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## Who is responsible for Natura 2000 in Poland? – a potential role of NGOs in establishing the programme

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**Abstract:** This paper concerns the involvement and the potential role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in establishing the Natura 2000 programme in Poland. Research carried out amongst members and volunteers of these organisations shows the great importance of the programme for their work. NGOs are readily taking part in discussions on the form of Natura 2000 in Poland and demonstrating their willingness to help establish it. As a result of the lack of partnership relations with the bodies directly responsible for this programme, the role of NGOs in the implementation of Natura 2000 has not yet been clearly defined. NGOs form a base of experts, experience and information on local nature and communities, which may prove to be very useful in achieving the aims of the Natura 2000 programme in Poland.

**Keywords:** Non-Governmental Organisation; NGO; Natura 2000; volunteers; nature monitoring; environmental education; local communities.

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## **1 Introduction**

### *1.1 Natura 2000 Programme: guidelines and implementation in Poland*

Poland's accession to the European Union led to significant changes in the national legislation on nature conservation. One of these is the supplementation of the existing areas of conservation to include the Special Protection Areas for Birds and the Special Areas of Conservation for Habitats. These areas make up the so-called European Ecological Network, Natura 2000. The responsibility for creating this network lies with the EU Member States (Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992; EASAC, 2005). The network is to fulfil a key role in the conservation of the community's biodiversity through ensuring the protection of an appropriate selection of natural habitats and species of European importance on the basis of biogeographical regions designated in Europe (Ostermann, 1998). The protection of Natura 2000 network sites is based on the idea of sustainable development, which should reconcile the necessity of preserving the continuing existence of species and habitats with the economic and cultural needs of man and specific local conditions (Sundseth, 2004).

According to the guidelines of the Natura 2000 programme, the Polish authorities must reorganise the system and method of managing natural resources. This concerns equally

- 1 a change in the traditional approach to managing the natural resources (based solely on conservation) to a more modern approach (taking into account social aspects)
- 2 the creation of a system enabling the application of these social aspects in practice
- 3 the organisation of a nature monitoring system of the newly created conservation areas (Bath and Encke, 2003; Harwood, 2000).

Executing these tasks in the time frame imposed from above by the European Commission (EC) presents the authorities with problems. Poland has not yet held the stage of biogeographic seminars, or completed a list of Natura 2000 sites considered to be exhaustive by the EC. It has also not adjusted national law and the environmental impact assessment system in line with the Habitats Directive, for which it has received a written warning. As a result, a fourth timetable was created in July 2006 for preparation of the proposal for the Polish section of the Natura 2000 Network. This state of affairs has provoked much discussion and commentary in both Polish and foreign media. Some are even mentioning the potential threat of financial penalties or the withholding of part of the funds designated for country development, mainly due to Poland not fulfilling its obligations (Kepel, 2006).

Interest in the fate of Natura 2000 in Poland is shared by various stakeholders both professionally connected with nature conservation and institutions and individuals directly affected by the introduction of the programme. Naturalists think that the obligations to protect natural habitats and species' habitats resulting from 'tough' EU law will significantly improve the effectiveness of the protection of native species and habitats, which are already covered under national law. They also think it will allow for effective conservation of areas of significant natural value, which are often threatened with destruction and have not yet been included under any of the existing forms of area conservation (Jermaczek and Pawlaczyk, 2004). Less optimistic about the programme are administrative employees of the water management, the General Directorate for National Roads and Motorways, as well as forestry workers, self-governments and individual inhabitants of the districts which are to become designated protection areas of the network (Bohdan, 2006). The discussion concerning the Natura 2000 programme in the press, on the radio and television is dominated, however, by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) acting as advocates of this new form of nature conservation.

