Economic activity
in the areas of Natura 2000

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Poland is typically an agricultural land, so quick introduction of Natura 2000 network without consulting residents and local authorities of the areas covered by the programme aroused much controversy. Many mistakes and disinformation of the society occurred in the process. Due to incompetence of officials, excessive bureaucracy and lack of effective provision of knowledge about the network, Natura 2000 was quite incorrectly associated with limitations and prohibitions, as well as with impossibility to conduct business activity in the area where it applied. It raised unnecessary fears and protests among those who were directly affected by its creation in their place of residence or work. It was wrongly understood, since – contrary to other forms of conservation protection of the environment – Natura 2000 allows for certain human activity. It is even reflected in legal regulations. One example can be Article 36 of the Environmental Protection Act of 16th April 2004, concerning economic, agricultural, forestry, hunting and fishery activity in the area of Natura 2000. It has the following content:

1. On the areas of Natura 2000, subject to section 2, activity connected with maintenance of equipment and structures serving the purpose of flood protection and economic, agricultural, forestry, hunting and fishery activity, as well as amateur fishing, is not restricted unless it has significantly negative impact on the protection objectives of the given Natura 2000 area.

2. Conducting activity referred to in section 1 on areas of Natura 2000 being part of national parks and nature reserves is only allowed in the scope which does not infringe the prohibitions binding in those areas.

3. If an economic, agricultural, forestry, hunting or fishery activity needs to be adjusted to the protection requirements of an area of Natura 2000 where programmes of support for reduced profitability do not apply, the Regional Director for Environmental Protection may conclude an agreement with the owner or proprietor of the area, with the exception of State Property Managers, including the list of necessary actions, the methods and dates of their performance and the terms and conditions of payment for the actions performed, as well as the amount of compensation for income lost as a result of the introduced restrictions.

In practice, what results from the above-mentioned facts, economic, agricultural or tourist activity is acceptable in allocated areas of Natura 2000. The basic conditions the planned activity or investment must meet is lack of significant negative impact on natural habitats and animal and plant species for whose protection the European Environmental Network was established. Therefore, it is not traditional environmental protection, such as e.g. a nature reserve where human activity is forbidden. Hence, the issue of barriers for economic development, such as investment risk, is raised unjustly. Those fears result from insufficient knowledge and lack of understanding of the principles underlying the network. The priority of the European Environmental Network is to combine economic development with protecting and respecting biological diversity\(^3\).

What is more, even investments with negative impact on the environment may be accepted. It is possible when there is a public interest of superior importance and no alternative solution. In that case, environmental compensation should be made to allow for proper functioning of the network of Natura 2000 areas. If it can be suspected that the given investment may have significant negative impact on the species and habitats protected within the framework of Natura 2000 network, then environmental impact assessment must be carried out pursuant to the principles stipulated in the Environmental Protection Act of 27\(^{th}\) April 2001\(^4\). All that shows that in many cases the areas need not be avoided by investors. Investors who want to realize their enterprises on the areas of Natura 2000 should look for available information which will enable them to determine whether on or near the spot of the planned investment there are any natural habitats or habitats of plant or animal species, or species for whose protection the given Natura 2000 area was established.

It is not true that making environmental compensation is an absolute condition for carrying out any investment activities on Natura 2000 areas: it is only necessary when nature is evidently being destroyed. There are cases, however, when minimizing the negative impact of an investment on the area of Natura 2000 is impossible. In such cases, compensation actions are applied. As the name indicates, they are to make up for losses in natural habitats and populations of animal and plant species which cannot be avoided. The decision to make environmental compensation by no means exempts one from the obligation to look for

\(^3\) More information can be found on: http://www.poczujnature.pl/informacje-ogolne/

alternative solutions (selection of the variant of investment which is most beneficial for Natura 2000 areas) as well as plan and carry out minimizing activities.

Natura 2000 may not restrict the development of local communities and contribute to losses of any interest group. Natura 2000 must combine the necessity of economic development with improvement of life conditions of the residents. The fact that a given area is part of the network of areas of key importance for preserving biological diversity of the European Union, i.e. Natura 2000 network, is a kind of label informing people within the country and abroad of the existence of unique natural values there. So-called green business can be developed on the basis of those natural values of a given area, including mainly tourist services, agritourism, green workplaces and ecological education; besides, local products can be created and promoted⁵.

