

RUNNING HEAD: NATURA 2000 IN BULGARIA AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT⁶

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ABSTRACT

Natura 2000 is a European network made up of protected areas designed to provide long-term survival of the most valuable and threatened species and habitats of Europe in line with basic international agreements in the field of environmental protection and biological diversity. It should be established in all European Union countries and is placed as a basic requirement for the accession of candidate countries of the EU.

Locations within the ecological network shall be determined in accordance with two major environmental EU Directives, Directive 92/43 / EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (Habitats Directive) and Directive 2009/147 / EC on the conservation of wild birds (birds Directive). The process of creating the ecological network NATURA 2000 in Bulgaria started in 2002 with the adoption of the Biodiversity Act, which establishes the norms of both European directives. At this stage the network of protected areas in Bulgaria is almost fully built, including 119 protected areas for the conservation of wild birds, covering 22.7 percent of the country and 234 protected areas for conservation of natural habitats covering 30% of the territory of Bulgaria . 13 zone boundaries in both Directives match. Thus, the ecological network NATURA 2000 in Bulgaria covers 340 protected areas, which is 34.4 percent of the country.

The article analyzes the opportunities provided by similar ecological networks in the management of the lands included in them, in view of their environmental, economic and socially sustainable management in the future. The emphasis is on the fact that the planning and development of tourism infrastructure in protected areas, its operation and marketing should focus on environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability criteria.

⁶ Professional paper

Key words: NATURA 2000, protected areas, bio diversity, sustainable development, eco tourism.

INTRODUCTION

EU directives on the conservation of natural habitats, wild flora and fauna (1992) and wild birds (1979) are the main pillars of EU policy in terms of biodiversity. They create a conceptual framework and opportunities for joint coordinated actions of all member-states for protection and sustainable development of territories, inhabited by the most threatened and vulnerable European species and habitat types. Subject to protection under both directives are about 140 types of natural habitats and over 600 species of plants and animals of Community importance. Member-states are required to determine the distribution of these habitats and species within their territories and to manage them with the aim to ensure their preservation and sustainable use (National Information and Communication Strategy for the network of NATURA 2000, 2013, p.6). *The creation of NATURA 2000 is fundamental and it connects both directives. It represents an EU-wide ecological network of protected areas, located on the territory of 28 member-states. Over 26 000 areas have been included in it so far, which makes it the largest coordinated network of protected areas in the world. It covers about 18% of the territory of member-states of the European Union. Currently it is supplemented with sea areas.*

The contribution of this international initiative in the overall process for conservation of biodiversity consists in preventing degradation, fragmentation and destruction of natural and semi-natural habitats and habitats of rare and endangered plant and animal species. The ecological network ensures the free geographical distribution of the species, genetic exchange and migration. *NATURA 2000 includes areas under special protection under Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas, defined in the Directive on the protection of birds.* The creation of such a network of protected areas meets the obligations of the European Union under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. By the means of it, the European community is involved in the establishment of EMERALD Network under the Bern Convention, which covers the whole European continent and some North African countries.

Protected areas for birds are geographically designated areas under the Directive on the conservation of wild birds in order to protect the species, requiring special conservation measures for their habitats on the territory of the European Union. They are declared as species, endangered with extinction, vulnerable to changes in their habitats, rare or because of the

specific habitats, requiring special attention and for that reason included in Annex I of the Directive. In Bulgaria Birds Directive is applied to 110 species, included in Annex II of Biological Diversity Act (2002). Except for that protected areas are declared for migratory species, which are not included in Annex I of the Directive. There are designated Special Protected Areas (SPAs) during their periods of moulting, wintering and migration on their migration routes. Special attention is paid to the wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. The country has defined 76 types, described in a special instruction, approved by the National Council on Biodiversity (<http://bspb.org/bg/natura.html>).

Protected areas for habitats are geographically designated areas, defined by member-states under the Habitats Directive, allowing actions for protection and restoration of favourable conservation status of natural habitats and/or of species for which these areas are designated. Protected areas are declared for the endangered habitats on the territory of the European Union, described in Annex I of the Directive. Special attention is paid to priority habitats, such as coastal lagoons, flooded forests and etc. Annex I of the Biological Act describes 90 types of natural habitats, 26 of which priority. Except for that protected areas are declared for plant and animal species, other than birds, which are endangered, potentially endangered, rare or endemic ones. They are described in Annex II of the Directive. Annex II of the Biodiversity Act includes 25 species of mammals, 10 species of amphibians and reptiles, 25 species of fish, 36 species of invertebrates and 20 species of plants. Priority species are subject to extra attention.