### *1.2 The role of NGOs in the Natura 2000 programme*

NGOs have been actively involved from the outset in the whole process of implementing the Natura 2000 programme in Poland, led by scientific institutions on the instruction of the Ministry of the Environment. Representatives of the NGOs recognised the need to complete the list of species and habitats named in the annexes of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive and took part in the preparation of a proposal for its extension and a proposal of sites to be included in the Polish part of the network, to include the additional species and habitats (Baranowski, 2003). Paradoxically, many of the sites, including those that were added to the annex of the directive on the

conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora on the request of Polish organisations and institutions, were deleted from the list by the Ministry of the Environment before it was sent to the EC (Kepel, 2006). NGOs decided on a fairly drastic step – to question the government proposal. They sent the original list, known as the ‘Shadow List’ to the EC, which included all sites fulfilling the criteria of a Natura 2000 sanctuary. At the same time, they drew attention to the fact that, in the case of further designation of Polish natural resources, additional sites will be proposed for inclusion in the conservation. The Commission supported this action, in the anticipation that the Polish government would extend its proposal to include all those sites that were previously deleted from this list (Pawlaczyk et al., 2004).

The involvement of NGOs in the Natura 2000 programme is also apparent in their attempts to inform the public, for example, by addressing the issue on their websites and in their own publications. Additionally, many NGOs carry out nature research and make inventories of sites located within the network. With their knowledge of local environments, they have the opportunity to promote the topic of Natura 2000 and, at the same time, get to know the attitudes and opinions of people on the subject, often involving them in conservation work at the same time (Bzoma, 2006).

Making use of the potential of NGOs in carrying out monitoring of these sites is very important, particularly in the implementation phase of Natura 2000. According to the ‘Shadow List’ (Baranowski, 2003; Pawlaczyk et al., 2003), the nature monitoring of certain areas will be difficult to carry out, including bird sanctuaries to cover 15% of the country, habitat sites making up 9.4% of Poland and 6159.7 km of the Baltic Sea. The group of qualified specialists who were potentially to carry this out is too small (McCaffrey, 2005; Stevenson and Morris, 2002). Thus, the proposal came about to include volunteers in these actions, and form close cooperation between scientists and non-professionals (Parr et al., 2003; Pereira and Cooper, 2006). NGOs, by law, independently form the goals and areas of their activity. Till date, none have defined explicitly if, and how, they are getting involved with monitoring under Natura 2000. As a result of the specific character of their work resulting from reliance on a permanent flow of volunteers, it is difficult to say whether long-term cooperation with scientific bodies responsible for the network is realistic.

What are the opinions of NGOs concerning the Natura 2000 programme? Can their involvement in the Natura 2000 programme help achieve its guidelines and improve the way it currently works in Poland? Are NGOs sufficiently credible to take part in the monitoring of protected sites? And, finally, is the approach of the volunteers to the work they are carrying out sufficiently reliable for them to play a part?

Researchers from various European countries where the Natura 2000 programme is currently established are interested in answering these, and other related, questions. Scientists from 16 scientific centres have carried out such research over the last two years as part of the European research project 06364 EUMON (‘EU-wide monitoring methods and systems of surveillance for species and habitats of community interest’). The aim of the project was the development of a description and working processes of the institutions and organisations carrying out the nature monitoring and also wider research into the participation of volunteers in various Member Countries of the European Union. The project is still currently underway. This document presents its initial results for Poland. The final research results, showing the intended and actual cooperation between scientific institutions and volunteers on the monitoring of Natura 2000, are to be worked on by all the research groups and submitted for use by the EC.

## 2 Methods

The studies consisted of two stages. The first was concerned with the scale of volunteering in different types of NGOs and other institutions conducting nature monitoring in Poland. The second stage was based on the analysis of the working system of NGOs using volunteers, discovery of the volunteers' motivation for working with these NGOs as well as an attempt at evaluating the work of this group of non-professional researchers.

The first stage of the research was quantitative and was carried out using an e-mail questionnaire. This research provided information on particular nature institutions/organisations, their structure and composition and the type of employees (professionals, volunteers). It also provided general information on the motivation of volunteers involved in the work of the institution/organisation. The questionnaires were sent to organisations conducting nature monitoring. The research included NGOs, research institutes, national parks, government institutions and others. The sample was created on the basis of data available on the internet and using the snowball method (Babbie, 2003), where subsequent contacts were obtained from organisations that had already agreed to take part in the research. The effectiveness of this method of obtaining addresses proved to be moderate. Thirty-six replies were received in Poland, which made up 24% of the sample.

