

From Government to Governance for Biodiversity: The Perspective of Central and Eastern European Transition Countries

Tatiana Kluvánková-Oravská^{1*}, Veronika Chobotová¹, Ilona Banaszak¹,
Lenka Slavikova² and Sonja Trifunovova¹

¹*Institute of Forecasting, CETIP, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovak Republic*
²*Institute for Structural Policy (IREAS), Praha, Czech Republic*

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the problems of institutional changes in governance and the framing of biodiversity conservation policy at the level of the enlarged European Union. The current development of European Union governance has become more complex and multilevel, partially usurping competences from the central state and relying on networks of interconnected actors rather than on a hierarchy dominated and defined by the state. This shift is particularly challenging for biodiversity governance in new member states, where current decision making is still affected by post-socialist relations and massive ongoing institutional changes, often resulting in inefficient institutional designs and over-exploitation of natural resources. The paper offers a cross-country analysis of five Central and Eastern European countries, characterized by different socialist regimes and different transition processes from hierarchical to democratic and market governance. The theoretical basis of the paper is institutional rebuilding in Central and Eastern Europe in the context of the emerging multilevel environmental governance of the EU. The data were collected from desk study research and interviews. The results show that some elements of multilevel governance existed in these countries prior to the transition, but that EU integration empowered lower levels of self-government. The mismatch between the old hierarchical institutions developed under socialism and the new decentralized institutions introduced during the transformation process still persists and is visible. The emergence of multilevel governance with multiple actors' participation is prone to create tensions, but evidence from the countries studied indicates that this is not necessarily a disadvantage. Copyright © 2009 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd and ERP Environment.

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*Corresponding author address: IF SAS, Centre for Transdisciplinary Study of Institutions, Evolutions and Policies (CETIP), Sancova 56, 811 05 Bratislava, Slovak Republic, tel: +421 2 52495 300, progkluv@savba.sk.

Introduction

AMONG THE MOST CHALLENGING PROBLEMS OF THE PRESENT TIME IS THE UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGEMENT of complex socio-economic systems. This is particularly so in the case of governance. In European policy there is a growing interest in the promotion of shared decision making, in which interested parties not only play a role in planning but also become partially responsible for the policy outcomes (Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004). This is related to the concept of multilevel governance, which is 'the dispersion of central government authority both vertically to actors located at other territorial levels, and horizontally, to non-state actors' (Bache and Flinders, 2004).

This paper analyses how new approaches to natural resource and biodiversity governance at the level of the enlarged EU are changing, with emphasis on multilevel governance.

The paper argues that socialistic regimes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), which substituted the internal institutions of civic society with externally designed ones for top-down control, seriously affected the ability of the new democratic regimes to develop appropriate institutions for interactions among actors from multiple levels. The paper traces the historical development of the institutions governing natural resources and biodiversity and searches for elements of evolving multilevel governance in transition countries of CEE, where democratization and decentralization are fairly new processes. This paper does not intend to compare the evolution of biodiversity governance between new and old EU member states, but rather refers to the papers in this issue by Paavola *et al.* and Rauschmayer *et al.*

The empirical evidence was collected in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, three new EU member states where EU legislation has already been implemented, as well as countries characterized by different socialist regimes and transition histories, such as Potential Candidate Countries (Serbia) and Near Neighbours (Belarus). The analysis primarily covers the period from 1990 to the present. The data were collected using a desk study approach involving the use of secondary data such as books, governmental and non-governmental reports, reports of international programmes or organizations, press releases etc. Personal consultations in the form of semi-structured interviews with key biodiversity governance representatives at national, regional or local levels were conducted where data were unclear or missing. The data were collected while focusing on the following four themes: democratization, decentralization, emergence of the market and the role of EU integration. The process of data collection was aimed at analysing the determinants, effects and processes of institutional change in these countries and their impact on biodiversity governance.

The paper is structured into six sections, including this introduction. The theoretical concept of institutional change, in particular co-evolution of new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe with relation to multilevel governance in the EU, is discussed in the following section. The evolution of environmental governance in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is the subject of the next section. The fourth section analyses the institutional rebuilding of old socialistic institutions for biodiversity governance, while the fifth section discusses the role of EU enlargement in the development of multilevel governance for biodiversity. Finally, the sixth section concludes this paper.