The existing directives on habitats and birds are directly linked to other ecological legislation and provisions of the Directive for assessing the environmental impact and the Directive for strategic environmental assessment. Such interconnection is needed, in order to regulate the process of development and adaptation of protected areas, without the risk of jeopardizing or violating their status, integrity and ecological status, resulting from the implemented project and planning actions, directly or indirectly linked to the areas (National Information and communication strategy for NATURA 2000, 2013, p.88).

Considering the vital importance of the European ecological network NATURA 2000 in terms of biodiversity conservation and Bulgarian commitments in this regard, this paper makes an attempt to analyze the opportunities, provided by similar ecological networks in land management within their territories, with a view to their ecological, economic and sustainable social management in the future, including the opportunities for tourism development, which does not destroy environment – a guarantee of lasting interest and turning the preserved nature in Bulgaria into an attractive

tourist destination now and in the future.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the purposes of this research there have been used recognizable methods and approaches for collection of data. Some sources have been used, provided by the Ministry of Environment and Water, the Directories of Bulgarian National and Nature parks, and all 16 Regional Inspections on Protection of Environment and Water, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Executive Forest Agency, research publications from international scientific forums, dedicated to biodiversity and protected areas, as well as series of publications of Bulgaria and foreign authors. The analysis is conducted and the results have been established by the means of comparative and analytical approaches. Last, but not least personal observations in some of the protected areas have been conducted. The working methods that have been used for the purposes of this research include description, diagnosis, analysis and synthesis, comparison, statistical and expert methods.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The establishment of the ecological network in Bulgaria caused serious discussions, and sometimes faced a resistance from the local population and number of businesses and public organizations. awareness campaigns conducted by the Ministry of Environment and non-governmental environmental organizations had significant contribution to overcoming the existing problems and ambiguities in this regard, as well as publications of a number of Bulgarian and foreign artists working in the field of biodiversity conservation. The most important and directly related to Natura 2000 publications and methodological manuals, played a significant role in building a network of protected areas in Bulgaria are: Procedures for sustainable forest management in Natura 2000 (2011); Natura 2000 and forests - Challenges and Opportunities. A Practical Guide (2004); Definition, management and monitoring of forests with high conservation value in Bulgaria (2005) Implementation in Bulgaria of Directive 92/43 / EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora and Directive 79/409 EEC on the conservation of wild birds by the Biodiversity Act (2004); Proposals for habitats for inclusion in Annex I of Directive 92/43 / EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora and to Intercontinental Manual of EU Habitats EUR 15/2 (2004); Natura 2000 - for nature and people (2008); Natura 2000 in Bulgaria, the most frequently asked questions about NATURA 2000 (2007); Handbook for Natura 2000 in

Bulgaria (2002); Planning Guide for activities in lands and forests from the forest fund in Natura 2000 protected areas (2008); Manual for the management of protected areas NATURA 2000 (2008); Number of national populations of nesting birds in Bulgaria (2004); Guidance on determining the favorable conservation status of natural habitat types and species of NATURA 2000 (2008); Guidance on the preparation of management plans for Natura 2000 sites in Bulgaria (2009); Nature protected in Bulgaria-textbook for self contest for Natura 2000 (2008); NATURA 2000 Under Threat in Bulgaria (2009); Important Bird Areas in Bulgaria (IBA) and Natura 2000 (2007); Natura 2000 Conservation in Partnership (2009). NATURA 2000 in the Continental Region in NATURA 2000 in the Black Sea Region (2009); NATUROPA-Sustainable planning for nature and landscape (2004); NATURA 2000-Discover Europe's Nature (2005); The EU Biodiversity strategy to 2020 (2006); Monitoring the impact of EU Biodiversity Policy (2010); Assessing biodiversity in Europe -the 2010 report (2010); Implementation of NATURA 2000 in New Member States of Central Europe-Assessment Report (2005); Jewels in the Crown-Good Practices NATURA 2000 and Leisure (2004); The Habitats Directive - Celebrating 20 Years of Protecting Biodiversity (2012); Reports and materials for interaction between sustainable tourism and Natura 2000 (Publications of the Environment DG of the European Commission 199/2001), etc.