The second stage of the research was conducted using ethnographic methods. The techniques used included participant observation, in-depth individual interviews and focus group interviews (Daniłowicz and Lisek-Michalska, 2004). This research was carried out amongst members, volunteers and organisers of five chosen Polish NGOs conducting nature monitoring and with an employee of the Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection, which deals with nature monitoring. They were aimed at finding out the deep-rooted opinions, beliefs and motivations of the respondents. The conclusions from this part of the research are based mainly on the analysis of 26 in-depth interviews.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 *Organisations conducting nature monitoring with the participation of volunteers: characteristics*

The organisations taking part in this research have very different backgrounds. Some have a long history (decades) of experience in monitoring, whereas the majority (including all the NGOs) were only established in the 1990s. Volunteers work for 26 of the 36 organisations researched and have done almost from the outset, whereas eight institutions conduct monitoring exclusively using permanent employees. Among the respondents of this research, the NGOs counting the most volunteers were those conducting bird monitoring, although generally volunteers worked in organisations dealing with all aspects of biodiversity. The organisations studied were very different with regard to the number of employees, their admittance policy and the number of members. Organisations and institutions conducting nature monitoring in Poland employ as many as 250 permanent employees. There are, however, others who do not employ a professional workforce. Some allow all those interested to become members and others

reserve this opportunity for those professionally or scientifically involved with their work. Most of the respondents confirmed they cooperate and exchange results of their research with other organisations and bodies. Only five of the organisations offer their volunteers some form of financial help with work-related costs (e.g. travel costs). Two-thirds of respondents said that the volunteers working for them have appropriate qualifications to carry out their part in the monitoring. Training was provided for volunteers in 16 cases. Practically all of the respondents claimed that they verified the data collected by volunteers. The work of the organisations conducting monitoring is mostly concerned with carrying out research and making inventories, whereas organisations monitoring birds also conduct bird ringing. In terms of monitoring, the volunteers primarily take part in the collection of data in the field and counting species by observation.

### *3.2 Volunteers' motivation and an evaluation of the importance of their work for nature monitoring*

Various people involved in the work of the organisations included in this research, all of them are volunteers. They can be divided into four groups:

- 1 active professionals (mainly scientific employees, involved in, and control, the monitoring work of the organisations as well as preparing reports from the research)
- 2 professional hobbyists (with professional background but they see their work for such organisations as a way of spending their free time, rather than a professional obligation or career)
- 3 students (of faculties related to the environment who are doing their Master's dissertations on subjects connected with the work of the institution or are taking part with the aim of gaining experience in their subjects)
- 4 amateur hobbyists (do not have environmental education but a passion for research).

The unpaid work of volunteers who carry out their work well is exceptionally important for NGOs:

“The human resources here will be very important, the knowledge of these people, their predisposition, their availability, etc. At the end of the day, it often comes down to financial resources, because in Polish conditions, well, you know how it is with this volunteering, (...). Undoubtedly we have some superb volunteers, but in a slightly different category from those in Western Europe” (Eagle Protection Committee).

“It's great that people are pursuing their dreams, as it's mostly biologists and dreamers, dreaming of studying animals, and we're helping them fulfil these dreams and this benefits the environment too because we're using the data as an argument for better protection, better management of the land” (Association for Nature WOLF).

Generally, those involved in the work of NGOs are there for a long period of time. This results from the interest of the volunteers themselves as well as from the working principles of particular organisations. They do not willingly take on those offering one-off or sporadic help, mainly because of the necessity of 'training' each of the

volunteers to carry out the tasks assigned to them. The respondents themselves emphasised this in their answers:

“We vouch for these people in the Ministry. When we receive permission in the Ministry, there is always a clause that we guarantee that these people will carry out this work according to some guidelines or other, which aren’t going to cause concern, or any damage to the habitat where they are. That’s why they have to be trained” (Eagle Protection Committee).

