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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

40th meeting
Strasbourg, 1-4 December 2020

REPORT

**ON THE SPOT EXPERT APPRAISAL OF THE
PODYJÍ NATIONAL PARK
(CZECH REPUBLIC)
26-27 August 2019**

*Document prepared
by Mr Peter Skoberne (Slovenia)*

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Programme of the mission	3
3. General description.....	5
4. European interest	6
5. Conservation measures	10
6. Management	10
7. Review of the renewal assets	12
8. Conclusions and Recommendations	14



1. INTRODUCTION

The European Diploma for Protected Areas was awarded to the Podyjí National Park in 2000 (ResDIP(2000)14) and renewed twice (2005 - ResDip(2005)6 and 2010 - CM/ResDip(2010)4). The last renewal expires on the 20 June 2020. With a view to the possible renewal of the European Diploma an on-the-spot appraisal was undertaken in 2019.

I visited the area from 26 to 27 August 2019. The visit was very well organised and supported by Správa Národního parku Podyjí (Podyjí National park Administration) which is responsible for the site management.

I would like to thank the organisers of the visit, in particular to the director Tomáš Rothröckl, to National Park staff and all other active participants for the helpful, competent, enthusiastic and very open assistance during the on-the-spot-appraisal mission.

2. PROGRAMME OF THE MISSION

Monday 26 August 2019

Meeting at the National Park Podyjí staff (Podmol): welcome, presentation, discussion on ED recommendations.

Tomáš Rothröckl, Director

Lenka Reiterová, Head of the nature protection department

Petr Vančura, Head of the forestry department

Jan Kos, Head of the public relations department

Josef Maxa, Head of the economic department

Martin Bílý, Ministry of the Environment

Field visit to the buffer zone near Lukov: efforts for more nature friendly management of intensive agricultural land (restoring old roads, planting orchards and hedges) then to Čížov and Čížovski Lom (natural regeneration of forest after winter storm calamities).

In the afternoon field trip in the southern part of the National Park: Hananice (conversion of fields into vineyards), view point above Devet mlynu (dry grasslands), Dyje – small dams reconstruction, old mills (Gruberov mlyn, Papirna), water supply, vineyards Šobes, meadow management, Havranické vřesoviště (heathland), Seasfielduv kamen (viewpoint, historical heritage, visitors management, forestry), Popice (small winery Koníček – importance of traditional agriculture for natural and cultural heritage).

Tuesday 27 August 2019

9:30 – 11:30 Čížov Visitors Center, meeting with stakeholders

Lubomír Vedra, Mayor of Vranova nad Dyjí, Deputy chairman of the Podyjí National Park Council

Marek Venuta, Representant of the city of Znojmo in the Podyjí National Park Council

Ivo Prchal, Mayor of Lesná

Aleš Kňazovčík, Mayor of Havraníky

Eva Bogdanová, Spolek Charlese Sealsfielda, Popice (NGO)

Radomír Němec, ČSOP - Czech Union for Nature Conservation (NGO)

Jiří Kacetl, Okrašlovací spolek - Znojmo Advancement Society (NGO), Member of the Podyjí National Park Council

Pavel Vajčner, Znovín Znojmo Winery (big local wine producer)

Antonín Koníček, small local wine producer

Michal Pokorný, Povodí Moravy (Dyje river management company)

Stanislav Čupr, Milan Váša - E. O. N. company, operator of the Vranov hydroelectric power station

Václav Habán, Fishermen's Association

12:00 - 13:30 Thayabrücke restaurant, Hardegg

Working lunch with National Park Thayatal Director Christian Übl (Hardegg)

14:00 – 15:30 Čížov Visitors Center, meeting with academic community

Antonín Reiter, Zoologist - Jihomoravské muzeum ve Znojmě (South Moravian Museum in Znojmo)

Vlasta Škorpíková, Ornithologist - Jihomoravský kraj (South Moravian Regional Authority)

Pavel Kožený, Hydrobiologist - Výzkumný ústav vodohospodářský T. G. Masaryka (the T. G. Masaryk Water Research Institute)

Miroslav Barankiewicz, Ichthyologist - Výzkumný ústav vodohospodářský T. G. Masaryka (the T. G. Masaryk Water Research Institute)

Visit of the viewpoint at Kozi stezka

Documents considered:

