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ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN NATURA 2000 SITES CASE STUDY: BRAILA COUNTY

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Abstract: *Biodiversity is a huge variety of ecosystems, species and genes, which represent the natural capital. The biodiversity values make up the natural heritage that must be used by the present generations without jeopardizing the chance of the next generations to enjoy the same living conditions. The protected natural areas represent the most important method to preserve biodiversity and to provide development patterns in harmony with nature, in the context of the fast economic development in the last decades. Natura 2000 represents a protected areas network, designated at from European level. Its aim is the preservation of the wild habitats and of endangered vegetal and animal species, as the proper management of these areas.*

Key words: *biodiversity, Natura 2000 sites, management*

INTRODUCTION

Natura 2000 represents the keystone of the EU policy in the field of biodiversity and it represents a network of protected natural areas designed in order to implement the directives: *Habitats* (Directive on the conservation of natural habitats, of wild flora and fauna 92/43/EC) and *Birds* (Directive on the conservation of wild birds 2009/147/EC). Thus, this network protects the natural habitats and the wild species of endangered plants and animals at EU level, consisting of the following categories of protected natural areas of community interest (Natura 2000 sites):

→ *Special preservation areas* that preserves habitats and species of plants and animals, except for birds, in conformity with the Habitat Directive; they are declared on the basis of the recognition of the Sites of Community Interest by the European Commission;

→ *Special avifaunistic protection areas* for the protection of all wild birds species, in conformity with the Birds Directive.

By joining the European Union, Romania has the obligation to include a certain percentage of its natural space into this network, so as to ensure the conservation of it, if the respective areas accommodate habitats and species of community interest.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study intends to make an assessment of Brăila county biodiversity and of the management of protected natural areas, of its preservation state, of the anthropic activities that have led or could lead to its degradation.

Characterization of the protected natural areas had two components: (i) the theoretical component: identification of the current national and international legislation, short description of protected natural areas; (ii) the practical component: the state protected natural areas from the point of view of management regime, the impact of anthropogenic activity and trends.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Brăila County included in the Southeast Region of Romania that is top of the list in terms of conservation of biodiversity: is the region with the largest area of protected areas of Romania (43.8% of the total of protected areas in Romania), as well as the region with the largest area of protected natural areas occupied (about 32% of the region's surface).

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On its territory is located 144 of protected natural areas of national interest, including a nature reserve of the biosphere, 1 national park and 3 natural parks, as well as 108 sites Natura 2000.

Table 1. The surface of natural protected areas* in 2012

The counties of South East Region	Surface of natural protected areas (ha)
Brăila	60936.2
Buzău	49524.1
Constanța	140549.1
Galați	63465.5
Tulcea	618889.5
Vrancea	95842.2

Source: Annual report regarding the environmental state in South East Region in the year 2012, Regional Agency for Environmental Protection Galați, South East Region

*They avoided duplication of various types of protected natural areas

The summary of these surface areas is approximately 1029206.6 hectares, protected areas are located in all counties. Due to the variety of geoclimatic conditions existing each county present specific features in relation to habitats and species of flora.

By the emergence of Ord.MMP 238/2011 for the modification of Ord. MMDD 1964/2007 concerning the declaring sites of Community importance as an integral part of the European ecological network Natura 2000 sites in Romania and HG 971/2011 which modify HG 1284/2007 concerning the declaring areas of special protection areas as an integral part of the European ecological network Natura 2000 sites in Romania, the number of sites of Community importance in the Southeast Region has reached to 67 and the number of the areas of special protection areas has risen to 41.

In conformity with the Romanian legislation on the regime of protected natural areas, the protected natural areas in Brăila county are the following:

a) Protected natural areas of national interest: in Brăila county there are 3 protected natural areas of national interest: one natural park and two natural reservations, the total area of which is of 23828.86 ha and represents 5% of the area of the county.

