change is required, for biodiversity conservation as much as for sustainable consumption.

The DPSIR structure permits to present research results in an easy-to-digest way, as a series of effects to which agents react (e.g. politics and consumers). To make it operational, bioscience analysis has to be combined with policy and economic analysis, and Responses have to be derived for all D, P, and I effects. (I: micro level impacts, most famous is the loss of species and macro level impacts, i.e. the loss of or damage to ecosystem functions). Deriving Responses is no scientific but a political undertaking, for which science can only provide information for all agents involved. They include changes in consumption patterns brought about by changed consumer preferences (orientations) and behavioural routines (mechanisms), as much as a changing legal environment (organisation).

Responses to Impacts

Developing responses on the level of impacts obviously aims at symptoms but does not address the causes. However, such strategies can nonetheless be of importance, if the risk to biodiversity is imminent and the measures addressing root causes would be too time-consuming to provide results. The traditional response is to protect nature from human use hoping that the resilience of the system is sufficient to start a recovery process (which is indeed often the case). Sustainable consumption should pay tribute to it, e.g. respect red lists of endangered species as items not to consume, keeping the CITES rules for international trade in species, in particular by not buying endangered species as pets, souvenirs, aquaculture or decorative purposes.

However, the traditional approach has failed in two respects: by not delivering the expected results and by undermining the social sustainability of local populations excluded from using the protected area. So it was further developed into a modern approach of participative ecosystem management with the people, including concerns for livelihoods and social sustainability. Sustainable consumption can contribute to such efforts for instance by a preference for local, organic food consumption and fair trade goods, by spending holidays in the countryside, by sustainable tourism—in a nutshell by spending money in areas where ecosystem management is practiced without violating the framework established for this behalf.

Land use change could be mitigated by stopping the permanent increase of living areas and the strive for single houses, substituting them for flats (owned or rented) in compact built areas, to avoid land fragmentation and stop urban sprawl. Revitalizing city centers and improving public transport are also important (although less in the hands of consumers).

As for biological pollution, besides boycotting GMOs, invasive species can also be addressed by consumers by minimizing one’s food miles and by consuming “low mileage” for all products and their parts, and by avoiding own traveling. Container transport has decreased cost and carbon associated to bulk material sea transport, but it has also massively enhanced the risk of unintended imports of invasive species.

For climate change energy is the key issue. There are three areas in which households can contribute most: housing/construction, nutrition, and transport/mobility—whereas fashion, clothing, cleaning and cosmetics are marginal from an environmental point of view. Some ideas: speed limits of 100 km/h on roads, 200 km/h on rail and 400 km/h in the air (turboprop planes are the most energy-efficient), or to have no holiday day trips shorter than three weeks. Since the internet consumes as much energy as global air transport, and an avatar in “Second Life” as much as a real person in Brazil, living more in the real and less in virtual worlds is also one measure to be taken.

Chemical pollution refers not only to pesticides or heavy metals but also to the volume effects e.g. of fertilisers (nitrogen overload is one of the most important points for biodiversity loss in agricultural areas). Consumers can practice conscious
shopping and waste separation as well as rethink gardening habits (private gardens get the highest dose of chemicals compared to all other agricultural areas!). Another way is not to buy new electronic equipment but reuse and upgrade older electronic devices.

Pollinator loss is a major concern as most fruit and vegetables depend to some degree on pollination by bees, butterflies, bats, etc. Protecting pollinators requires changes in chemicals policy and land use planning which preserves nesting and forage areas for pollinators, enhances the diversity of flowering near agricultural areas, and improves the connectedness of undisturbed spots. Consumers can hardly influence these measures (except in their role as citizens and voters), but can increase the demand for them by buying organic food and by eating more fruit, vegetables and in particular honey instead of meat and sugar (also a major contribution to our health).

Responses to Driving Forces

To overcome the causes of biodiversity loss, the Drivers must be changed, from planning to politics, and from processes to orientations and values. The latter represent the core of the consumer society—this constitutes to some degree a joint agenda for biodiversity preservation and sustainable consumption efforts, and a basis for cooperation.

Conclusion

Stopping forces leading to biodiversity loss is no simple task. At times our own habits and comforts will need to be modified and partly sacrificed. This does not mean to give up everything we enjoy, but implies that we should gain satisfaction from other, more nature-friendly activities. It is still in our power to act as responsible agents of change and save what is still left of our natural habitats.

How to Impact Tourism Development in the Carpathians?