- Podyjí/Thaya River Basin National Park, application form, Ministry of the Environment, Praha, Council of Europe, doc. PE-S-DE (99) 57 rev.;
- The Podyjí National Park, application, expert appraisal by Pierre Hunkeler (Switzerland), Council of Europe, doc. PE-S-DE (2000) 68;

- Resolution Dip (2000) 14 on the award of the European Diploma to the Podyjí National Park (Czech Republic), adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21st June 2000 at the 715th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (see Appendix III);
- The Podyjí National Park, renewal, expert report by Peter Skoberne (Slovenia), Council of Europe, doc. PE-S-DE(2005)8.;
- Report on an exceptional visit to Podyjí National Park (Czech Republic) and Thayatal National Park (Austria), 15–17 September 2014 by Michael B Usher (U. K.), Council of Europe, doc. T-PVS/DE (2015) 4;
- Annual reports 2013 – 2018 (Ministry of Environment of the Czech Republic, Nature Conservation Department and Administration of the Podyjí National Park);
- Podyjí National Park web page: <https://www.npPodyjí.cz/?lang=2>

3. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Podyjí National Park, the smallest National park in the Czech Republic, is situated at the Southern Czech/Austrian border on the left side of the Dyje/Thaya river between dams of Vranov and Znojmo. It is an island of relative wilderness within an intensive agricultural area.

Podyjí National Park is characterised by extraordinary scenery, being home to features such as rocky amphitheatres, cliffs, meanders, detritus fields, impervious ravines, several types of heathland adorned with multi-coloured layers of thermophilic plants, or alluvial plains around the river Dyje. The division of the valley along the river Dyje creates two distinctive ecological regions and thus contributes to the high biological diversity of the park¹.

The main phenomenon is the Dyje river canyon, surrounded by a close to nature forest (85 % of the National park cover). Diverse geomorphological, geological situation and forest management are the main reasons for 89 described forest types. The Eastern part of the National park has a different natural character. Here there are dry steppe grasslands, heathlands and agricultural landscape (vineyards, pastures, fields).

Cultural landscape and historical background are natural and cultural assets of the protected areas, as well.