Table 2. The protected natural area of national interest in county Braila, in year 2012

Name	Category of protected area	Area at level of county - ha
Balta Mică a Brăilei	Natural Park	22989 ^{*)}
Lacul Jirlău Vișani	Natural Reservation	838.66
Pădurea Camnița	Natural Reservation	1.2

^{*)} In years 2006-2008, in conformity to Law 5/2000 the total area of Natural Park Balta Mică a Brăilei was of 17529 ha, in years 2009-2010 after an assessment made by the Office for Cadastre and real Estate Publicity Brăila the park area increased to 20460 ha, and in period 2011-2012, in conformity to GD 971/2011 area of PNBMB was established at 24123 ha, of which 22989 ha pertain to county Brăila, and the rest: 976 ha to county Ialomița and 158 ha to county Constanța.

Source: Annual report regarding the environmental state in county Brăila per year 2012, Agency for the Environmental Protection

b) Protected natural areas of international interest in county

In conformity with the Ramsar Convention through which the wetlands of international importance are protected as habitat for the aquatic birds, convention to which Romania is a signing party, in the year 2001 Balta Mică a Brăilei (the Small Brăila Swamp) was declared RAMSAR site (position 1074 on Ramsar list) under the name Insula Mică a Brăilei (the Small Island of Brăila), he has an area of 17586 ha and represents 3.7% of the area of the county. 207 species of birds were inventoried, representing half of the species of migratory birds characteristic for Romania, among which 169 are internationally protected species, through the *Conventions in Berne, Bonn and Ramsar*.

c) Protected natural areas of community interest

In conformity with *Government's Emergency Ordinance no. 57/2007 on the regime of protected natural areas, the preservation of natural habitats, of wild flora and fauna*, approved with modifications and completions by *Law no. 49/2011*, the protected natural areas of community interest (Natura 2000 sites) are represented by the special avifaunistic protection areas (the sites of community importance) and the special preservation areas.

The goal of the *special avifaunistic protection areas* is to preserve, maintain and where appropriate, to bring back into a favourable conservation state the birds species and the specific habitats, designated for the protection of the wild migratory birds of community interest, in conformity with the Birds Directive. Thus, on the territory of Brăila county, 9 special avifaunistic protection areas have been delimited, totalling an area of 59788.37 ha, which represents 12.5% of the county area.

Table 3. Special avifaunistic protection areas in Brăila county

Crt. no.	Name	Code	Area at county level (ha)
1.	Balta Albă-Amara-Jirlău	ROSPA0004	1213.8
2.	Balta Mică a Brăilei	ROSPA0005	24821.8
3.	Balta Tătaru	ROSPA0006	8583.6
4.	Dunărea Veche-Brațul Măcin	ROSPA0040	6228
5.	Ianca-Plopu-Sărat	ROSPA0048	1982.1
6.	Lunca Siretului Inferior	ROSPA0071	1824.6
7.	Măxineni	ROSPA0077	1504.3
8.	Berteștii de Sus – Gura Ialomiței	ROSPA0111	2962.7
9.	Valea Călmățuiului	ROSPA0145	10667.8

Source: Annual report regarding the environmental state in county Brăila per year 2012, Agency for the Environmental Protection

The sites of community importance represent those areas which significantly contribute to the maintaining or the restoration to a favorable preservation state of the natural habitats or the species of community interest and which could significantly contribute in this way to the existence of the "NATURA 2000" network and/or significantly contribute to maintaining the biological diversity. On the territory of Brăila county, sites of community importance have been declared, totaling an area of 43318.74 ha and representing 9% of the county area.

Table 4. Sites of community importance in Brăila county

Crt. no.	Name	Code	Site area at county level (ha)
1.	Balta Albă-Amara-Jirlău-Lacul Sărat Căineni	ROSCI0005	2835
2.	Balta Mică a Brăilei	ROSCI0006	20872
3.	Brațul Măcin	ROSCI0012	4503.4
4.	Lunca Buzăului	ROSCI0103	978.18
5.	Lunca Siretului Inferior	ROSCI0162	1755.67
6.	Valea Călmățuiului	ROSCI0259	8603.04
7.	Ianca - Plopu - Sărat - Comăneasca	ROSCI0305	3222
8.	Lacul Sărat - Brăila	ROSCI0307	377
9.	Sărăturile de la Gura Ialomiței - Mihai Bravu	ROSCI0389	172.45