The Carpathians are rich in nature, culture, and hospitable people—that make them an attractive place for tourists. However, it is for governments, businesses, and communities to choose: should tourism harm or even destroy those values, or should it help to preserve them and make the lives of local people better? After a choice is made the question emerges: How? In the Carpathian Convention process NGOs have a chance to influence both aspects of the answer.

The Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Tourism is working on two documents that will support successful development of sustainable tourism in the Carpathians. Our Tourism Protocol to the Carpathian Convention, once adopted by the Parties to the Convention, will be a binding document which shall set the legal frame for tourism development in a sustainable way. Our Strategy will support the implementation of the Protocol by suggesting ways to stakeholders on how to combine and strengthen their efforts related to sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians.

The draft documents will be presented to the 2nd Conference of the Parties of the Carpathian Convention (COP2) to be held in Bucharest in June 2008. While there is a possibility that the COP2 will suggest that the Parties start implementing the Strategy right away, the Protocol itself will not be adopted earlier than at COP3.

How and when?

Once the documents have been drafted by a core group, a public consultation process will be initiated to involve as many people, institutions and organizations as possible to reach a wide agreement on these issues.

The public consultation process will start in January 2008. The second meeting of the Working Group is planned for March 2008 and will provide an opportunity to integrate all opinions of stakeholders into the draft Tourism Protocol and the Strategy. The drafts will be submitted to COP2 by the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee that has its meeting in April 2008.

During the first three months of 2008 NGOs can influence the contents of both the Strategy and the Protocol by participating in the public consultation process and by encouraging stakeholders, including local communities, to take part. During the second quarter of 2008 and until COP2 in June, NGOs should lobby governmental delegates to COP2 so that they stand up for the implementation of sustainable tourism strategy without delay.

Previous steps

The Working Group on Sustainable Tourism received a mandate to develop the Tourism Protocol and the Strategy for the Future Tourism Development of the Carpathians from the COP1 in Kyiv in December 2006, where it was also established. The group is chaired by the Czech Republic and is facilitated by CEEweb. The process is co-financed by the Carpathian Project of...
Late September the Polish government proposed 75 new sites under the Habitats Directive for the European Commission. Paralelly, 52 new sites under the Birds Directive have been designated at national level. Naturalist Club Poland (a CEEweb member) estimates that as a result of the network extension, the level of species and habitats representativity (which is a basic Natura 2000 network quality parameter) will increase from around 15 percent to 60-70. The Bulgarian government adopted 27 new sites in October and 47 in November. With this, the Natura 2000 network now covers 33.8 percent of the country’s territory.

NGOs very much welcome the progress but point out that most of these developments have arrived with big delays and are not necessarily the result of the good will of governments. In Poland, for example, the same list of sites was proposed by NGOs already at the end of 2005, but was not submitted to the EU. Only when the Commission threatened to freeze investments on “potential” (meaning not submitted or established) Natura 2000 sites from Structural Funds in 2007, did the government decide to act. The designation process was very much delayed in Bulgaria and Romania, too. A national list of sites had to be submitted by the day of accession but it did not happen in any of the two new Member States. While Romania came forward with an acceptable proposal in the summer, the final decision on a number of important sites in Bulgaria was postponed till late November.

The long delays provided good opportunity for investors to apply for building and construction permits on pending Natura 2000 sites. The example from the EU-12 countries shows that once a permit is issued, it is more complicated to preserve the site and some of them might not be saved from development. Conservation organisations also fear that the designation of sites will not be sufficient to protect nature in countries where every effort is made to escape the obligations of nature protection and illegal developments in protected areas are an everyday phenomenon.

The next possibility to step up for a better designation of Natura 2000 will be the biogeographic seminar for Romania and Bulgaria, and the repeated seminar for Poland, both foreseen for the first half of 2008. Here, NGOs can put forward site proposals when this is scientifically adequate and necessary.

Progress in Natura 2000 Site Designation

Late September the Polish government proposed 75 new sites under the Habitats Directive for the European Commission. Paralelly, 52 new sites under the Birds Directive have been designated at national level. Naturalist Club Poland (a CEEweb member) estimates that as a result of the network extension, the level of species and habitats representativity (which is a basic Natura 2000 network quality parameter) will increase from around 15 percent to 60-70. The Bulgarian government adopted 27 new sites in October and 47 in November. With this, the Natura 2000 network now covers 33.8 percent of the country’s territory.

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Halting Biodiversity Loss – Only Beating around the Bush at the Belgrade Conference?