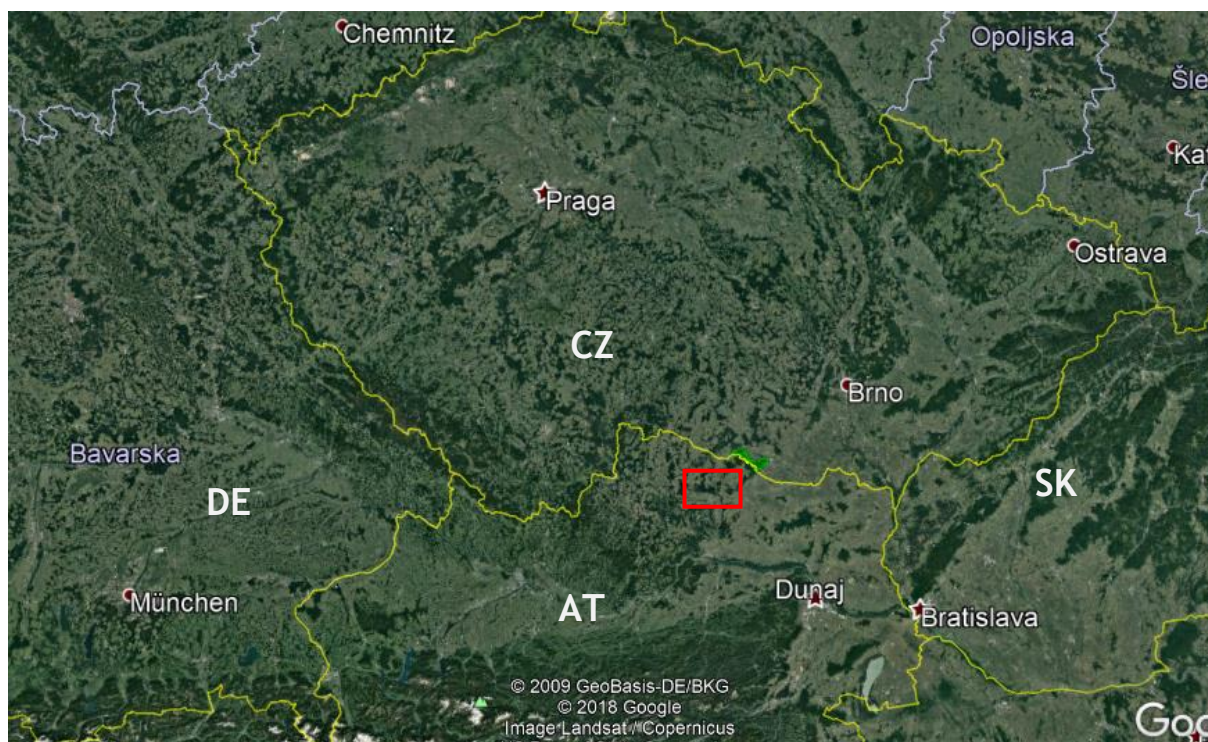


Figure 1: Topographic situation of the Podyjí National Park

¹ <https://www.nppodyji.cz/?lang=2>

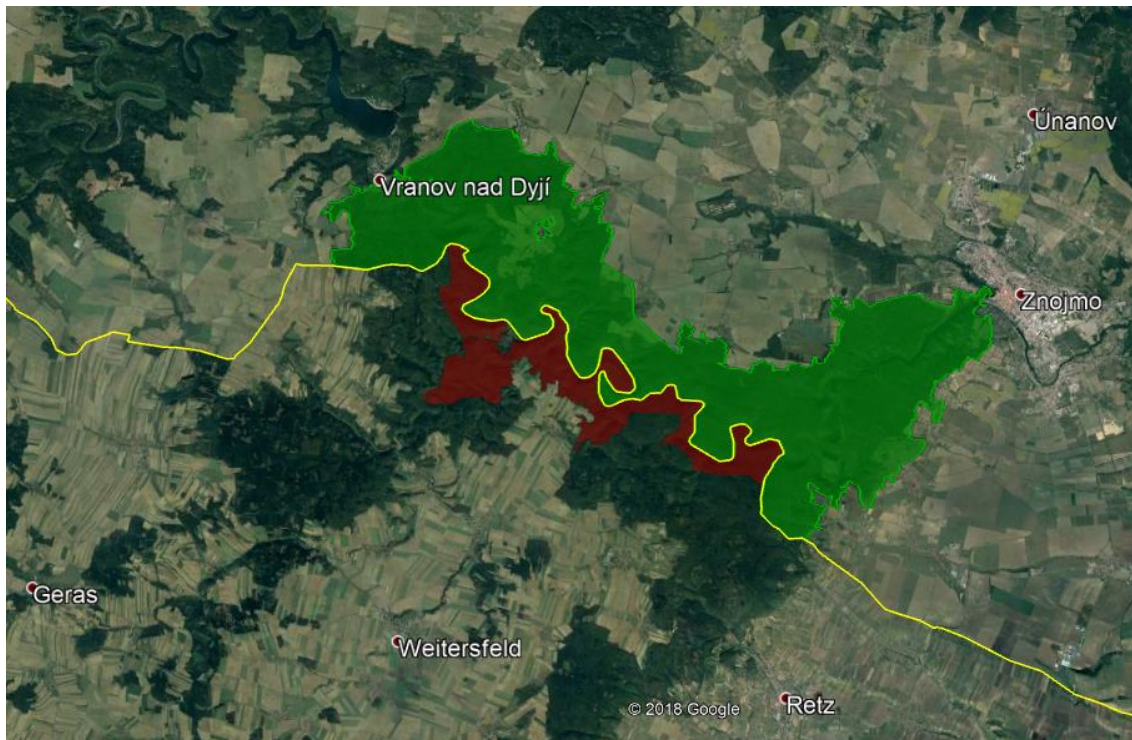


Figure 2: Podyjí National Park (green) and Thaya National Park (red) – transboundary parks

4. EUROPEAN INTEREST

Podyjí National Park has all attributes of geomorphologic, geologic and biodiversity qualities of European importance. There was less economic pressure in the past mostly because of historical reasons as the area was less accessible because of the iron curtain. The fact that Podyjí is situated at the meeting area of two biogeographic regions (Alpine and Pannonian) is contributing to the diversity.

The transboundary character of the area is of European interest, as well. Both sides of the Dyje/Thaya river are forming a unique and integral part of the river system.

Additionally, the European importance is recognised by the Natura 2000 network. There are two overlapping Natura 2000 sites: SPA Podyjí - CZ0621032 and SAC Podyjí - CZ0624096)².