All the NGOs that took part in the study claimed to conduct their research in a professional manner. An important element of this is, good planning and effective organisation of the volunteers’ tasks. This results mainly from the leaders’ awareness of the direct link between the working system and the quality of the results.

“A lot depends on the organizational side of things, if the directors don’t take care of the working conditions, it often leads to abuse or oversights” (Operation Carpatica).

The organisers are also aware of the specific character of the work, which relies chiefly on volunteering. Precise verification of the work of the volunteers is not always possible, although the leaders generally see the volunteers’ motivation as positive, which has a direct effect on the quality of their work.

Various types of motivation of the volunteers working in the field of nature conservation, in its broad sense, have been identified and described. The most commonly seen types are altruistic, egoistic and those who see it as an investment (Knegtering et al., 2002; Nielsen, 2001). Participants in this study described their own motivation and that of others in these terms, although it would be difficult to show examples of ‘pure types’. In the majority of cases, the primary motivation was the desire to help preserve our natural heritage and the joy of being in the heart of nature, in particular when there is an opportunity for very direct, even tangible contact. Involvement in research as an investment in oneself was decidedly less prevalent and, in itself, not highly ranked by the respondents. A person’s emotional attachment to nature instills greater faith in the accuracy of their work than other types of motivation for getting involved in the work of these organisations, such as the need to achieve particular career moves or to obtain a reference or certificate.

### 3.3 *The Natura 2000 programme in the opinion of NGOs*

In the opinion of all the NGOs whose representatives were interviewed, the Natura 2000 programme is important. What is distinctive, is that its role is looked at from different perspectives – from that of particular NGO’s own, local activities, and from the importance of the programme for nature conservation, in its broad sense, across Poland and even beyond its borders. This is particularly visible in the comments of decision makers in the organisations studied regarding the creation of the ‘Shadow List’. On the one hand, they stress the considerable role of the NGOs in determining sites on the list, emphasising the collective character of the work in achieving this aim. On the other hand, they indicate their direct interest in adding sites particularly important to them to the official government list.

“[concerning the] ‘Shadow List’, it was said that they would be confirmed this year and that they’d be included in Natura 2000, which has in fact considerable importance, for example, for getting financial resources from the European Union, the funding of various activities, on these sites as well” (Polish Society for the Protection of Birds).

The Natura 2000 programme, from a global perspective, is seen as necessary and justified for nature conservation whereas, from a local perspective, it is seen as an important element promoting the work of NGOs in the area. The fact that the 'Shadow List' was treated as more exhaustive than the ministerial list by Union authorities is regarded as a big success by the NGOs, along with the hope that their representatives will participate in the implementation of the programme. The ministerial proposal, as has been stressed on more than one occasion, is primarily non-conflicting in organisational terms. It is not, however, focused on protecting that which is most valuable and rare in Europe. The government excluded sites from the list where work and investments were planned, which have nothing to do with nature conservation.

"It means that only those sites which were the least conflicting were proposed in the first ministerial proposal (...) and that's not even the least conflicting with regard to local communities, as there is probably conflict there too, but with regard to conflict with the most powerful authority, the State Forests. It's as if the Ministry, which contains the State Forests and to which the Director of the State Forests is subordinate, was scared of conflict with them!" (Association for Nature WOLF)

The Natura 2000 programme, in the opinion of NGOs, has significant importance for regional development. This position, testament to the maturity of Polish nature organisations, is not popular in many circles, even government ones. This probably results from the fact that the network is still being mistakenly identified with the kind of environmental conservation which has been in force in Poland to date (such as national parks or reserves), where there are no opportunities for investment.

"I don't think they know what the idea of the Natura 2000 network is, what it's for, why, and on what grounds? Because after all these years they are still (...) mistaking 'Nature' for a national park, to put it simply. They think that if a Natura 2000 area is established, then the people living there may (...) think they're living in a museum, that they can't build, they can't run any kind of business, but it's all the other way round" (Polish Society for the Protection of Birds).