Institutional Changes and Multilevel Governance in an Enlarged EU

The term governance denotes new forms of regulations that differ from the traditional hierarchical activities of centralized bodies. Governance implies the involvement of various actors that are independent from a central power and operate at different levels of decision making. We are currently observing an increase in the democratic character of decision making or the transformation of traditional governments to governance. The boundaries between these two terms were well described by Rosenau (1992) when he suggested that both government and governance refer to purposive behaviour, but, while government is linked to activities backed by formal authorities, governance refers to larger processes, including informal mechanisms and multiple actors. Additionally, governance is not restricted to temporal or spatial limits and can thus travel easily across categories and disciplines, allowing it to be used for different spatial scales or for multilevel governance (Jordan, 2008).

The ongoing processes of European integration and rationalization have shifted authority from national states up to European level and down to sub-national levels, with an increasing role for non-state actors. The dispersion of central governmental authority across multiple jurisdictions both vertically and horizontally is seen to be more flexible than the concentration of governance in one jurisdiction, and such a concept is known as multilevel governance (Hooghe and Marks, 2003). Multilevel governance thus pulls authority away from national governments and empowers supra- and sub-national actors (Bache and Flinders, 2004).¹

Vincent Ostrom (Ostrom *et al.*, 1961) proposed a similar term, polycentric governance, which describes the co-existence of many centres of decision making that are formally independent of each other. The polycentric approach emphasizes that governance systems that manage to distribute capacities and duties across many levels will achieve better outcomes than either highly or fully decentralized systems or centralized systems. It can thus be understood as a governance system under which actors are able to organize multiple governing activities at and across different scales (Ostrom *et al.*, 1961; Ostrom, 1997; cp. also Newig and Fritsch, 2009).

Multilevel governance, so described, has four characteristics. First, decision making at all territorial levels is characterized by the increased participation of non-state actors. Second, the complexity and dynamics of actors and their networks make identification of territorial levels more difficult. Third, the role of the state is being transformed from regulator to coordinator of power and authority. Finally, the multilevel character of governance is challenging the traditional representative nature of accountability (Bache and Flinders, 2004).

Governance of natural resources and biodiversity (Paavola and Adger, 2005) implies establishing compatibility between ecosystems and social systems. It involves the establishment and enforcement of governance institutions as essential links for maintaining the ability of ecological systems to support social and economic systems. Institutions for biodiversity governance can be defined as systems of established and embedded social rules that structure interactions between social and ecological systems (Hodgson, 2004). An interaction between complex social and ecological systems is understood as a process of evolution and co-evolution. Such a characterization might also describe the process of institutional change and institutional building, which is also dynamic, complex and a result of co-adaptation. A major challenge is to understand the process of building an institution for biodiversity governance that would allow the sustainable management of local, regional and global ecosystems. The connectivity pattern within and between social and ecological systems plays an important role in designing institutions for sustainable resource use (Gatzweiler and Hagedorn, 2002).

In the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the institutional changes undertaken in the late 1980s reflected a massive political, economic and social transformation.² The two most important institutional changes in CEE countries were transformation and EU accession. These countries started the transformation process from very different points of development, having experienced different socialist regimes and degrees of socialistic control. Even though the transition history varies in each CEE country, the transition can generally be understood as a mixed process of top-to-bottom institutional rebuilding (new political and economic institutions implemented by international actors applied to post-socialistic institutions) and the evolution of informal rules or shared mental models. EU accession, on the other hand, can be seen as a process of legal harmonization in which the time given was not sufficient for evolution. Therefore, the main formal actors of multilevel governance in the transition countries of CEE are mostly different governmental agencies, their economic agendas or international actors and institutions created by them (Perraton and Wells, 2004).

The process of institution building for sustainability in CEE is affected by the particular procedures and problems arising from the process of transforming the former political and economic system (Gatzweiler and Hagedorn, 2002). The breakdown of the command economies of CEE highlighted the problem of institutional building.

