

Sustainable Tourism in Biosphere Reserves of East Central European countries? Case studies from Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic

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In the countries of East Central Europe we can find a special situation. Due to the former socialist system, the industrial development was concentrated on the urban areas, so that the undisturbed development of ecosystems was possible outside these centers. For that reason we can find today e.g. a rich presence of wild animals like wolf, lynx, bear and beaver. But biodiversity is under serious threat from unsustainable exploitation, pollution and land-use changes throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Tourism, while still at a relatively modest level of development in the region, provides opportunities, as well as challenges for the sustainable use of biodiversity. For minimizing danger it is important how and in which way tourism is managed. The concept of sustainability strives to reconcile existing conflicts among goals of economic growth, environmental protection and social justice. In biosphere reserves it is an important task to develop tourism in a sustainable way because of its great negative impact on biodiversity, in both, quantitative and qualitative sense. The growing market of nature orientated tourism applies growing pressure to sensible areas. It is a necessity for regions to take action. Biosphere Reserves are designated and managed with the objective of promoting and combining biodiversity conservation with sustainable development based on community participation and science.

The presented case studies in Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic provide a view inside the situation of protected areas in East Central Europe dealing with tourism in different stages of development. Empirical results from my survey which was taken in summer 2003 in three biosphere reserves (Sumava, Czech Republic, Slovensky Kras, Slovakia and Aggtelek, Hungary) will show the view of the acting people in the region. Without involvement of local people sustainable tourism development is fated to die. These results are an important part of my running PhD research project.

The selected biosphere reserves are taking part in an international project in cooperation with UNESCO MAB-Secretariat focuses on the implementation of sustainable tourism. In cooperation with local communities, NGOs and the public and private sectors this project aims at providing Biosphere Reserves with the capacities to better guide, control and promote tourism development consistent with the objectives of the Convention of Biological Diversity.