² <http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/Natura2000/SDF.aspx?site=CZ0621032>

SPA (the Bird Directive) Podyjí (CZ0621032)

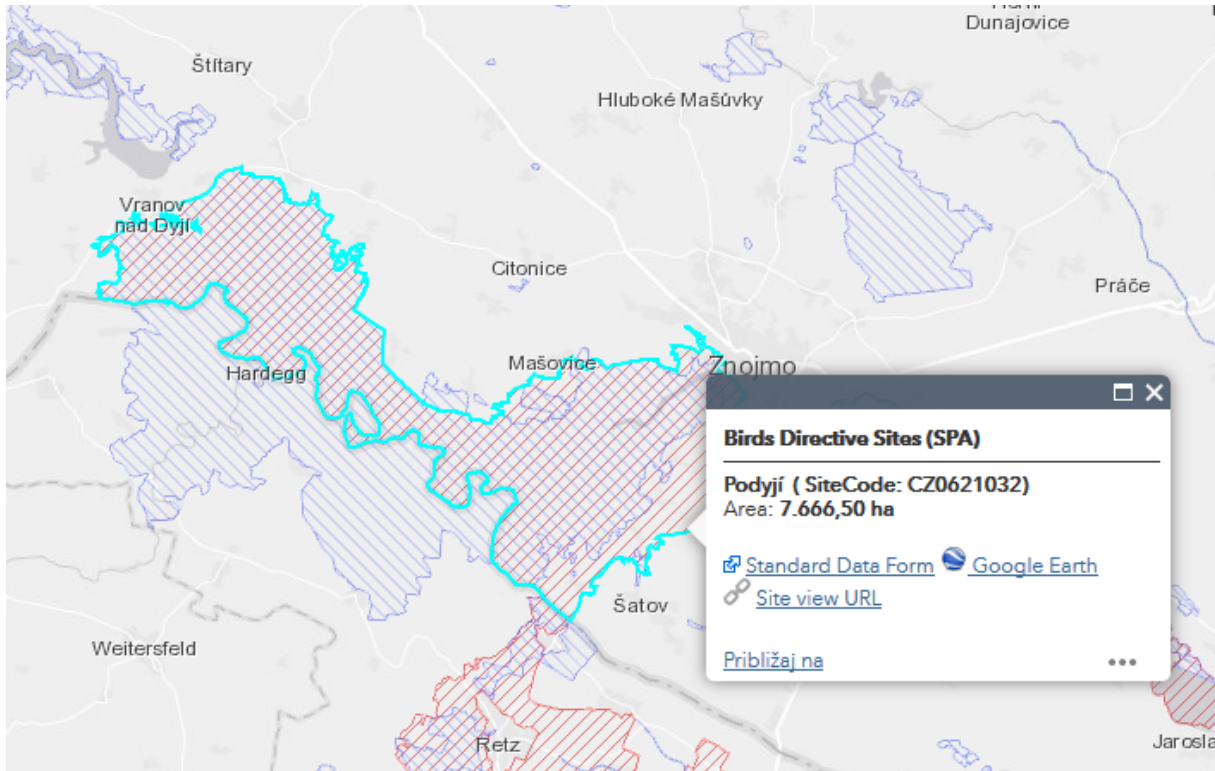


Figure 3: Bird Directive site Podyjí³

Target species for the SPA (the Bird Directive) Podyjí (CZ0621032) are:

Name	Global Assessment
<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	B
<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	A