The transition process in CEE was 'jump started', leaving an 'institutional gap' (Gatzweiler and Hagedorn, 2002) or 'institutional vacuum' (Stark, 1996; Hanisch *et al.*, submitted) according to the literature. The western model of privatization as essential to institutional transformation was intended to be implemented instantly, ignoring the

¹ Similarly the term *condominio* was introduced by Schmitter (1996) to describe dispersed overlapping domains to solve common problems for multilevel governance in the European Union.

² Socialism is a system of economic institutions in which the property rights to the means of production are predominantly held by state agencies. To facilitate top-down control, many internal institutions of civic society have to be replaced by externally designed, predominantly prescriptive institutions, and central planning substituted for the spontaneous coordination of markets (Kasper and Streit, 1998, p. 415).

importance of the interactions within social–ecological systems and the co-evolution of old and new institutions (Chobotová, 2007).

As Bromley (2000) pointed out, people believed that capitalism would appear magically from the morning mist if only the heavy hand of government would get out of the way. According to Evans (2004), such an imposing of uniform institutional blueprints based on idealized versions of western institutions could be called ‘institutional monocropping’. This oversimplified view, that transition involves the unproblematic imposition of a western blueprint, is contested, being shaped by existing informal institutions and social conflicts (Gowan, 1995; Smith and Pickles, 1998) and by the persistence of routines and practices enduring from the socialistic period.

Thus transformation cannot be viewed as a simple replacement but as a recombination: actors in the post-socialist context have been rebuilding institutions not *on the ruins* but *with the ruins* of communism (Stark, 1996). Transition involves not the imposition of a blueprint on a ‘blank’ social and economic space, but a reworking of the institutions of central planning (Williams and Balaz, 2002).

To understand the process of institutional changes in the transition countries of CEE from centrally planned, hierarchical systems to democratic ones with market economies, we must remember that some other institutions previously existed (Chobotová, 2007) and interacted. The building of institutional arrangements for achieving suitability cannot be established easily because there was no ‘institutional free space’. The transition of CEE countries is a slow, complex and dynamic process that requires evolution, co-adaptation and learning rather than ‘shock therapy’. In our view, instead of centralized or decentralized governance systems, long-enduring institutions with multitiered systems of actors operating at various scales and a set of independent self-governing systems with their own centres of power can be seen as appropriate structures for addressing the needs of multilevel governance.

The key question is how this recombination of institutions ‘*with the ruins of communism*’ influences the restructuring of hierarchical governance structures to multilevel governance ones, in which the most important features for CEE countries are the increased participation of non-state actors and the challenge posed to the traditional representative nature of accountability (Bache and Flinders, 2004).

Evolution of Environmental Governance in Central and Eastern European Countries

To be able to understand the process of institutional changes in biodiversity governance in CEE countries we have to take into consideration the influence of past and prevailing institutional factors on the durability of newly established institutions. It is important to start from the most serious environmental protection problems during socialism in these, which arose from the overexploitation of protected areas and the lack of environmental awareness of state officials.

Under most socialistic regimes, environmental objectives were strongly supported only in legal regulations and environmental protection was primarily shaped by an ideological legacy, rooted in Marxist value theory, which aimed to manifest the principles of socialism. Marxist value theory considered labour (power) to be the source of all value, and the environment, therefore, had no intrinsic value aside from the serving of human needs. As an ‘unproductive and inefficient’ activity, environmental protection had a low priority even within protected areas. Very often, environmental protection institutions existed only formally and the absence of the market allowed states to be the only regulatory body, often resulting in a *de facto* open access resource regime.

Intense economic activities such as tourism, timber or agriculture expanded in protected areas under state management (see e.g. Mirek, 1996; Kasprzak and Skoczylas, 1993; Kluvánková–Oravská and Chobotová, 2006). For example, the protected primeval forest Belovezhskaya Pushcha in Belarus was transformed in 1957 into a game preserve and used on an illegal basis by top party officials (Luckov *et al.*, 1997).