The Environment for Europe process has delivered various strong commitments for the environment and in particular for biodiversity on a Pan-European level. However, when it comes to implementation, there seems to be no consensus even about the true causes of problems and the necessary actions.

Even the organising of this high-level ministerial-NGO discussion on biodiversity has caused serious difficulties. After making a uniquely strong commitment at the 5th Ministerial Conference in Kyiv to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, we have experienced great complications to have biodiversity even on the agenda of the 6th Conference in Belgrade. It took several months of negotiations, strong lobbying from committed countries and Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS), as well as a protest letter from NGOs to achieve a compromise on having it as a ‘special session’. This name at least perfectly reflects that it is a special issue indeed. It is unnecessary to reiterate the role of biodiversity and ecosystems in contributing to human well-being, which was also frequently mentioned by the speakers at the roundtable.

Despite Pan-European commitments, biodiversity loss has not been halted and the direct drivers for this failure have been pointed out by roundtable participants both from the East and the West. Intensive land use, urban sprawl, ecosystem fragmentation and climate change are identified as the direct causes of biodiversity loss. However, biodiversity loss is only a symptom of the unsustainable functioning of society and economy. All this is part of the unsustainable production and consumption patterns, which are more and more spreading in the whole pan-European region. We are greatly disappointed that no real commitment was made at this Conference for a pan-European framework towards sustainable production and consumption. We are also disappointed because we are fearing for biodiversity.

At the same time there is another important underlying cause of biodiversity loss which was not sufficiently recognized in the discussion—namely the current institutional framework. It does not only include the legislative and financial frameworks, but also the fragmented institutional structure, which is still not tackled by the countries. Governments have been calling for giving a price for biodiversity and valuing the economic benefits from biodiversity and ecosystem services. NGOs are rather concerned whether it is at all possible to express all the various features and benefits of a given ecosystem in one single number. The functioning of ecosystems is complex and the benefits we gain from them are subjective, so it shall be approached with special caution. However, consideration of ecosystem services shall be integrated into decisions about development plans and projects. This is an important issue for the future where governmental efforts have been rather weak so far, if at all.

Of course the institutional framework and production and consumption patterns are also determined by other factors. Current values as the root cause of biodiversity loss were very correctly mentioned by some speakers, also from governments. Without political will we cannot achieve the necessary substantial changes. But then it comes to how we define well-being and development. And countries have not gone so far. That is why we will continue to fail in halting biodiversity loss as long as we do not gather the courage to ask if we have set the right aims for our society and economy. We need to redefine the notions of well-being and development, which is, however, not on the table of ministers of environment. There is a strong message on the need of pan-European cooperation both from governments and NGOs. Our countries are part of a globalised world and cannot achieve substantial changes if the rest of the world remains the same. We all need to act together in the whole region because—as NGOs also pointed out in the discussion—supporting nature conservation activities in other regions does not substitute actions in our own backyard.

The Roundtable was jointly organized by PEBLDS and CEEweb for Biodiversity on behalf of European ECO Forum at the Belgrade Conference.

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Interview with Victoria Elias
The Belgrade Conference from NGO Point of View – How Much Benefit has it Brought to the Environment?

The 6th Ministerial Conference within the Environment for Europe (EfE) process took place in Belgrade between November 10–12. We asked Victoria Elias, the outgoing Chair of the European ECO Forum, the Pan-European NGO coalition providing input into the process about the outcomes of the Conference.

Q: The EfE is an intergovernmental process launched in 1991 to shape Pan-European environmental policy. What do you think about its contribution to the improvement of the state of environment now, in 2007?

VE: In general I think that the process was very successful because it addressed Pan-European environmental problems and needs for cooperation. There were very important decisions made, at least until the Kyiv Conference in 2003, related to biodiversity, public participation, and access to information and education—just to name a few areas. I don't think that there were many achievements since Kyiv till Belgrade in improving the environment on the ground, but in general we work on policies and in the final stage it also contributes to it. Similarly, the involvement of the public in the discussions and decisions about environmental issues also indirectly improves the environment, as it is promoted by the Aarhus Convention, one important result of this process.

At the same time the Pan-European approach has been more or less kept in the process, although one may argue that North-America is not truly involved. I agree that in this respect the process is much more successful in Eurasia, on Pan-European scale.

Q: NGOs have been playing an increasingly important role in the process under the umbrella of European ECO Forum. What have the major NGO successes been that ECO Forum can be proud of?