Compensations do not only apply to the natural environment but also include compensating for profits lost by people whose work is connected with the areas covered by the network. Actions and measures are taken to support the companies conducting activity on the areas of Natura 2000 in financial, material, technological and organizational ways. The principles of compensations for the lost income and for costs arising out of adjustment to the requirements are included, among others, in the Environmental Protection Act. That information should be popularized, especially among the residents of the communes where the network may be the main source of developmental limitations.⁶

Apart from the Environmental Protection Act, Habitats Directive and Birds Directive, information on activity in the territories of Natura 2000 can be found in:


– the Regulation of the Minister of Environment of 30th March 2010 on preparing a draft of protection plan for Natura 2000 area (Journal of Laws Dz. U. of 2010 no. 64 item 401.)

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⁵ [http://biznes.gazetaprawna.pl/wywiady/23332,natura_2000_nie_hamuje_rozwoju_gospodarczego.html](http://biznes.gazetaprawna.pl/wywiady/23332,natura_2000_nie_hamuje_rozwoju_gospodarczego.html), data after the website as of 25/05/2012

– the Regulation of the Minister of Environment of 17th February 2010 on preparing a draft of plan of protection tasks for Natura 2000 area (Journal of Laws Dz. U. of 2010 no. 34 item 186.)

– the Regulation of the Minister of Environment of 30th March 2010 on detailed methods and forms of submitting information on nature compensation (Journal of Laws Dz. U. of 2010 no. 64 item 402.)

Examples of financing economic activity in the areas of Natura 2000

Both public and private entities can try to obtain funds for financing their activity in the areas covered by the network from the European Union, Voivodeship Funds for Environmental Protection and Water Management or the National Fund. Within the framework of national resources from the Nature Protection priority programme, it is possible to apply for funds allocated for nature and landscape protection. The most important sources of financing Natura 2000 network in Poland from communal funds are:

- **The Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment** – as part of the programme, big infrastructure investments are carried out concerning environmental protection, transport, power industry, culture and national heritage, health care and higher education. The aim of the programme is to improve the investment appeal of Poland and its particular regions by the development of technical infrastructure with simultaneous protection of the environment and improving its condition, retaining cultural identity and development of territorial cohesion.

- **Regional Operational Programmes** – prepared by the self-government of each voivodeship separately.
- **LIFE+ Financial Instrument** – it is the only financial instrument of the European Community created strictly for the purpose of supporting environment protection enterprises.\(^\text{11}\)

- **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development** – it is the main source of supporting the development of rural areas; funds for Poland are available from the **Rural Development Programme**\(^\text{12}\) – within the framework of that agri-environmental programme, actions were divided into 8 packages.

Package 1. Sustainable farming  
Package 2. Organic farming  
Package 3. Extensive permanent grasslands  
Package 4. Protection of endangered bird species and natural habitats outside of Natura 2000 areas  
Package 5. Protection of endangered birds species and natural habitats in Natura 2000 areas  
Package 6. Preservation of endangered genetic plant resources in agriculture  
Package 7. Maintenance of genetic resources of endangered animal species in agriculture  
Package 8. Water and soil protection\(^\text{13}\)

- **European Fishery Fund** – it is an instrument of the Common Fishery Policy of the EU, aimed at sustainable economic development of the fishery sector.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^\text{13}\) In order to emphasize how important the protection of biological diversity is, the levels of subsidies farmers can receive within the framework of the agri-environmental programme for the year 2007-2013 if their farms are located in the areas of Natura 2000 have been differentiated from those for farmers whose farms are located in other places.

\(^\text{14}\) [http://ec.europa.eu/polska/possibilities_for_funding/funds/efr/index_pl.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/polska/possibilities_for_funding/funds/efr/index_pl.htm), data after the website as of 25/05/2012
• **European Agriculture Guarantee Fund** – it finances direct payments and organization of common agricultural markets.