Although the NGOs have a positive opinion on the idea itself of Natura 2000, this does not extend to the methods used to establish it. According to the representatives of NGOs, the running of the programme, mainly by national authorities, is ineffective. The current research does not explicitly answer the question of what is causing the difficulties in communication between the NGOs and government bodies. According to those participating in the research, cooperation with the State Forests and the nature conservators has run well since the start of their monitoring, whereas attempts at negotiation with the Ministry of the Environment appear to be the least satisfactory.

"There's a very big split between theory and practice. Generally, between the intention itself, the idea, and the implementation in Poland... It can't be that the Ministry, which is responsible for the implementation of Natura, is doing everything it cannot to implement it. Or to implement it on a limited scale. And there's a struggle between the NGOs and the Ministry. One wants to push it as far as it'll go, and the other as little as possible. Well something's not right here" (Operation Carpatica).



### 3.4 *Participation of NGOs in establishing the Natura 2000 programme – declarations*

Fulfilling the guidelines of the Natura 2000 programme will require a lot of effort and the work of many specialists. The scientific institutions that have been involved in the programme from its outset are convinced of the need for cooperation between different institutes in order to overcome inadequate knowledge about natural resources and to achieve public approval in the areas proposed for conservation as part of the network (Makomaska-Juchiewicz and Tworek, 2003). The implementation of the programme should start, first of all, with an extensive informative educational campaign directed mainly at local communities living in the areas included in the network. There are, by law, no plans to include social aspects in the planning stage of the conservation of nature areas or to include informative educational aspects (Act on Nature Conservation from 16 April 2004). Poland is only indirectly obliged to conduct informative educational programmes by the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEG of 21 May 1992).

“This doesn’t bode well for the future at all, because even if we appointed the management now, mapped out the boundaries nicely and described them, we’re going to have a huge problem with implementing any kind of activities, because without that public approval, even with all the European Directives, practically speaking, we can’t achieve anything. If the local community is against it, then we’ve got a difficult time ahead of us, very difficult” (Eagle Protection Committee).

The methodology used to determine the network, developed by EU experts, does not include methods of resolving social conflicts, neither have they been proposed as part of the implementation projects of the Natura 2000 network in Poland (Bernacka et al., 2004).

In that case, how do NGOs see their role in establishing the Natura 2000 programme? Although they clearly declare their enthusiasm for the programme, few have a clear idea of their future participation in the programme. To a large extent, this results from the still ambiguously formulated way in which it operates. According to non-governmental activists, their organisations in particular could plan and carry out the informative environmental programmes for local communities as well as for other stakeholders groups directly or indirectly connected with the programme (forestry workers, employees of the water management, local governments). Other than public relations specialists, it is the NGOs who can act as advocates of the programme since they work in the area, they know the local problems and the people whose potential interests are particularly susceptible to conflict with nature conservation.

“I heard recently that, apparently, the first applications are being made where the neighbouring district says: ‘include me, I want to as well’. Because the opportunity is there. Natura 2000 really does create a lot of opportunities for making use of Union funds. And that’s for the development of all those kinds of agritourism farms after all, for individuals living in those areas. Natura 2000 is an excellent idea for promoting the region. It’s a kind of slogan that could provoke interest, after all. (...) Because if they want to build roads, and they avoid the most valuable places, it’s more expensive, but at the same time they can receive more. (...) So I don’t understand the decision-makers’ thinking” (Polish Society for the Protection of Birds).

The other pressing issue for NGOs is developing partnership relations with the government, public institutions connected with the Natura 2000 programme and with investors interested in areas included in the network.

“There are conflicts all around. I mean, generally, I would say that the problem with working with the administration, with the Ministry, with the Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection is that they quite often back out of their promises. All the time, really, it turns out that they’re just words, words, words, more meetings, more discussions and a lack of real actions” (Polish Society for the Protection of Birds).

Some of the NGOs also see opportunities to participate in monitoring research of the designated sites. Many of them have carried out this work for years, before Poland had even heard of Natura 2000. So far, no changes in plans with regard to research in this area have been confirmed, although the participants who responded often indicated at least a partial similarity between their actions and the requirements of Natura.