VE: I think that the level of NGO involvement and the contribution of various NGOs is a success of the process in general. We can be proud of several things, and just to name the most important ones, I would start with the Aarhus Convention. It was the NGOs who brought up the idea of guidelines on public participation, which was later developed into a convention, and NGOs were full partners in the preparation and drafting of the text. Other NGO initiatives include PEBLDS, where NGOs are still very much involved in decision making bodies and implementation. I could also give the example of education for sustainable development, where the initiative for a strategy purely came from NGOs. First the idea came from Ukraine that there shall be a charter on environmental education, but then we went further and came to the negotiation process to draft and adopt a strategy not on environmental education, but on education for sustainable development. Now this session brought the most representatives in Belgrade including not only ministers of environment, but also of education.

Q: The 6th Ministerial Conference took place in Belgrade in November. Are NGOs satisfied with the outcomes?

VE: In general we can be satisfied with the fact that the process will continue because the main danger was that it would be stopped and no similar Pan-European forum for policy development would exist in the future. But in terms of delivery of commitments and further decisions on environmental policies we cannot be satisfied. One main concern about the need to develop a Pan-European framework on sustainable consumption and production was not accepted or supported, so we still need to lobby for this in the future. The ministerial-NGO roundtable on biodiversity could also have delivered stronger results. And it is not clear if the process on education will be part of the process or will develop separately in the future.

Thus we did not reach much in Belgrade. But at least there is future.

Q: What do NGOs expect from the reform of the EfE process?

VE: The continuation of the process on a Pan-European scale which could ensure much more effectiveness. And I hope that the level of NGO involvement will not be lower because we are there to express our constructive views, and not to oppose things. We would like to find ways how different stakeholders concerned about the environment can express their views in the process because the opportunity shall be given to all.

Q: What would you suggest to Pan-European NGOs for the future?

VE: I hope that NGOs will work in coalition also in the future. There shall be a platform like ECO Forum where each NGO can work separately but they can also formulate common views. They shall be active in discussions, try to follow the official agenda. It is first of all an advocacy and policy process, thus NGOs shall lobby for some particular decisions. The second issue is developing common projects which support their lobby goals. Thus they can all contribute to improving our environment.
The Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic –
More than a Gathering in Nature

The “Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic” is a multi-stakeholder initiative launched at the Belgrade Conference which aims to raise awareness on biodiversity and strengthen commitment to its conservation through regular national events every year on May 22, International Biodiversity Day.

The “Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic” intends to bring together representatives of society for a national picnic in nature—shall they represent the government, political parties, trade unions, business, farmers, social and environmental groups or academic institutions.

In addition to seasonal fruit from extensive, organic orchards what else is needed for making the Picnic a success in your country?

» Commitment from an institution or organisation which can mobilise stakeholders and devote some capacities for the organisational tasks

by Irena Bitunjac

Saving the Sea – A New Project for Marine Protection

The Adriatic Sea represents one of the most important resources of the Republic of Croatia. Yet, there is very little information among authorities about the distribution of important marine species and habitats. Public knowledge and awareness about endangered Adriatic marine biodiversity is also on a very low level. This project aims to alleviate these problems.

Our project titled “Strengthening Civil Society for Marine Protection in Croatia” was started from EU funds through the CARDS 2004 Program. The main aim was to strengthen the cooperation of NGOs and diving clubs—these two groups being the most active in the field of marine biodiversity data collection.

» High-level representatives of various stakeholders who are attracted to the Picnic both by the importance of the issue and the content of the picnic basket
» A nice and scenic place in nature which can be used for a friendly gathering
» Preferably nice weather

Join the Pan-European Biodiversity Picnic and help to save biodiversity and ecosystem services, the presents of nature for the future!

For more information contact Klára Hajdu at hajdu@ceeweb.org

An equally important aim was to raise public awareness in state institutions responsible for marine data collection and management and build cooperation with them.

In this project we aim to help reduce human impact and halt the loss of marine biodiversity in Croatia’s coastal and island zones. The project especially focuses on the newly established Lastovo Archipelago Nature Park and Cres-Lošinj Marine Reserve.

During the project we develop collaborations with fishermen in order to reduce impacts of fisheries on marine endangered species and habitats of Lošinj and Lastovo archipelago. We also improve cooperation with state authorities responsible for managing protected areas. This is backed up by the development of a training programme. During the project we will collect baseline data on marine biodiversity in Nature Park and Cres-Lošinj Marine Reserve with the help of volunteers. The programme is accompanied by research activities, workshops, public lectures, and exhibitions about marine conservation.

Seas are the source of all life on earth and we intend to keep them in their natural beauty for the future.