It must be emphasized that today in Bulgaria there are significant differences between the existing protected areas, proclaimed in the Protected Areas Act (1998) and protected areas, regulated by the Law on Biological Diversity (2002). Despite the fact that under the directive, regulating establishment of the European ecological network NATURA 2000, the designation of these areas (protected areas under national law of Bulgaria) by member-states should be based solely on relevant scientific information and criteria, described in Annex 3 of the Directive (Article 7 of the Law on biodiversity). The aim of the network NATURA 2000 is not to create scientific reserves with restricted rights, where all human activities are excluded. The emphasis in land management is focused on ensuring their environmental, economic and social sustainable management in the future compatible with the conservation objectives of the protected areas. In many cases, the presence or renewal of a number of traditional activities and ones with favourable impact is of essential for maintaining biodiversity, especially in agricultural and forestry regions. A priority in NATURA 2000 is ecotourism development, sustainable forestry and organic farming.

At present there are no specific prohibitions and restrictions on the activities in the proposed protected areas and they do not arise from the Habitats Directive and the Biodiversity Act. Prohibitions and restrictions on

activities, contrary to the conservation objectives of protected areas could be defined in orders for their proclamation, but only for activities that are indisputably proven that will lead to significant damage to the subject of protection.

Under the provisions of the Biological Diversity Act orders declaring protected areas are subject to mandatory public consultation before being promulgated, the latter is duty of the Ministry of Environment and Waters (MEW), which has to provide full access to the necessary information for that purpose.

There are a number of compensatory payments for loss of earnings and expenses in the implementation of statutory limitations to users of lands, forests and water areas within the boundaries of protected areas, as well as opportunities for voluntary inclusion in areas of high natural value and beyond.

Any plans, programs, projects and investment intentions in areas under NATURA 2000 are subject to specific assessment of their impact on the object and purpose of conservation of the protected area, which serves as a base for taking decisions. In the course of the assessment, under Habitats Directive are allowed exceptions in respect of projects and investment proposals, even if it is proved that their implementation can lead to a significant deterioration of the subject of protection when there are reasons of public primary interest and there is no alternative.

EU member –states are responsible for the management of the protected areas included in the network of NATURA 2000. However, when it comes to marine areas, where management activities may involve fishing regulation, it is more appropriate to apply management, conducted by the European Union. For this purpose the European Commission consistently supports the development of Management plans. In Bulgaria the management of protected areas is the responsibility of owners and users through development of Management plans. Their management is coordinated and controlled by the Ministry of Environment and Waters. According to the law, Management plans are not mandatory under NATURA 2000, but in terms of proper management and ensuring the sustainability and benefits for biodiversity and people, it is important such plans to be developed and implemented. Long-term conservation of valuable habitats and species in areas under NATURA 2000 can be done through stimulation of agricultural, recreational and forestry practices that protect and maintain habitat types and species in good condition.

The European Commission has introduced a priority framework for action to NATURA 2000 which each country should develop and to set priorities for conservation of NATURA 2000 and the need for European funding. In this way, NATURA 2000 practically is integrated in all EU

funds, achieving shared responsibility in terms of funding and protection of the network. In Bulgaria direct funding for activities, related to NATURA 2000 is implemented by Environment operational program and the National program for rural development as well as Life + program. These programs provide funds for development of Management plans for areas under nATURA 2000 and for other activities, provided in these areas, ecological and investment projects, information campaigns, training and etc.