The list of example opportunities of activity in the areas of Natura 2000:

- Organic farming
- Biodynamic agriculture
- Agri-tourism
- Adventure tourism, e.g. hiking, cycling, horse-riding
- Culinary tourism
- Green schools, residential school trips, rallies of high school and university students
- Development of handicraft
- Preservation of the dying professions (embroidery, pottery, smithery etc.)
- Development of services (hospitality, catering, transport, rental of tourist equipment and others)
- Promoting the region by means of a strong European brand: Natura 2000
- Promoting of own regional products
- Organization of cyclical theme open-air events
- Obtaining subsidies for realization of projects and programmes improving the condition of infrastructure (sewage system, roads, bicycle routes, biomass boiler power plants, educational and training programmes, contests etc.)\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\) [http://www.budnickatradycja.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19&Itemid=38](http://www.budnickatradycja.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19&Itemid=38), data after the website as of 25/05/2012
Good practices in other European countries

1. Finland

280 companies of the SME sector and associations have signed agreements with Koli National Park, assuming that circles of small and medium enterprises are more effective in generating income and pro-environmental activity than the same number of enterprises acting individually. The agreements between the park and enterprises mainly referred to cooperation regarding hospitality, product supplies, catering (restaurants and bars), transport, conference services and educational activities\textsuperscript{16}.

2. Belgium

The company Heylen renders commercial services connected with preservation of biological diversity. The basic ones are: forestry in sensitive ecosystems, management of ponds, bogs, wetlands (including mowing of meadows and wetlands), designing and construction of infrastructure in naturally valuable areas, including fences, drainage and footbridges. The company’s customers are the authorities (national, regional and local) as well as private and social entities involved in environmental protection.

3. Portugal

The company Imobiente deals with consulting concerning preservation (or improvement) of biodiversity in forests, their certification and other environmental services such as soils protection, carbon capture and storage\textsuperscript{17}, protection of water supplies and fire protection. 80% of the company’s customers are individual forest owners, and the others are public entities and non-governmental organizations. The

\textsuperscript{16} Natura 2000 jako czynnik zrównoważonego rozwoju obszarów wiejskich regionu Zielonych Pluc Polski, ed. A. Boltromiuk, M. Klodziński, Warszawa 2011, p.139.

\textsuperscript{17} Separation of carbon dioxide from fumes in order to limit emission.
company operates on the market created by the state, as most of the performed activities are financed with EU funds or governmental funds.

4. England

The company South Downs Marketing Ltd. is an intermediary in commercial relations between animal breeders and their customers. Farmers are obliged to properly manage pasture grounds on calcareous soil by extensive pasturage and breeding with traditional methods, compliant with the principles of conservation of the variety of species and biological diversity of grasslands, thanks to which the ecosystem of pasture grounds is effectively protected. The company represents farmers and negotiates for them attractive sales prices of meat produced with the traditional, extensive method of pasturage. What is more, local slaughterhouses have been build in cooperation with farmers so as not to transport the animals and thus shorten the route between the producer and the consumer.

5. Spain

Semillas Silvestres is a company dealing with collection of forest plants seeds in natural ecosystems and sales of the seeds. Most of the distributed seeds are allocated for the needs of renaturalization works, some are used in forests, they are also bought by garden plant nurseries and landscape architects. The company is also planning to cultivate seeds of grasses resistant to droughts in order to plant them along motorways in Southern Europe. According to the owner, the company serves as a bridge between wild seed populations and cultivation in places where species are endangered\textsuperscript{18}.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibidem, p. 140.
Summary

In our times of industrial expansion, undoubtedly there is a need to protect unique areas. That is the purpose of the European Ecological Network Natura 2000. However, we need to be aware of the specificity of the system, and in particular, remember that it does not completely restrict human activity. The basic condition arising from its assumptions is management conforming to the principles of sustainable development. Natura 2000 does not stand in contradiction to investments; the opposite is true: natural values of the areas provide an opportunity of development of many fields of economy, which results in generating many new workplaces, but human activity may not be detrimental to the condition of natural habitats and the conditions of existence of species being the object of protection in the areas of Natura 200019.

Many problems and difficulties result from lack of understanding what the ecological network really is. It is essential to increase the ecological awareness of residents and local authorities of the areas covered by Natura 2000 and to promote the so-called green business. Especially important is constant deepening of the positive image of relations between business and environmental protection in social awareness and creating business strategy on the basis of biological diversity.

Bibliography

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