Association for Nature, Environment and Sustainable Development “Sunce”
Wetlands Restoration – A Story of Cooperation with Military Foresters

by Jaromír Síbl

In Slovakia wetlands are among the most seriously threatened natural ecosystems. During the last few decades the total area of wetlands has dramatically decreased and most of the remaining wetlands are seriously threatened by human activities.

The last few decades have seen the drying of Slovakian wetlands. The most significant changes in natural water regime have been caused by extensive drainage. This practice caused a dramatic decrease in both wetland biodiversity and retention capacity (i.e. the land’s ability to store water). In order to deal with these problems in 2005 the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic started a project called “Restoration of Wetlands of Zahorie Lowlands”. The aim of the project was to restore the most valuable remaining wetlands in the territory of Zahorie Lowlands. The project was also expected to contribute to the development of the Natura 2000 network through the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of important wetland habitats and species within the region.

One CEEweb member organisation, BROZ (Regional Association for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development) has been also involved in this project. Our main tasks were to coordinate the project, implement wetland restoration measures and publish and disseminate materials.

At the very beginning we ran into serious difficulties: a large part of the project area (four out of eight sites) was located within the Zahorie Military Training Area. As we had insufficient cooperation with the Ministry of Defence and its related institutions, the implementation of project activities on these sites were greatly hindered. Therefore our first task was to establish cooperation with the state enterprise called Military Forests and Estates (VLM)—a key stakeholder in forest management in the area. (This was important as these forests contain the wetlands themselves.)

The first important step was the nomination of an official representative by the Ministry of Defence to the steering committee of the project. After several meetings and long discussions with the representatives of the state defence sector we have gradually overcome this problem: Our governmental partners began to understand that nature conservationists were not their “enemies” but were “just doing their jobs” (although on “the state’s” territory). They realized that our actions were based on national and EU nature conservation legislation. In this respect we were lucky: all the project sites have already been listed on the national list of pSCIs since 2004.

The first substantial positive result was the official statement of VLM—namely that they agreed to the construction of a fish bypass on the River Rudava. This was in fact one of the key actions of the project. Cooperation has significantly improved since August 2006. This improvement was mainly due to external factors. Following the parliamentary elections in June 2006 several key persons were replaced within the defence sector as well, including the former Minister of Defence and the head of VLM’s regional branch in Malacky. Fortunately, the new leadership was more open to the ideas of nature conservation so real-life cooperation could finally be started.

Since then we have been able to actively involve VLM in several of the project activities. Some of the highlights:

» We invited representatives of VLM to take part in study visits to national parks and other protected areas in Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, and East Slovakia. The aim was to show them positive examples of wetland restoration and “nature friendly” forestry practices abroad.

» In the summer of 2007—after almost two years of negotiations—restoration works could finally be started at two project sites within Zahorie Military Training Area. (The filling of drainage ditches was started.) We also reached an agreement with VLM about the restoration of all abandoned meadows (clearing bushes and mowing) on the project site pSCI Rudava.

With these results behind us we feel that we have taken several steps in the right direction. At present we know that our cooperation with military foresters is still not perfect, but we are now looking forward the future with much more enthusiasm and optimism.

This program is financially supported by the LIFE Nature Programme of the European Commission.

by Veronika Kiss

Winning the Business for Biodiversity – A Green Revolution or a Mere Illusion?

The Portuguese European Presidency is determined to involve the business sphere into biodiversity conservation. For this reason it launched the “Business and Biodiversity” initiative and convened a high level conference in November in Lisbon, Portugal. The results though are still to be seen.

Promoting the role of business in biodiversity conservation is not a new initiative. Some devoted governments, NGOs and private actors have been cooperating on the elaboration of effective mechanisms and model projects for several years. However, EU wide results have not been achieved so far, which
This calls for their stronger engagement. The great demand for financial resources would require the development of favourable loan schemes for such enterprises, in which process European banks should have a special responsibility. Whilst the “Business and Biodiversity” initiative is an EU wide programme, EU level environmental policies and regulations should be developed to create an even playing field in the common European market.

Facing these challenges, participants of the high-level conference discussed relevant responsibility schemes, business-related biodiversity assessments, markets for biodiversity goods and services, as well as partnerships. The outcome of the conference is a document called Message from Lisbon on Business and Biodiversity. This statement does not make any strong and concrete commitments but is a rather general description about what can be done at EU level to promote pro-biodiversity business. It stresses competitive advantages gained from conserving biodiversity and using biological resources in a sustainable way. It recognizes that competitive markets also have an enormous potential to mobilize private resources and stimulate innovation. Besides, it acknowledges the primary need to promote an even greater awareness of the importance of biodiversity throughout the business sector, as well as among consumers. Participants of the conference recognized that there is an urgent need to promote biodiversity conservation in micro, small and medium enterprises—and in particular those with a strong link to biodiversity conservation, as well as those based in the rural economy. They also noted in the document that such enterprises should be provided with information, relevant expertise, and tools.