In most CEE countries, land was nationalized shortly after the introduction of socialistic regimes and private property did not exist. All protected areas were owned and regulated by the state with some limited resource use for citizens. One exception was Poland, where small-scale private property rights were largely respected and no massive land nationalization occurred. This was due to a combination of historical and political factors, including the danger that the communist government might have lost the support of the peasants during its early years.

The transformation processes in the early 1990s, such as decentralization and structural changes in property rights, had a diversifying effect on biodiversity governance in the countries studied. In Poland, restrictions on property rights could only be introduced based on legal agreements, which entailed compensations for the landowners. Compensation programmes for landowners and the cooperation of parks' management with local communities in Poland thus provide incentives for local actors to see protected areas as assets.

In the Czech Republic, most land in national parks remained in state hands following the transformation, with most decision-making authority allocated to park management officials. This was because the territories of many current national parks, especially the Šumava and Podyjí National Parks, are located in border regions, from which the German population was displaced after the Second World War and which were subsequently used by the Czechoslovak army. The continuity of both human settlement and historical property rights was therefore interrupted (Mikšíček, 2007).

In the Slovak Republic (after the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993), land privatization was fully implemented but with the absence of appropriate institutions for market operation. Thus protected areas have a diversified ownership structure but no appropriate incentives, such as effective compensation for loss of opportunities for income generation by private and municipal owners, to encourage sustainable behaviour from non-state owners. Decisions within the park are also influenced by the multiple ownership conditions. At present, biodiversity governance in Slovakia is subordinated to regional administrations and a centralized state nature conservancy (in contrast to other Central European countries, such as the Czech Republic and Poland, where decision making in nature conservation is undertaken by the respective park administration). The park administration acts as an advisory body to the respective authority, but has no actual power. The lack of legal authority for park administrators to monitor and sanction activities within the parks sometimes leads to illegal behaviour by tourists and local inhabitants as well as ignorance of the rules.

The development of Belarus and Serbia was rather backward. The transition initiated in the early 1990s was interrupted by the emergence of authoritarian leaders and, in Serbia, also by war. This had serious implications for environmental protection.

In Belarus, for example, the interruption of land reform after the election of Alexander Lukashenko as president in 1994 and the subsequent subordination of national parks' administration, together with all other national estates, under the presidential administration resulted in massive overexploitation of forest, land and minerals, with a serious impact on biodiversity.

In Serbia, difficulties with the identification of land parcels and the absence of suitable proofs of pre-communist ownership caused land reformation to be delayed until 2006. Particular to Serbia is that natural resource governance is decentralized among various types of organization, usually public enterprises (Todić, 2005).

Institutional Rebuilding in Transition Countries of CEE

The decentralization of previously hierarchical and centralized governance can be seen as a predominantly top-down oriented process, in most cases heavily influenced by external political forces or factors. The time given to rebuild institutions from the socialist period or to build new institutions has not been adequate. Thus a basic question to address in this section is how the pre-existing institutions and organizational heritage of post-socialistic regimes in CEE affect the evolution of the new democratic regimes, particularly the multilevel governance of biodiversity. We shall concentrate on the key institutional barriers and mention some positive examples of institutional rebuilding.

A good mechanism for effective communication and interaction between actors from various decision-making levels does not exist in CEE countries, as democratization and decentralization are new processes. An example of the large conflicts in recent years is the dispersion of competencies and forest management practices among state agencies. Such a conflict can be seen in the Czech Šumava National Park, where park administration has competence over both biodiversity protection and forest management (Správa NP a CHKO Šumava, 2006), resulting in a conflict of interest between protection and economic use. In the Slovak High Tatras National Park, the former park authority was divided between the state forests, managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, and biodiversity management, which is controlled by the Slovak Ministry for the Environment. As the division of competences

between these two governmental bodies has never been decided, a constant tension between them exists and has been increasing. A catastrophic windstorm in 2004, which affected a large part of the forest ecosystem, resulted in enormous pressure to reconsider the size of the core zone and the implementation of intensive forest practices by State Forests in two nature reserves designated as NATURA 2000 sites. The main argument for this change was that there was a considerable risk of bark beetle outbreak, which could potentially damage neighbouring forests that were not under the full protection regime as well. As a result the EU launched infringement proceedings against the Slovak government for potential violation of the Habitats Directive and reconsideration of the park's NP status according to IUCN standards.