It should be emphasized that whether member states receive funding from Structural Funds or not, they have to comply with NATURA 2000 regulations. It is very important to comply with these provisions for programs, funded by the Community. The European Commission expressly states that if a member state does not provide a list of protected areas, included in NATURA 2000 that could lead to suspension of funding by certain Structural funds. Recently, the European Commission went to law against Bulgaria for statutory requirements for the protection of birds regarding the yet unannounced protected area of Rila buffer, covering the lower part of the mountain. Within its territory there are plans for large-scale development for tourism – construction of a new ski resort called Super Panichishte in the area of the Seven Rila lakes. The detailed development plan of this complex includes construction of new hotels with a capacity of 5000 beds, new ski tracks and etc. Previously, because of the public pressure in NATURA 2000, gradually were included the National Park of Rila and Nature Park of Rila monastery, which restricted construction works in both areas. The accusation to the Bulgarian authorities is that they have not implemented the proposal to expand the territory, designated as a special protected area and as a result the habitats of about 20 vulnerable bird species have been threatened. In January 2016 the European Court ruled against Bulgaria in a similar case regarding another major area of importance for bird protection in the region of Southern Dobrudzha – protected area of Kaliakra. With its decision, the European Court sent a clear message to Bulgaria that protected areas under NATURA 2000 cannot be plowed, turned into golf courses, and wind energy parks must not endanger important migration routes. Previously, according to information from the Ministry of Environment and Waters to October 2013 there are 14 criminal proceedings against Bulgaria for breach of European environmental legislation. Some of them are related to breaching of the Birds and Habitats Directives (National Information and communication strategy for NATURA 2000, 2013, p.88).

The beginning of establishment of the ecological network of NATURA 2000 in Bulgaria was done in 2002 with the adoption of the Biological Diversity Act (BDA), which introduced the norms of the two European directives on biodiversity conservation – the Birds Directive and the Habitats

Directive. Based on the BDA was created the national network of protected areas, part of the European network of NATURA 2000. These are sites on the territory and water area of the country, which meet the requirements for availability of important for biodiversity plant and animal species and habitat types, enlisted in the annexes of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive. The lists of natural habitats and species, including birds, for whose habitats are declared protected areas are listed in Appendix I and II of the Biological Diversity Act.

The process of establishing the network of NATURA 2000 in Bulgaria in the period 2002 – 2006 began by implementing a number of projects as a result from that was developed a National list of potential areas for inclusion in NATURA 2000. Initially the proposed list contained 114 protected areas for conservation of wild birds, covering approximately 23.6% of the country and 225 protected areas for preservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna, covering about 30% of the territory of the country. In 2007, after the decisions of the Council of Ministers, Bulgaria submitted to the European Commission a national list of the potential sites of NATURA 2000, which contained 114 protected areas for the conservation of wild birds, covering 20.4% of the country and 228 protected areas for preservation of natural habitats, covering 29.5 % of the territory of the country. After some decisions of the Council of Ministers in 2010 and 2011 the national list of protected areas was completed and included 118 protected areas for protection of wild birds and 231 protected areas for conservation of natural habitats. After new decisions of the Council of Ministers in November 2013 the maritime part of NATURA 2000, concerning protected areas under Habitats Directive was expanded by three completely new marine areas and water area was expanded of the six already existing areas. Along with this one more protected area was added to the general list for the protection of wild birds. As a result of the efforts, today the network of protected areas in Bulgaria includes 119 protected areas for protection of wild birds, covering 22.7 % of the country and 234 protected areas for conservation of natural habitats, covering 30% of the territory of Bulgaria. Thirteen of the areas cover the same territories under both Directives. In this way, the ecological network NATURA 2000 in Bulgaria includes 340 protected areas, which is 34.4% of the territory of the country (fig.1). On this stage, with small additions the network of protected areas under NATURA 2000 could be considered as fully developed as the national lists of protected areas are approved by the Council of Ministers and the European Commission.