³ <http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/>

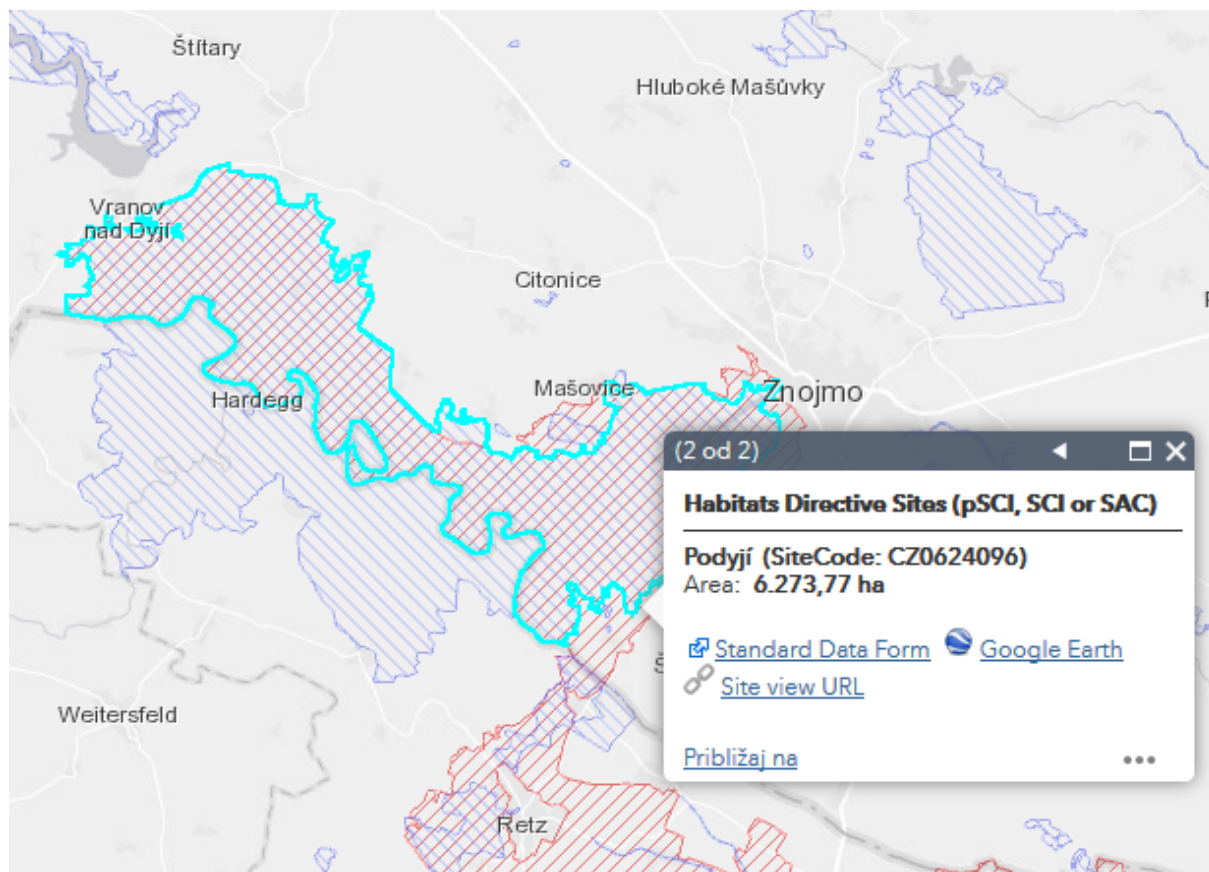
SAC (the Habitats Directive) Podyjí (CZ0624096)

Figure 4: Habitats Directive site Podyjí⁴

According to the Standard Data Form (SDF) the target habitat types and species of the area are:

Target habitat types (Annex I of the Habitats Directive):

Habitat type Code	Name	Global Assessment
3260	Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation	B
4030	European dry heaths	A
40A0	Subcontinental peri-Pannonic scrub	A
5130	Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands	A
6190	Rupicolous pannonic grasslands (Stipo-Festucetalia pallentis)	B
6210	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites)	B
6510	Lowland hay meadows (Alopecurus pratensis, Sanguisorba officinalis)	C
8150	Medio-European upland siliceous screes	B
8220	Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation	B

⁴ <http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/>

Habitat type Code	Name	Global Assessment
8230	Siliceous rock with pioneer vegetation of the Sedo-Scleranthion or of the Sedo albi-Veronicion dillenii	B
8310	Caves not open to the public	A
9170	Galio-Carpinetum oak-hornbeam forests	B
9180	Tilio-Acerion forests of slopes, screes and ravines	A
9110	Euro-Siberian steppic woods with <i>Quercus</i> spp.	A

Target species of European importance (Annex II of the Habitats Directive):

Scientific name	Global Assessment
<i>Barbastella barbastellus</i>	C
<i>Buxbaumia viridis</i>	C
<i>Callimorpha quadripunctaria</i>	B
<i>Cerambyx cerdo</i>	A
<i>Cottus gobio</i>	B
<i>Cypripedium calceolus</i>	B
<i>Limoniscus violaceus</i>	A
<i>Lucanus cervus</i>	A
<i>Myotis bechsteinii</i>	B
<i>Pulsatilla grandis</i>	A
<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>	B
<i>Triturus cristatus</i>	B

<http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/Natura2000/SDF.aspx?site=CZ0624096>

Other international recognitions:

Since 2004 Podyjí National Park is designated as *Important Plant Area* (Plantlife).