Source: Annual report regarding the environmental state in county Brăila per year 2012, Agency for the Environmental Protection

d) Protected natural areas of county interest

By Brăila County Council Decision no. 20/1994 on the protected natural areas and the natural monuments on the territory of Brăila county, the following zones were declared as protected areas: Balta Mică a Brăilei, Lake Jirlău, Camnița and Vișoara Forests, as well as Popina Blasova. Subsequently, the first three obtained the protected natural area of national interest status, declared by Law 5/2000 for the approval of the national territory management plan, and Forest Vișoara and

Popina Blasova have the status of protected natural areas of county interest at present, both of them represents 0,4% of the Braila county.

Forestry Reserve Viișoara has an area of 1897.8 ha, being located in the southern part of Brăila county. The forest is a relict of the oak tree forests that used to populate the sands on the right bank of the river Călmățui. Being irrationally cut for hundreds of years, the forest was naturally regenerated. The forest consists of oak and acacia trees, and the reason of obtaining the protection status was the very existence of these oak trees, a rare species in Brăila forests. For the quantity and quality of the wood, an area of 39.4 ha of it is also a seminologic reserve, mentioned in the “National catalogue of resources for forest reproduction materials in Romania”.

Popina Blasova is located in the north-eastern part of Insula Mare a Brăilei, near Lake Blasova and was declared natural monument due to its singularity in the relief of Brăila county, with a height of 45 m and an area of 2.3 ha. Due to the soil conditions generated by the mineralogical composition of the area, the vegetal cover on the northern flank includes two endemic species: the blue bell and the milfoil with yellow flowers.

Environmental management in Natura 2000 sites

Conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable utilization of the components and the equitable share of the benefits that result from the utilization of natural resources represents the primordial conditions of the management of protected natural areas, through which it seeks, first, to maintain the harmonious interaction of man with nature.

Declaring an area as a Natura 2000 site is the first evidence that the area has an outstanding natural value, and in the second that the area can generate revenue from ecotourism and other associated activities. The definition of these sites was not gone from the idea of strict protection, prohibiting human activity. The management of these zones must, however, take into account the fact that Natura 2000 is primarily a tool for biodiversity conservation. Management plans may include only economic activities that help to maintain and to protect nature and the environment.

In 2012 in Braila county there are 24 protected natural areas, out of which: 3 protected natural areas of national interest, 1 RAMSAR Site, 18 Natura 2000 sites (9 SPA and 9 SCI) and 2 protected natural areas of county interest.

Only 10 of the natural protected areas were awarded joint in administration or custody and had regulations and management plans in various stages of elaboration and approval

Table 5. Protected natural areas awarded in custody

Crt. No.	Name	Category of protected area	Total surface area ha	The surface area of Braila county ha	Custody/ administrator
1.	Balta Mică a Brăilei	Natural Park	24123	22989	The Administration of the Natural Park Balta Mică a Brăilei
2.		RAMSAR Site	17596	17596	
3.		Natura 2000 - SPA	25856	24821.8	
4.		Natura 2000 - SCI	20872	20872	
5.	Pădurea Camnița	Natural Reservation	1.2	1.2	Brăila Forestry Directorate
6.	Dunărea Veche-Brațul Măcin	Natura 2000 – SPA	18759	6228.05	County Fishermen's Association Athletes Galați
7.	Lunca Siretului Inferior	Natura 2000 – SPA	36492	1824.6	The Association for the Conservation of Biological Diversity
8.		Natura 2000 – SCI	25081	1755.67	
9.	Brațul Măcin	Natura 2000 – SCI		4503.4	County Fishermen's Association Athletes Galați
10.	Lunca Buzăului	Natura 2000 – SCI	6987	978.18	The Ecological University of Bucharest

Source: Annual report regarding the environmental state in county Brăila per year 2012, Agency for the Environmental Protection

The rest of the 14 protected natural areas had no administrator/custody and no regulations and management plans. In the absence of these there are not effective forms of protection for the environment in these protected natural areas.

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