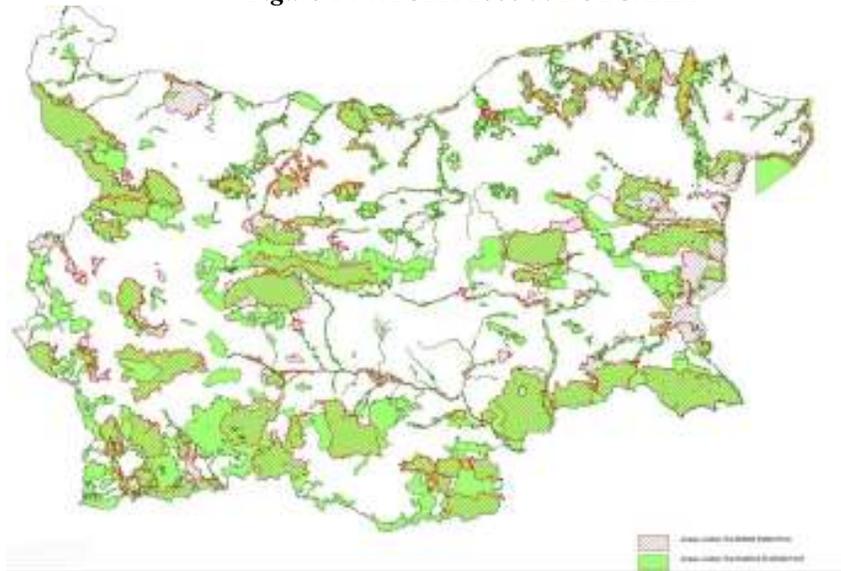
The process of issuing orders for designation of protected areas under the Birds Directive is completed whereas the process of issuing orders for designation of protected areas under the Habitats Directive is currently in

action. The first Management plans of protected areas have already been approved.

It is necessary to point out that at the beginning of establishment of the network NATURA 2000 in a number of countries of the European Union there were fears that it will have a negative impact on tourism development. It is a well known fact that tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in Europe. Furthermore, in recent years the interest in specialized forms of tourism marks a great increase, including ecological and rural tourism. The market for these forms of tourism grows almost three times faster than the classic tourism market.

As the network NATURA 2000 keeps most of the valuable for nature and biodiversity sites in Europe, it acts as a magnet for lovers of ecological tourism, offering opportunities for direct contact with the wild nature through access to biodiversity, photo-hunting, mountaineering, caving, rock climbing, mountain biking, including cross country, downhill with extreme mountain climbing route, down slalom, freeride and rafting, canyoning, water caves, kayaking, paragliding and etc. This in turn is a prerequisite for diversifying the local economy and stimulating investment in local business initiatives, related to tourism. At the same time it should be taken in mind that ecological tourism is a tourism activity, aimed at nature where there is a low impact on it, which contributes for the conservation of biodiversity. It also provides enough financial revenue for the local population, based on which the latter could assess the importance of protecting the natural heritage, which in turn ensures their well-being.

Figure 1 NATURA 2000 in BULGARIA



In the context of tourism industry the idea of sustainable ecological, economic and social development of protected areas, included in NATURA 2000 can be achieved through a balanced management of different tourism activities within these areas. The latter is reflected in strategic planning and management of activities, which can be implemented in the nine tourism regions in Bulgaria. Within the scope of their boundaries are formed sub-regions, micro regions and tourist centers, the latter are expected to turn into the main structural units for planning and management of tourism in the regions.

Regardless of the product specialization of each region, the protected areas under NATURA 2000 within their boundaries, and related to them conservation activities of natural habitats requires measuring the level of tourism activity and its regulation in order to achieve and sustain environmental standards and indicators. In narrow terms this means that the design and establishment of tourist centers of the area and localizing key tourism destinations and places to visit have to be outside the protected areas under NATURA 2000. The latter is crucial regarding the fact that tourist centers and destinations are characterized by construction of massive complexes and related to their exploitation tourism superstructure and infrastructure. Except for that, they generally concentrate the overall tourist flow and the extent of tourism activity is highest. The intensity of recreational load should be in certain limits, when it comes to protected areas

under the both Directives.