The value of Podyjí was additionally recognised in the year 2017 when the European Wilderness Society on the basis of Quick Audit System included Dyje Wildriver and Podyjí Wilderness into the list of *European Wilderness Areas* with a Bronze Wilderness Quality Standard⁵.

The Podyjí National Park was certified as an EUROPARC programme *Transboundary Park* in 2007 and renewed in 2015.

⁵ <https://european-wilderness.network/>

Conclusion:

The Podyjí National Park is of exceptional European significance and importance for the conservation of biological diversity, cultural landscape and cultural heritage.

5. CONSERVATION MEASURES***Legal protection status***

The beginnings of the large-surface-area protection of the the Dyje river date back to 1978, when the Podyjí Protected Landscape Area was created on an area of 103 km². Most of this area was included in the militarised border zone and was closed to the general public. After the political changes in 1989 preparations were made to declare this territory (63 km² core area and 29 km² of buffer zone) with exceptional natural quality as a national park, which was achieved in 1991⁶.

The Nature conservation legislation in the Czech Republic is on high level and National Parks are an important part of this system. The Law on Nature and landscape protection (Act No 114/1992 Coll., 1992) was recently amended and consequently there are some improvements for National Park management, mostly regarding zonation and competences.

Conclusion:

Existing legal regulations are considered as a solid basis for the future conservation and sustainable development of the Diploma holding area.

6. MANAGEMENT***Institutional arrangements***

The National Park administration is directly responsible to the Ministry of Environment and financed by the state budget. That is the main park income, however they have some revenues regarding own activities, as well project activities.

The central office of the National Park administration is in Znojmo and the information visitor centre is situated in the hearth of the protected area in Čížov.

The National Park Council is the main supervision body and consists of 43 representatives of relevant institutions and interest groups.

Management Plan

The Management Plan was approved in 2012 and ends in 2019. A new Plan is in preparation and should be adopted in 2020.

Zoning

There are some new developments regarding zonation. For the time being the territory of the NP is divided into 3 zones with special protection regimes:

1st zone (strictly natural) – includes the core territory of the NP, which is mostly the valleys of the Dyje river and its tributaries

2nd zone (targeted natural) – includes a large proportion of the forest complex and the most valuable forest-free areas (heathlands and meadows). The aim of management in this area is to achieve a near-natural condition of the forest stands.

⁶ <https://www.nppodyji.cz/characteristics-of-the-np-territory>

3rd zone (marginal) – this mostly fringes the 2nd zone in the outer sections of the national park and is the most influenced by human activity. The marginal zone also covers the agricultural areas around Lukov and Čížov villages and the fringes of the forest complex. These lands can be utilized, in a reasonable manner, for agriculture, forestry and tourism but the targets and interests of nature protection must always be in first place.

The National Park area is surrounded by a buffer zone. Its main function is to protect the territory of the park from development effects from the surrounding area. Within the buffer zone there are small-surface-area protected areas.

There will be some changes in the zonation approach, following the updating of the Law on Nature and landscape protection. The management of visitors will no longer be linked to the zonation regimes and treated by a separate zonation of quiet zones and network of paths. This approach will be used in the new management plan.

In the new management plan, the existing policy of forest management towards more natural structure and function will be followed. In 1991 about 30% of forests were at a close to nature stage in 2014 they reached 47%, while the target for 2035 is set at 75%.

Research and monitoring are in place. An emphasis is given to issues that have higher relevance to the National Park management (e. g. forestry, fishery, target species, invasive alien species...).