In Serbia, biodiversity governance is subject to state–public partnerships;³ however, post-socialistic influence and lack of democracy results in institutional mismatch. The structure in place is largely based on informal institutions and therefore the influence of powerful groups with links to former and present political elites. An alarming example is the large-scale ski resort constructed by the Serbian government with the support of international capacities in the Stara Planina Mountains, which violated six national acts and affected the largest protected area in Serbia with potential biodiversity effects on the whole Balkan Peninsula. The biodiversity of Stara Planina is represented by a number of ecosystems and species under international protection, e.g. the Ramsar site of peat meadows, nine species on the World and 42 on the European Red List of Endangered Species or a total of more than 100 species protected by various national regulations.

Socialist influence still persists in the exclusion of non-state actors from decision making. National parks in most cases find ways to establish a dialogue with local communities, but environmental NGOs are often perceived by them as 'orthodox' and are not involved in consultations or in real decision making (Okraska and Szymczuk, 2004).

The exclusion of non-state actors from biodiversity governance is particularly significant in Near Neighbouring Countries. In Belarus, there are no formal communication or cooperation channels between national park administrators, local governments and environmental NGOs. Most tourist facilities are located within the national parks and are run by the parks' administration, which is subordinated directly to the Management Department of the President, operating on annual business plans. Management and protection plans, in contrast, are developed only every ten years.

The institutional mismatch between post-socialistic and new institutions is still prevalent, resulting in coordination problems between actors, as documented by the mismatch between inter-governmental agencies over forest and biodiversity governance in the Czech Republic and Slovakia or by the exclusion of various examples of non-state actors from public dialogue. The lack of institutions for actors' interaction and effective governance, such as a collective choice mechanism, sanctioning and monitoring, can be cited as key aspects of this. Such findings are comparable with other regions with short democratic histories, such as community forest studies in developing countries (Andersson, 2003). It has been documented that, even though the legal and financial conditions of the decentralized forestry regimes in Bolivia were favourable, institutional and socio-economic barriers, such as free riding, weak monitoring and sanctioning, still persisted. The motivation of local politicians and decentralization combined with democratization were seen as effective drivers of institutional consolidation (Andersson, 2003).

There are also positive experiences of multi-actor interactions. In Poland, elements of multi-actor interaction are derived from a long tradition of market structures that, in small scale, remained even during the socialist period. In the Czech Republic, the existence of networks of actors (NGOs, interests groups etc.) and various consultation mechanisms for non-state actors, such as state and NGO partnerships, are due to the effect of historically determined informal civic movements. The most visible example was in the Czech Switzerland National Park, where the national park administration initiated the foundation of a non-profit organization intended for cooperation and communication with municipalities, NGOs and other non-state actors.⁴

A new formal institution in Polish and Czech biodiversity governance is the National Park Council,⁵ which acts as an advisory body to the park administration for all important management processes (especially zoning,

³Management of protected areas is done by public enterprises.

⁴This organization, České Svýcarsko, o.p.s., attempts to integrate the interests of the state administration, municipalities and NGOs. Its common activities include the preparation and coordination of the Integrated Protection of Ecosystems in Czech Switzerland project, the running of the Information Center of the National Park etc. (Správa NP a CHKO Šumava, 2006).

⁵In Poland, National Park Councils also functioned before the transformation, but primarily for scientific reasons only.

management planning, visiting rules, forest management, land-use plans etc). The membership of the national park scientific councils aims to achieve the representation of non-state actors, such as scientists, environmental organizations and local government representatives in the decision-making process. These structures are seen as an accelerator of cross-scale interactions. In Poland, the establishment of all major protection areas has to be consulted and agreed upon with the local authorities (Legislation: 16 April, 2004, art. 10).