The Message encourages the establishment and strengthening of public/private partnerships among local, regional, and national governments, NGOs, business, and academia to fight biodiversity loss. It also recommends the development and testing of market-based approaches for biodiversity. And last but not least it recognizes the need to promote the principle of a level playing field at a global level in order to provide the correct incentives and signals for companies. In this area the EU could play a significant role.

By Katarzyna Ososinska

A Fight Worth Fighting for – Constructions in Protected National Parks in Bulgaria

Most of Bulgaria’s valuable protected areas are threatened by fast developments of tourism facilities which are dangerous for the environment and are simply unsustainable. The country’s national parks and other protected territories have either already been violated or are planned to be used for mass tourism development.

There are numerous examples of—mostly foreign—investments in the country’s national parks and other protected territories. Ski lifts, hotels, and roads are built at all times at one place or another. The majority of such investments are illegal, meaning they are not consistent with either Bulgarian or European laws or the management plans of the parks in question. Despite this fact such constructions are supported by local and national officials and in some cases are even developed by them! After the ‘fall’ of Strandja Nature Park one of the recently endangered areas is Rila National Park. This park is one of the largest and most important protected territories in Europe. The park covers the area of the highest mountain range of the Balkans, the flora
Bad example

Illegal construction of a lift near Panichishte. This is the lowest part of the lift being constructed, which is located within the Rila buffer Natura 2000 area. The last two fundamentals of the lift are within Rila National Park and Rila Natura 2000 area.

and fauna of which is extremely rich and includes numerous relict and endemic species. Rila is currently threatened by the construction of new (Panichishte – Seven Rila Lakes - Kabuł) and expansion of already existing ski resorts (Borovets).

In Panichishte the buffer zone of the park has recently been violated by the widening of a road leading to one of the chalets near the Rila Lakes and by a ski lift construction in this intended Natura 2000 site. Both constructions are illegal. They have no environmental permits and old environmental impact assessments and also they affect the territory of the National Park and two proposed Natura 2000 areas (Rila buffer – still not accepted and Rila – accepted by Bulgarian authorities). These are just examples of the numerous violations of the law and park management plan that are obviously noticeable in the whole region. The park’s Directorate is not authorized to do anything more than send official statements to the Ministry of Environment and Water which they already did. Some weeks after that the Director of the Park was dismissed. The of Environment and Water has the right and the obligation to stop on-going constructions and prevent further illegal developments. However, the only thing done by environmental authorities was the issuing of a fine of 5000 Euros against the municipality— which did not stop or even delay the project.

Some activities, however, were taken by environmental NGOs from all over Bulgaria. They organised street actions against the constructions and mobilised themselves to establish a coalition called “For The Nature” in order to exert more pressure on the decision making process. Still, they cannot yet persuade Bulgarian officials to respect the law. Although the coalition has organised a well-known campaign and had successful actions with a strong support from Bulgarian society, still wider cooperation is needed, also on the international level.

It is the coalition’s plan to focus on raising the campaign on an international level about the violation of Natura 2000 network and related legislation in Bulgaria and gather international support from European NGOs and through the media. This is especially important as the earlier attempts of Bulgarian NGOs alone could hardly solve any problem.

In Bulgaria NGOs together with practically all scientists gathered the information for areas to be included into the Natura 2000 network, covering some 34 percent of the country’s territory. In a recent decision of Bulgarian authorities all of proposed areas were theoretically accepted into Natura 2000 network (except for Rila buffer which Natura 2000 status was refused for the apparent purpose of not stopping mass tourism investments there). Council of Ministers also decided that territories with approved management plans will automatically be excluded from all Natura 2000 areas.

If you would like to help these efforts, visit the website at www.forthenature.org and contact the Bulgarian NGOs coalition at contact@forthnature.org.

by Katarzyna Ososinska

Diverse News from the Sustainable Tourism Working Group

Advocacy workshop for Sustainable Tourism

At the end of October 2007 the CEEweb Sustainable Tourism Working Group held a workshop on NGO participation in decision making processes on tourism development in Rila Mountains, Bulgaria. Participants were representatives of NGOs from Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovakia, Albania, and Poland who had the possibility to share their experiences and develop their skills in organising successful advocacy campaigns. Part of this discussion was about specific techniques of working with the media. As Rila National Park is endangered by illegal tourism-related developments, one complete day of the workshop was devoted to the development of a common strategy for campaigning against this investment project.