The main challenges of the recent management that should be addressed in the new management plan are as follows:

1. The number of visitors is raising, and the period of visiting is extending too. New forms of recreation are appearing (e. g. e-bicycles, gliding, kiting, water sports ...). The new zonation system should take into account all these different interests and pressures to minimise the impact of visitors on nature.
2. The main past major threat represented by the Vranov dam water management is under control for the time being, but co-operation with the operator and authorities should continue in order to maintain this situation.
3. In the last decade there is an obvious change in land cover. Dry grass land areas in the south-eastern part of the National park are converted to wine yards as a result of changes in land use. Grass land areas are important for biodiversity (stepic elements) and extensive pasture and moving has to be assured and transformation into wine yards prevented.
4. For fishery they are two main issues to consider: first is research on fish populations with respect to the changing water regime from big fluctuations to more natural ones, as well as the influence of small dams (and their retention function) and in particular scenarios of lowering the quantity of water due to climate change and higher demands of water supply for agriculture and urban needs. Second topic is sporting fishing. Competences for fishery rights should be redistributed in a way that implementation will be possible.
5. Some parts of the forest were damaged by wind and ice and consequently attacked by the bark beetle. While at these areas natural afforestation is taking place, there is also a markable influence of ungulates. Regulation of ungulates by hunting in buffer zone should be considered within the preparation of management plan.
6. Despite the positive settling of the main problem from the past regarding the big fluctuation of Dyje river, a new threat is appearing. The quantity of water in the river is slowly decreasing, mostly due to climate change (less snow in the mountains, changed rain regime). On the other hand, draughts are rising demand for water irrigation of agricultural areas, which can have direct influence on the water regime of the Dyje within the area (e. g. water pump near Papírny at Devíti mlýnů). An agreement on water use is essential.
7. The positive process of renaturalisation of intensive agricultural areas in buffer zones should continue.
8. There is a regular and a very good co-operation between Podyjí National Park and Thayatal National Park administration. They are jointly planning some research of mutual importance (e. g. fishery, visitors management). They are planning to build a new bridge for pedestrians near Hardeck to create a circular visitors foot path. Construction of new paths should be carefully examined and defined within

the management plan. On the Austrian side there is no threat of wind turbines construction anymore. The plan was formally abandoned. There is good co-operation on presenting the former iron curtain on both sides in the former military objects at the Hardeck cross-border. As both parks are European Diploma holders it would be very meaningful to harmonise renewals to the same cycle. Not only, that this would be more rational, as on-the-spot review can be done within the same mission, recommendations would be more harmonised. the European Diploma is renewed for the Thayatal National Park until 28 May 2028. Thus, I propose that the renewal for Podyjí is aligned on the same date.

9. Recommendation No. 206 (2019) of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, adopted on 6 December 2019, on nature-based solutions and management of protected areas in the face of climate change, is addressing EDPA, as following:
- Ensure adaptive management in the context of climate change is included, as appropriate, in Resolutions for the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas (EDPA);
 - Support the involvement of Emerald Network and EDPA sites in testing ways of scaling up and transferring nature-based solutions, as a response to climate change and for the prevention of natural disasters.

Several activities are already linked to research of influences on climate change. That should be continued and incorporated into the management plan.

10. There are some motions to inscribe Podyjí National Park to the UNESCO World Heritage List. The area is undoubtedly of European importance but could hardly compete at global level. I would advise to give more visibility to the European Diploma instead.

Conclusion:

Management is in place and is functioning. The National Park administration has relatively good support from the Government and is proactive in communication with stakeholders. The Management plan for the next period is in preparation.

7. REVIEW OF THE RENEWAL ASSETS

Annual reports and following documents were considered:

- Bottacci, A., Ciampelli P. (a cura di), AGC Edizioni, 2018, *La Riserva Integrale di Sasso Fratino*, RCCB, Pratovecchio. 291 pp.
- Lefeuvre, J.-C., *Appraisal Report on Sasso Fratino Integral Nature Reserve (Italy)*, Council of Europe, 2000, document PE-S-DE (2000) 65.
- *Resolution on the award of the European Diploma to the Sasso Fratino Nature Reserve (Italy)*, Council of Europe, 1985, document Res(85)12.
- *Resolution on the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Sasso Fratino Integral Nature Reserve (Italy)*, Council of Europe, 1990, document Res(90)11.

Review of the recommendations of the Resolution CM/ResDip(2010)4 on the renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to the Podyjí National Park:

1. *Ensure, in collaboration with the operator of the hydroelectric power station at Vranov, that the negative amplitudes in the flow regime from the dam sluices are reduced and that a minimum residual flow rate is guaranteed.*

By agreement with the operator of the hydroelectric power station at Vranov high amplitudes of the flow regime are reduced by using two small turbines. A minimum residual flow of 2.8 m³/s has been legally set since October 2016. The recommendation is fulfilled. We can expect that climate change will intensify draughts and increase the pressure on water demand. The management of water regime is crucial for aquatic and water related ecosystems, so the recommendation should remain.