“NGOs have huge potential when it comes to ‘Nature’ areas, which they focus on (...) And I think that they already have huge knowledge and environmental data on these areas, which they would probably very willingly share. Undoubtedly, they need some kind of financial support too, because as I said, for that environmental research, and scientific research too, the hardest thing is to get funding because you have to carry out a lot of work and other tasks, which take up a lot of time and resources, so that the project also contains that scientific element. And that kind of project by NGOs must have some concrete results, which can be demonstrated to sponsors. (...) They’ll probably be more effective if they’re NGOs, because as we know from experience, the NGOs use significantly less money and the effects are often much greater, as far as results go” (Association for Nature WOLF).

It is, however, very significant that NGOs have environmental databases going back many years, often even in the form of scientific works. They are a rich source of information on a given area, which could potentially be used as comparative material in judging the effectiveness of the planned conservation by the programme. Generally, many NGOs declare their willingness to participate in the monitoring of Natura 2000, but only chosen ones are invited to cooperate with the Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection or the Ministry for the Environment. In practice, this means the NGOs passing their own data to administrative bodies, but it very rarely means a working partnership on joint projects. Other organisations pass their work on to the Ministry or to other bodies on their own initiative; they are aware, however, that there is relatively little interest in their results.

“Sometimes we just send our articles and brochures that we’ve published to officials and to those responsible for some department or other. Everything that contains information on environmental values or the data we’ve collected, we send...” (Association for Nature WOLF).

Another reason for making the most of the potential of NGOs for nature monitoring in Poland is the way they operate, which is to a significant extent based on cooperation, linking up in networks and exchanging information on different regions of the country. Although particular organisations work in a defined area, usually very local, rarely extending beyond a province, they recognise the need for regulation, standardisation of research techniques and a more comprehensive approach to the issue of conservation.

“The exchange of data with similar ringing operations is mainly based around organizations connected with SEEN<sup>1</sup>. Of course, exchanges of data take place here (...) with these organizations and these operations. They’re mostly about the technical side of research at different locations, the fast exchange of information on ringed birds and some informal, casual conversations during various meetings” (Operation Carpatica).

Many volunteers, but also permanent employees, of organisations participate in the research of more than one NGO, often working in different areas of the country. This sharing of experience, mainly by forming and exchanging opinions on the system, quality and results of the research of sister institutions provides the opportunity to mutually assess the reliability of the results. The cooperation and shared experience of organisations focusing on research and those focusing solely on public activity, protests and education plays an equally important role. This experience in cooperation is very important from the perspective of Natura 2000, in which nature conservation is to be organised as a network, planned from a global perspective and not only according to the needs of local, temporary actions.

### *3.5 The opinions of decision makers on the competence of NGOs*

NGOs have not yet achieved a stable, reliable position, as they have done in other EU Member States, mainly because of their short history in Poland. They are often associated with typically agitational activities rather than with professional ones.

“Well the name itself – non-governmental – raises certain doubts as to whether we can trust them or not. Can we sign a contract with such an organization or not? They all approach it in quite an untrustworthy way and that’s, I think, where the mistrust by the Polish authorities comes from” (Eagle Protection Committee).

NGOs dealing with environmental issues, including Natura 2000, are no exception here. Their actions often raise doubts and are seen as harmful to Polish interests, even by Polish MPs. Although this criticism is at the highest levels of the authorities, public administration employees, who have direct contact with the work of NGOs, express completely different views.

“These organizations really do have a large support structure, knowledge, and enthusiasm too (...) We don’t know what the problems are. They know better than anyone what’s going on, because they simply love it. And obviously, they know what’s happening in the field” (Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection).

The NGOs are also criticised for poor work on the Natura 2000 site list. What is interesting is that these organisations were not responsible for preparing this document at all. Even if some of their representatives took part in the work on designating the protected sites, the Institute of Nature Conservation of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IOP PAN) (Baranowski, 2003) was responsible for the overall document. This institute works with experts from NGOs, making use of the data they have collected, and this is, after all, proof of the reliability of the methods and the scope of work of the NGOs.