Training in Romania

The next CEEweb Sustainable Tourism Working Group workshop will be held in Romania on December 17–19, 2007. The main focus of the workshop will be strategic tourism development.

Joining the Dots

“Joining the Dots” is a new project of our Working Group aiming to support the implementation of CBD Guidelines on Tourism and Biodiversity. The pilot project’s activities take place in Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria where Green Echoes Association, Young Researchers of Serbia, and the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation have started work on sound tourism development in Trascau Mountains, Djerdap National park, and Strandja Nature Park respectively. Based on the results of the work a manual will be published under the title Manual for
**By Judit Herman**

**CEEweb Annual Meeting 2007**

In the past few years autumn has become synonymous with the CEEweb Annual Meeting so we in the CEEweb office spared no time or effort to organize this important event. The Annual Meeting took place on November 14–17. These four days turned out to be packed with work and play as we tried to have it all: legal requirements, workshops, outdoor programmes and private conversations... These were not dull days for sure!

The venue of the event was a friendly guest house complex in the scenic town of Visegrád by the river. This town is famous for being situated at the great bend of the river Danube among the hills of a national park. Participants were welcome by a nice, rainy autumn in the hills.

On the first day Working Group meetings took place where participants had strategic discussions about the plans of their respective groups. These discussions formed the basis of the strategy and work programme for the network for 2008-2010. On the first evening we had our usual intercultural night: we tasted each other’s traditional wines, cheeses, and sausages—and danced to the songs played by a real Hungarian folklore band until some of us could hardly move. It was exercise at its best.

On the second day we took a long excursion in the snow-covered forests. Among the sleeping trees of the winter forests, on the icy and slippery slopes we could give each other a real helping hand and practice cooperation on a different level. At the very top of the mountain we enjoyed the splendid white-greyish view of the river and the hills around. It was a breathtaking experience—in all senses of the word!

Thanks to the fresh air and the cold we returned to the afternoon session with rosy faces. In this session we discussed the CEEweb working program and issues like lobbying for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS). With the help of a professional facilitator we tackled complex issues like internal/external communication and capacity-building of our network, activating members, and synergies of the four Working Groups.

The third day was the official Annual Meeting. Here we had many pressing issues to cover: Working Groups reported about their activities and finances, aspirants were nominated for the Supervisory Committee and International Advisory Committee (one free post in each of the committees), and new aspiring member organizations introduced themselves.

Members present voted with the following results:

- The CEEweb Work Program for 2008-2010 was accepted
- Katarina Klimova (BROZ, Slovakia) was elected for the International Advisory Committee
- Urszula Biereznoj (Naturalists Club Poland) was elected for the Supervisory Committee
- Ten new organizations were accepted as CEEweb members: Eco Protection (Macedonia), Greens of Montenegro, Zivot (Croatia), Green Echoes (Romania), Sand Glass Foundation (Bulgaria), Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation, Future Now (Bulgaria), Carpathian Paths (Ukraine), Fauna (Ukraine), and Rodope Mountains (Bulgaria)
- The Policy Working Group was established, which shall elaborate a written policy for the Network
- The name of the network was changed in order to make it shorter—so our new name is officially CEEweb for Biodiversity

The closing of the Annual Meeting was a real treat—a visit to a renaissance restaurant where people had a big historic feast! However, the work was not over yet, as the training organised on the next day gave an insight into the EU funding schemes for rural development. We worked hard and could return to our organizations with many new impulses and ideas. A big thank you for everyone who could make it and contributed to this event.

Sustainable Tourism Development based on the CBD Guidelines in cooperation with yet another CEEweb member organisation: Ecological Tourism in Europe. The aim of the project is to strengthen the network of NGO experts capable of implementing sustainable tourism projects and to encourage the sharing of experiences between NGOs from the Carpathians and South East Europe.

For more information on our activities see www.ceeweb.org/workinggroups
Fiery Dragon Wolf Protects Obedska Bara

It often happens that lush and fertile natural areas become the setting for legends, myths, and fairy tales. Such is the case of the Obedska Bara wetlands near the river Sava in Serbia, where stories of knights and princesses who sought refuge in its woods still exist in local folklore.