2. Secure the adoption and implementation of the management plan for the period 2010-2019.

The management plan 2010-2019 was adopted in 2012 and implemented. A new management plan is in preparation. Part of this plan is the evaluation of the implementation of the expired plan. The new management plan should address all actual challenges.

3. Control the development of leisure activities, and in particular avoid the use of the River Dyje for water sports.

NP authorities are controlling leisure activities and streamlining them according to the management plan and NP regime. There is a pressure for recreational use, especially near Vranov and Znojmo. The interests of water recreation should be considered within the frame of the preparation of the new management plan but subordinated to nature conservation requirements. The new approach for zonation for visitors is a promising tool to meet the interests of both.

4. Intensify co-operation with the Thayatal National Park to harmonise the fishing regulations within the two parks and reduce the negative effects of fishing in the core zones.

Since 2014, a joint project with the NP Thayatal is underway and is dealing with the state of fish stocks in relation to sporting fishing. The project will be completed in 2020. Recommendations for the fisheries regime are expected. However, there is still a competence problem on the Czech side regarding fishery rights which has to be resolved at governmental level by law.

5. Develop relations with municipalities and the local community in order to encourage sustainable management of their land within the national park, in line with the principles and rules laid down in the management plan.

Continuous communication and cooperation with municipalities is a very important part of the activity of the national park administration. The relations are strong and good. The National park supports municipalities and associations for obtaining national and European subsidies to improve their living. Through everyday communication they are resolving land use and planning issues. This good practice should continue as it is essential for the future of the protected area.

6. Pursue and improve the management of agricultural areas, particularly in the buffer zones.

In the buffer zone, mostly in the intensive agricultural area in the Eastern part of the National park, they are gradually mitigating effects of the past intensive agricultural practice. Over the last 15 years, over 30,000 trees and bushes have been planted to improve the migration permeability of the landscape, to improve its microclimate, water balance and diversify its structure. It is a long and gradual process, giving long term results which should continue.

7. Grant funding to public authorities for water supply and purification within the park's perimeter.

All municipalities in the buffer zone have a sewerage system and water supply. The expansion of water supply and sewerage systems is a general policy which follows EU legislation and has to take into account possible draughts due to climate change. It is an ongoing process and which goes beyond the National Park competences. I suggest dropping this recommendation.

8. Undertake research on the influence of the artificial barriers on the ecosystem of the Dyje River. Mitigation measures on the riparian ecosystems should be adopted.

Since 2014 a joint project with the NP Thayatal is dealing with the river permeability issues. The project is expected to finish in 2020. However, the low rock/wodden dams of historic mills don't seem to be a critical artificial barrier for most of fish species. Nevertheless, the results of the study have to be regarded when defining possible mitigation measures for river permeability in the new management plan.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General conclusion:

The Podyjí National Park is of European importance and is well managed to maintain the exceptional natural character of the area.

I therefore recommend to the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma and to the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention to agree on renewing the European Diploma of the Podyjí National park for the next 9 years.

In addition, the following **recommendations** should be attached to the renewal:

1. Pursue the collaboration with the operator of the hydroelectric power station at Vranov to manage a nature friendly flow regime and guarantee a minimum residual flow rate;
2. By 2022, adopt and begin the implementation of the management plan for the period 2020-2029. Prepare the management plan in a participatory manner, taking into account particularly: visitors management in the light of the new zonation of quiet zones, the development of leisure activities on Dyje river, the agreement on water use, the harmonisation of fishing regulations, the population control of ungulates in the buffer zone, and specific provisions dedicated to climate change and how to address this issue in relation to the long-term conservation of rare species;
3. Continue and further develop the established good relations with municipalities and the local community in order to encourage sustainable management of their land within the national park, in line with the principles and rules laid down in the management plan;
4. In the management plan give special emphasise to the issue of extending wine yards on valuable dry grass lands. Promote traditional, small scale vinery within the National Park;
5. Continue improving the close to nature mitigation of agricultural areas, particularly in the buffer zones;
6. Continue and strengthen the co-operation with the Thayatal National Park in the frame of the existing twining agreement;
7. Use more regularly the European Diploma logo on publications and appropriate infrastructures, promote the European Diploma more actively, encourage partners and stakeholders to use European Diploma logo.