In Slovakia, where biodiversity governance is subordinated to regional and central state authority, the Association of Municipalities operating in some parks can be considered to be a new multilevel institution. For example, in Slovensky raj NP, such an association is called the 'Microregion' and includes the voluntary membership of municipalities around the park. The Microregion supports nature conservation, cultural activities and traditional crafts and cooperates in the provision of tourism services. Any decision made within the Microregion is based on a consensus among all the members. The park administration is also a member and can interact with non-state actors and be better informed about the activities planned within the national park. This assures at least informal cooperation in the decision-making process and biodiversity governance.

Multilevel governance elements existed in most CEE biodiversity governance structures prior to the transition. In Poland and Slovakia, hierarchical elements still dominate. In Slovakia, the additional absence of appropriate incentives to encourage sustainable behaviour by non-state owners results in the expansion of unsustainable economic activities (Klúvanková-Oravská and Chobotová, 2006). In the Czech Republic, the jurisdiction is a combination of the general and the task specific with a relatively high degree of self-organization. The transfer of knowledge and institutions across the full scale remains uncertain for all countries in our paper.

The Role of EU Enlargement

The primary legal framework for the present biodiversity policy at the EU level is formed from the Habitats and Birds Directives. The Habitats Directive provides for the creation of a European network of special areas of conservation (SACs) with European priority habitat types and species, which is also known as NATURA 2000.

Implementation has been connected with various problems and conflicts in both old and new member states (see e.g. Alphandery and Fortier, 2001; Gibbs *et al.*, 2007; Hiedanpää, 2002; Krott *et al.*, 2000; Paavola, 2004; Rauschmayer *et al.*, 2009; Stoll-Kleemann, 2001), which are also well documented by Paavola *et al.* (2009). In the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe that joined the EU in 2004 and 2006, NATURA 2000 was an example of an entirely new institution placed into post-socialistic governance structures. As documented in the previous section, the largest problem area seems to be the cooperation of various actors.

The Habitats and Birds Directives leave the public consultation stage to each member state (Article 6 of the Habitats Directive), which allows for country-specific solutions to be implemented depending on the particular country's practices and the state of democratic decision making. In most new member states, the critical factors influencing implementation were a weak history of participatory governance, including absence of a collective choice mechanism, conflict resolution and a lack of responsibility for the coordination of resources under the common regime. In some cases, non-state actors became part of governance consultation, for example, the NGOs in the High Tatras and Sumava National Parks, but not decision making.

The Habitats Directive was designed to integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions at the EU level, but delegated the task of promulgating procedures for designating sites for the NATURA 2000 network to the member states. Member states followed the (mainly environmental) orientation of the directive and designated sites on the basis of scientific criteria and existing scientific information without consulting local landowners, civic groups or others who were affected by site designation and thus could not see in NATURA 2000 any economic or social interests (Article 8 of the Habitats Directive). The designation of SACs upon scientific criteria increased even more the overall frustration of non-state land owners in the new member states, as their aversion to following biodiversity protection stemmed from the absence of proper market incentives to do so. Compensation schemes and their monitoring require cooperation between many government units and interest groups, which has not yet evolved in new member states; consequently, NATURA 2000 was very often understood as a restrictive measure for nature conservation. In Poland, for example, an attempt to increase the NATURA 2000 areas was opposed by the Polish Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who declared that 'NATURA 2000 has expanded so much that

it is practically impossible to build anything'. Mistakes also occurred in the process of SAC designation (Article 3 Annexes I and II etc).

Most new member states reported that some areas were so designated without a detailed knowledge of what was in them, and some local governments were against the establishment of the sites (Banaszak *et al.*, 2008) because they were fully excluded from consultations.

The Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia all reported more difficulties with the designation and management of NATURA 2000 sites at areas not previously protected (Weigle and Kiczynska, 2003). The reason most likely is derived from the fact, that in contrast to old sites, which were already covered by national networks managed by professional bodies, the management of new sites was given to local governments and community forest owners, who are newly established bodies and who often lack professional skills not only in nature conservation but also in coordination and management, as well as a sense of responsibility. To stimulate the active engagement of actors in the management of SACs in new member states will require more assistance. Positive examples from the 'LIFE' programme, the EU's financial instrument for supporting environmental and nature conservation, can provide inspiration.

