

CASE STUDY

Implementation of Natura 2000 in the case of ICZM in Stepnica Local Community

ABSTRACT:

As in many European countries implementation of Natura 2000 makes many problems nearly to everybody. But possible of courses success of implementation depends first of all on how this system will be accepted by local inhabitants. In Poland another very important aspect is that many sites boundaries have been designated with crucial mistakes. On the other hand there are some good examples: Natura 2000 has started to be accepted, because it can mean even small local development. For example in a branche such as tourism.

LOCATION:

Baltic Sea Region, Estuary of Odra river, Poland

KEYWORDS:

Active nature conservation, tourism ,stakeholders involvements, Natura 2000

AUTHOR:

Name: dr Kazimierz Rabski
Organisation: Stepnica Local Community
Telephone/fax: +48 91 4188521
E-mail address: krabski@wp.pl

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Stepnica Local Community is located on the western part of Szczecin Lagoon. The most part of the community (about 60%) is designated to European Ecological Network "Nature 2000". That is because very high nature values, however the boundaries have been designated without any public participation and moreover with a lot of mistakes, not only formal. However to all local stakeholders it has been clear that the north part of the community can be and must be a part of Natura 2000 European challenge. In local spatial planning organised under Community development policy tourism is one from the most important direction for local sustainable development. Together with Society for The Coast (EUCC-Poland) preliminary activities have been undertaken. Combination of active nature conservation, agriculture and tourism even one year after starting implementation seems to give a very promising results. By the way is still under the discussion what is possible and what is prohibited in economical development inside Natura 2000 sites.

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Stepnica Local Community.

Among local communities located in the area of Szczecin Lagoon (Odra Delta) Stepnica seems to be most attractive. Stepnica Local Community covers 294 km², from which 39,8 % are waters of Lagoon and local catchments, 32% are forests and the rest are fields, meadows, swamps and peat areas.

The community has about 4900 inhabitants from which about 2100 lives in Stepnica village. The most important directions of business are: wood industry, forestry, tourism, fishery and agriculture.

Still the high number of unemployment is a result of collapsing of "kolkhoz" system.

The connections with the city of Szczecin have a big influence for local social and economical structure and development.

The Stepnica village is very old. The first historical information is dated for middle of XIII century, when for sure fishery harbour has existed from. Also it has been an important centre for agriculture and forestry.

From the beginning of XX century Stepnica has been known as a good place for tourism due to nature values, but special because of valuable coast. The years about 1920 –1930 were the most successful for local development. It has been more then 6000 places for sleep for tourist, a number of restaurants, good prepared beaches. A communication from Szczecin was realised by narrow steam railway as well as ships.

After 1945 Stepnica became a part of Poland. On the area of field and meadows a "kolkhoz" system of farming was organised with the special attention for cows (meat and milk production). The local meadows were also famous because of hay production. The tourism has been stopped and reduced to the separate places for children (campsites) or a small separated "bed&breakfast".

The very important "point of change" was 1989, not only from the point of view the "greatest politics" The state agriculture system was collapsed. For about 10 years the deep crisis was characteristic for this region what was parallel to situation in the whole country.

The independents of local administration were in opposite to many legal acts and regulations until about 2005. Actually many from the development programmes can be realised on the level of local community. One from them must be implementation of Natura 2000 and realisation of sustainable development. And coastal tourism can be a very important way of it.

Nature values.

The estuary of Odra River, here in the Stepnica Local Community creates a very valuable landscape. Together with a system of small rivers and channels as well as coastal meadows, forests and agriculture landscape Community seems to be one from the most nature valuable areas in lowland Poland.

At the moment a lot of nature inventories is under preparation and some facts are still monitored. The highest value in European scale is characteristic for birdlife.

Number of breeding species is 177 (73% from whole number observed in Poland). Migrating and visitant birds 63 (what is only 37% from observed in country).

Only these dates show how important for birdlife is Stepnica Local Community.

It is worth to mention that among of European endangered birds 65 species can be found here and 4 from the list of global endangered birds. These are the White-Tailed Eagle, Corn Crake, Aquatic Warbler and the Crane.

Other interesting species of animal, quite popular here: deer, roe-deer, foxes, wildboars, but also otters, badgers or beavers.

Also very interesting is flora. Characteristic for the lagoon coast, the most easily identifiable plants are the magnificent *Angelica archangelica* var. *litoralis*. also found here are the following bulrushes and associations, which some members attain a height of over three meters: *Sonchus paluster*, *Senecia paludosus*, *Ranunculus lingua*. in the thickets and usually along the massive coastal forests are: *Calystegia sepium*, *Humulus lupulus*, *Cuscuta europea*, *Lonicera periclymenum*.

There are often willow thickets, besides which grow *Myrica gale*. It is possible to encounter the protected species *Osmunda regalis* in the forests. One interesting phenomenon is propagation of foreign plant species in the marshy meadows and bulrushes if the lagoon. Coming from Himalayas

are such common species as *Impatiens glandulifera* and *Impatiens capensis* is spreading more and more.