The fortress of Kupinik (today’s village of Kupinovo) situated at the very edge of the wetland had the privilege of being the residence of Vuk Grgurevic, one of the most legendary Serbian heroes. Vuk Grgurevic acquired a remarkable reputation for his courage and the nickname Zmaj Ognjeni—Fiery Dragon. (It is interesting that his name, Vuk, means ‘wolf’ in Serbian; so his whole name, Zmaj Ognjeni Vuk, actually means ‘Fiery Dragon Wolf’.)

Born in Serbia under the harsh Ottoman rule, his childhood years were filled with suffering and a wish for revenge. Historians suppose that he was born in Smederevo, a fortress and town on the river Danube and one of the Ottoman-free areas at that time. He was an out-of-wedlock son of Prince Grgur Brankovic. When Vuk was still a baby his father was arrested and cruelly blinded by the Ottomans. Surrounded by cousins fighting over titles while the country was in ruins, isolated and left without any love or attention, Vuk’s faith and skills steadily developed.

It was believed that he had a birth-mark predicting his great career as a soldier. As a young boy he spent most of the time on the river Danube watching soldiers practicing horse-riding and military know-how on the riverbanks. He gained his first military experiences by crossing the Danube to fight the Hungarians for food and goods needed by the starving Serbian people. Soon the story about a brave young man began to spread. After the fall of the town of Smederevo in 1459, Vuk, restless and righteous, decided to move to Hungary.

The Hungarian king, recognizing his abilities and respecting his noble ancestry, gave him the Kupinik fortress which became the centre of the dying Serbian state. It lies in the south of Srem, an area between the river Sava and Fruska Gora mountain. His arrival to Srem was a big relief to the Serbs living in that part of Hungary as Ottomans often crossed the river to rob, torture, and kill the local population and burn and loot their houses.

Once in Srem, and willing to fight, Vuk was delighted with his role of a borderland protector. Rarely populated Srem was a huge wetland area at the time where rivers, ponds, reed beds, and wet meadows interweaved with virgin oak forests and fields. In its center Obedska
Bara oxbow lake hosted the largest heron, egret and ibis colony in this part of Europe, comprised of tens of thousands of birds as well as a rich wildlife. This mystical setting became the home of Fiery Dragon Wolf who flew as the fire-breathing creature of the fairy tales, from one place to another to protect and save his people. The vast wilderness offered a perfect hiding from the Ottoman militia seeking retaliation.

He fought with the Hungarians against the Czechs, the Poles, the Austrians and the Turks. In 1471 he gained the title of Despot of Serbia, and also received large possessions. He married Barbara Frankopan, a Croatian-Dalmatian noblewoman. Unfortunately, they did not have any children. In 1481 he fought against the Turks in central Serbia and rescued about 50,000 people from the ruthless Ottoman regime. These people later settled in Banat, mostly around Temišvar (Temesvár), a town in today’s Romania.

Vuk knew that Christian faith was very important for the Serb minority in Hungary so he founded monasteries all over Srem. Some of them, such as Grgetek Monastery on Fruska Gora mountain, still remains today the way he built it.

Fairy Dragon Wolf died on April 16, 1485, one year after the peace was made between Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. It was believed that since he was marked to be a soldier at his birth, he couldn’t stand living a peaceful life, without battles and adventures.

The time of knights passed a long time ago but the memory of Fiery Dragon Wolf is still so alive and picturesque that when problems arise around Obedska Bara, it is still believed that his spirit will appear. To save his people and to protect the wetland.

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His aim was a better life for his people in Hungary and in the Ottoman Empire. Hence, maintaining the balance between the two powers and making the right decisions in this complicated position were difficult tasks. But he managed. Always ready to help, he took part in many battles and had become well respected among Serbian people as well among Hungarian and Ottoman rulers. It was at that time that the Serbian people began to tell stories about their fearless hero, Fiery Dragon Wolf, unbeatable and omnipotent.

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More than 80 organisations from 17 countries are members of CEEweb for Biodiversity. Four working groups are the main driving forces of the network.

The **Rural Development Working Group** promotes the integration of conservation principles into agriculture and strives to improve the quality of life in the countryside.

The **CITES Working Group** is devoted to the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora in CEE.

The **Natura 2000 Working Group** helps the Natura 2000 network to be established and to function properly in CEE countries.

The **Sustainable Tourism Working Group** supports the members of the network in making tourism in CEE countries sustainable through joint activities, such as information exchange, promoting good practices, training and education, policy-making, pilot projects and lobbying.