“As far as NGOs are concerned, we’ve been working with the same organizations, which we have done for the whole time on Natura 2000, that is, the Naturalists Club and SALAMANDRA [the names of other NGOs] (...). Only that, really, we choose the experts. At the moment our proposal for carrying out the monitoring is that we are the coordinating institute, we appoint

experts on particular habitats or species and they select their team. In principle, it's not our concern who they appoint, as long as they're specialists. We judge them only by their competence" (The Institute of Nature Conservation, Polish Academy of Sciences).

"It's a strange situation because the minister (...) said that the previous Natura 2000 list was based on the data of NGOs, that's why it's probably exaggerated. Because the situation was that the Ministry commissioned the Natura 2000 study to scientific institutions: The Institute of Nature Conservation of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the National Foundation for Environmental Protection. And they did it together, it wasn't the NGOs but the scientists, [...] and they collected the material. NGOs just did the 'Shadow List' " (Association for Nature WOLF).

The participants of our study are aware of these opinions on their activities. They claim that it results to a large extent from not knowing their methods and the way they work, and also from the often over exaggerated agitational activities portrayed in the media. The actual scope of NGOs dealing with nature issues is very wide. In principle, however, the aim of NGOs is not only monitoring and research but also, and perhaps most importantly, promoting the results among the public. This aspect of their work and the public discussion on the goals of nature conservation is important for improving the quality of the environment (Ellis and Waterton, 2004).

Why, despite all their qualities described by the leaders, the activists and the volunteers of the NGOs, is there no decent communication between administrative bodies, the government and NGOs in Poland? Both sides clearly have problems in identifying the causes of such a situation.

"They don't even have any kind of database of which organizations are doing what in the country, and if they have, then it's not accessible for all officials to use. And we're trying to make some kind of personal contact with the people who we see as doing something in this matter. (...) They don't make contact first, because it's difficult to expect them to know which organization is doing what in the country" (Association for Nature WOLF).

"It seems to me that the non-governmental organizations do a lot. But we don't always know about it. We don't get to hear about what is being done in NGOs and there's also a problem with us using their data. (...). It belongs to them and we would have to pay for certain research results and there's always a problem here with money" (Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection).

This problem, thus, does not necessarily result from bad intentions, or a lack of understanding between officials and researchers/activists. Representatives of the bodies responsible for the practical implementation of Natura 2000 in Poland recognise that the knowledge, experience and help of NGOs in this area could be invaluable. Decision makers at higher levels could often present a barrier; they judge them on the basis of still existing stereotypes, mainly due to a lack of contact with these organisations. On this basis, they reject the opportunity of including NGOs in work on the Natura 2000 programme.

#### **4 Conclusions**

- 1 NGOs have great potential with regard to people, in the form of volunteers and naturalists collecting research and monitoring data for free, they also have a wealth of knowledge and experience collected over years of work in the field.

The inclusion of NGOs in the implementation of Natura 2000 is not their responsibility or their obligation. It appears, however, that involving them in this new type of nature protection could be very important for the programme overall.

- 2 The NGOs are still expressing an interest in the issue of Natura 2000 and, importantly, a willingness to cooperate with the institutions directly responsible for carrying it out. Representatives of NGOs stress that cooperation on the tasks of Natura 2000 would be possible on the condition that appropriate means of funding were provided, primarily by the Ministry of the Environment or other bodies responsible for the monitoring of Natura areas. The main role that NGOs would play in carrying out the programme, in their own opinion, would be the monitoring of the network as well as social educational activities.
- 3 Government representatives do not generally trust NGOs, not treating them as partners in the discussions and work on Natura 2000. This is probably the main cause of the frequent conflict and the lack of continuing cooperation on the programme. Assuming the benefits that the participation of NGOs in the implementation of Natura 2000 can bring, it is necessary to develop clear guidelines concerning the cooperation between the government and NGOs on issues of nature conservation.

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## Note

- <sup>1</sup>SEEN 'SE EUROPEAN BIRD MIGRATION NETWORK' a network for institutes researching bird migration, mainly along the south-eastern migration trail. The aim of the association is to discover exact migration paths in order to enable the effective protection of bird species, their habitats and resting places. One of its most important tasks is the standardisation and coordination of research methods among the different members of the network.