In the northern part of Stepnica Local Community Society for The Coast (EUCC-Poland) organised the first such a kind Odra Delta Nature Park to protect and promote the best from the local nature and nature management.

In August 2005 the 60% of Stepnica Local Community, because of the nature values has been dedicated to Natura 2000 network.

Tourist values.

The location of Stepnica Local Community gives a great chance for tourism. From the one site waters of Szczecin Lagoon, from the other a great complex of forests. The area can be and is interested for such a type of tourist as angling, sailing, windsurfing and other water sports, walking, horse riding but also for all kind of ecological tourism with first of all bird-watching.

The development of activities connected with tourism has not been observed till beginning of XXI century. Actually it is an important point in local development policy.

Natura 2000 in Stepnica Local Community.

The idea of establishing European Ecological Network Natura 2000 site here was proposed by scientists and deeply supported by EUCC-Poland. Thanks to lobbying of this organisation designation was possible. However the boundary of these sites have been not consulted with anybody. Ministry of Environment designated sites according to unknown data and illegal procedures. It must be clear that it makes a lot of protests and oppositions. The official Stepnica Local Community statement is that Community is not against nature and its conservation, but is against the way how it happened.

That is absolutely true that here boundaries are not realistic. The same site (=the same values!) is the middle of the village (IKEA wood factory) and places of breeding cranes and white tailed eagles (Odra Delta Nature Park). That of course must be change and additional works have been started.

Society for The Coast (EUCC-Poland) by its activities has started to involve local stakeholders to create a model concept of local Natura 2000 implementation. By using local potential, establishing Odra Delta Nature Park, consulting and information campaign the bridge between strong conservation and sustainable development has been started to create.

Tourism as the way to success.

At the beginning of undertaken activities mostly of the actors were sceptics. It is really hard to believe that is possible to combine these two "fields of activities": nature conservation and tourism. Special in Polish context, where and when "nature" traditional means "restrictions".

But in EUCC-Poland strategy, consulted with local stakeholders, some specific tools for nature conservation have been identified:

- extensive agriculture
- extensive fishery
- extensive forest production
- education
- eco-tourism, soft tourism

Here are some examples of how the implementation is realised in practise in the light of combining nature conservation and tourism on Natura 2000 site.

- A. Creating nature as a specific product.

In the strategy of EUCC-Poland together with Stepnica Local Community nature is understood as product. For local people (usually very poor!), for local stakeholders and administration values of nature must bring income generation. But that is the way: "we must protect something what can bring money!" And that is local nature: still natural coasts, forests, and meadows with 240 species of birds including the most rare.

B. Stimulating development of tourism services around the most valuable areas.

The zoning system is clear in Stepnica Local Community. Odra Delta Nature Park, including the reserve areas, coastal restrictions connected with defence, respectation to existing nature protection law. But around, even quite close must be well organised system of service. And that can be possible by using experience of Partners. A here is the role of CoPraNet INTERREG III C project. Local stakeholders by personal contacts can compare and adopt to local conditions the best from European experience in tourism organising in nature valuable landscapes.

C. Accommodation

For the last 2 – 3 years has been observed development of organising "bed&breakfast"s and small pensions. Stepnica Local Community offers now about 100 places with conditions which can be acceptable by next to everybody. It is not much, but compare to late 90. is far more and progress is significant. The important is that they offer to the tourist a local conditions and possibilities, in local rural style.

The good aspect is also, that people consult many times design and possibilities to established a new lodging.

D. Example of fishermans.

There have been organised possibilities to combine local, traditional small-boat fisheries with bird watching and photo-tours. At the beginning one fisherman decided to use his boat for such a job, actually 3 boats are ready to travel with tourists. And to watch birds such a white-tailed eagle.

E. Horses excursions.

Again very important here has been to combine existing values with traditional tourism. Horses tourism is strictly connected with Natura 2000 sites in Stepnica Local Community. Visitors can observe wild horses (Konik Horses, Konik Polski), but also can use local horses for riding. Two local inhabitants offer travelling on carts / horse-drawns, one family is specialised in horse riding instruction.

F. Bike excursions.

For individual and for organised group the bikes excursion to study and admire nature are organised. And thanks to the support from Hoge-Veluve National Park (The Netherlands) can be offered to the visitors nearly 100 bikes to be rented.

G. "Classic eco-tourism".

In the case of Stepnica Local Community a kind of classic eco-tourism can be treated as the great success. Nearly each week groups are coming to be instructed about nature. The bird-watchers from all around Europe just has started to know this place, where the nature conservation and soft tourism can be realised

Conclusions.

This case study shows that Natura 2000 implementation, even with the fundamental problems can be realised. That is thanks to the following aspects:

1. Local initiatives of stakeholders and NGO (as EUCC-Poland) can support local administration by permanent consulting in understanding and implementing Natura 2000 in the coastal zone
2. Natura 2000: European Ecological Network must be understood not as a system of restrictions, but as a system of sustainable management, especially in the attractive areas for tourism.
3. Bottom – up approach is needed on all levels of Natura 2000 establishment
4. Participation in international nature and management movement can be very useful. The CoPraNet Project is the best example to use existing good experience in local development.