The designation of SACs sites was thus contentious (Young *et al.*, 2007) and in most new member states resulted in the preparation of 'shadow lists' by NGOs. The immediate reason for these conflicts was the top-down and non-inclusive site designation process.

Despite the serious difficulties with NATURA 2000 implementation described in this paper, there are several positive aspects. The Habitats Directive provides incentives for the internalization of consultations with non-state actors in the decision-making process. Similarly, EU monitoring of compliance is seen as an incentive for the evolution of an internal monitoring and sanctioning mechanism, as seen for example in the case of forest management in the Slovak High Tatras NP. Other examples of designating NATURA 2000 sites catalysed regional development (WWF Polska, 2008). Such a situation can be observed in the area covered by the Barycz Valley Network in Poland. The inhabitants recognize and utilize benefits from the NATURA 2000 network, such as wide-scale free promotion of the region, development of environmentally friendly tourism and agri-tourism and development of a label for local products (Antoniewicz, 2006). Moreover, NATURA 2000 improved access to information and encouraged public participation, particularly at the local level. Proposals for the NATURA 2000 sites are required to be consulted with local governments, and other protection plans such as national nature reserves, landscape parks or forest management plans, should also be considered (Nowacki, 2006).

In summary, EU integration, particularly the implementation of NATURA 2000, can contribute to the development of multilevel governance, especially by stimulating multi-actor interactions, monitoring and sanctioning as documented in Poland, and in the Czech and Slovak Republics.

In Belarus and Serbia the effect of the EU has been mediated through external financial schemes such TACIS and INTERREG. Monitoring and sanctions applied to these programmes provide certain incentives to follow rules. Nevertheless, most international programmes are time specific and are carried out by outside experts who are not aware of local circumstances. Thus the EU provides very little influence for institutional changes in countries, jurisdictions and informal institutions. This is exacerbated by the hierarchical governance systems arising from the authoritarian political systems of Serbia and Belarus.

Conclusions

Multilevel governance in CEE countries can be characterized by a prevailing hierarchical structure arising from a limited tradition of decentralization and self-government, lower public awareness and institutional co-evolution, rapidly affected by transformation and integration processes. The situation varies from country to country, depending on historical determinants such as the role of property regimes or existence of formal collective choice mechanisms prior to or during socialism. These aspects determine the overall effectiveness of institutional changes undertaken to transform post-socialist governance structures into the hybrid systems that are common in European democracies.

Based on empirical evidence from the countries studied, we might conclude that the mismatch between the old hierarchical institutions developed under socialism and the new institutions introduced during the transition

process still persists and is visible, as illustrated in our paper over the forest management conflicts between state actors in Slovakia and the Czech Republic or by the exclusion of non-state actors from public consultations and decision making.

Examples of natural resource and biodiversity overexploitation by large-scale state actors in Belarus and Serbia also provide evidence that decentralization and democracy are key aspects of effective multilevel governance and a sustainable economy.

EU integration has been found to be a key driving force for changes and synchronization in the governance of natural resources. In Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic the implementation of NATURA 2000 brought some changes, especially that the management of sites must be negotiated with non-state owners and that compliance is driven by EU monitoring.

In Belarus and Serbia, the effect of the EU is determined by its external support, which is limited to international assistance. In both countries, state executives remain pivotal actors as authoritarian regimes prevent institutional reform, especially the re-distribution of power to supra- and sub-national actors.

Decentralization, together with the increasing role of non-state actors, results in cross-scale coordination and information management problems in most countries. This was especially seen during the designation of NATURA 2000 sites. The emergence of multilevel governance in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe demonstrated the absence of any accountability mechanisms, particularly for non-representative participants, such as non-state actors.

Evidence from our study, also shown in this issue by Paavola *et al.*, indicates that a complex, multilevel governance framework characterized by multiple-actor interaction is prone to create tensions and dynamics of its own, but that this is not necessarily a disadvantage. The appearance of new institutions operating at multiple levels and involving a multitude of groups of actors, such as the National Park Councils in Poland and the Czech Republic, is an example of emerging elements of evolving multilevel governance in transition countries of CEE.

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