Even in the initial stages of the selection of the Protected zones in Bulgaria, some very extreme reactions occurred from a whole range of business organizations, including representatives of the tourism business as well. The reasons for this can be found in the fact that in NATURA 2000 had been included such territories as part of the National Park “Pirin”, the National Park “Rila”, National Park “Central Balkan”, the Pomorie Lake, the Chengene skele bay, the Atanasovo and the Burgas Lakes, the “Ropotamo” complex, the Durankulak and Shabla Lakes, the Strandzha Mountain, the Natural Park “Zlatni piasatsi (Golden Sands)”, the Black Sea coast of the Dobrudzha region, the beach strip at the estuary of the Kamchia River, the Shumen Plato, the Rila Monastery, the Kaliakra cape, the Galata area, Batova, The Rupite site, Trigrad-Mursalitsa, Balchik, the Shkorpilovtsi beach, Irakli and other territories which attracts serious investors’ interests. Serious speculations have occurred also due to the possibility all construction activities to be prohibited in these zones in the future, as well as business activities to be diminished to their minimum and many others. It has been disregarded the fact that one of the main requirements for using of the areas the which come in the frames of NATURA 200, including also all tourism activities regardless of whether they are directed to recreation, business or ecological tourism and etc., is sustainability. This means that the planning and the development of the tourism infrastructure, its functioning and marketing should focus on the environmental, social, cultural and economic criteria for sustainability. If the observed in the past two decades trends of spontaneity in development of a number of industries, including of Bulgarian tourism will be kept there is a real risk that Bulgaria could lose a significant part of biological diversity. Especially vulnerable in this respect are higher plants, including rare, endemic and relict species, medical plants, mature forest plants and various animal species – amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research on the origin, development and characteristics of the network of NATURA 2000 in Bulgaria and its impact on investment processes and tourism development, there could be made the following conclusions and recommendations:

- The establishment of the European ecological network of NATURA 2000 is fully compatible with economic, social, cultural and religious specifications of each country in the EU. The creation of the network is aimed at achieving a balance between conservation of species and habitats and human activities. It must be established in all EU

member states and is a requirement for accession of candidate countries to the EU.

- Bulgaria ranks second after Slovenia for 34.4% of its territory, covered by NATURA 2000. With few exceptions it could be assumed that the network of protected areas in the country under both Directives is fully developed.
- At this stage the theme about NATURA 2000 in Bulgaria is not clearly and permanently positioned in the public and media space. There is poor awareness regarding the reasons for the adoption of legislation to protect biodiversity, existing legal instruments for the protection of biodiversity under NATURA 2000 and related procedures, as well as mechanisms to overcome contradictions between biodiversity conservation and economic development.
- From the very beginning of establishment of the European ecological network NATURA 2000 in Bulgaria a number of economic organizations and representatives of tourism sector openly demonstrated their negative attitude towards this type of biodiversity conservation. This led to a series of attacks against the natural heritage of the country. Exceptionally striking are violations in protected areas Aheloi – Ravda – Nessebar, Kaliakra, as well as in the other protected areas along the Black Sea coast. There is a very serious conflict between the representatives of the tourism business and ecological organizations related to biodiversity conservation in Vitosha, West and Central Stara Planina, Rila, Pirin, the Western and Central Rhodopes. Very often it happens with the involvement of the local population by potential investors against establishment of the network of NATURA 2000 and etc.
- Protected areas network NATURA 2000 offer excellent opportunities for the development of alternative forms of tourism, appearing as one of the most effective ways to absorb most valuable natural sciences in relation to areas in Bulgaria. Alternative forms of tourism help to minimize the negative anthropogenic influence caused by mass tourism and thus contribute to sustainable tourism and socio-economic development of tourist areas.
- Centers and major tourist destinations of tourist areas in Bulgaria can not be locations within the territorial scope of the protected areas of the European ecological network NATURA 2000.
- Protected areas under NATURA 2000 permit the tourist activity and operation whose scale and scope of action does not contradict the requirements and standards for sustainability.
- It is necessary to develop a strategy for collaboration and engagement with the issues and activities for the conservation of biodiversity,

protected areas and protected zones with the gene pool they contain and their recreational absorption, with universities and research institutes, by developing specialized programs for exchange of professionals and their cooperation with supervisory authorities under the program.

- The recreational use of these areas primarily requires the performance of a precise analysis of tourist resources and opportunities for the development of alternative forms of tourism. Moreover, such analyzes must be accompanied by the preparation of specific assessments to reduce the impact of tourism infrastructure and / or activities on the conservation status of species and habitats.
- It is necessary to develop indicators for monitoring and impact assessment in the management of these forms of tourism in and around protected areas NATURA 2000 and also to develop or update plans for the development of green tourism in the areas of NATURA 2000, including plans limiting the impact of damaging tourism and sports practices, plans for risk management and others. Last but not least it is necessary to elaborate plans for tourist infrastructure to diversify the opportunities for green tourism and also to limit potential negative impacts on protected areas NATURA 2000.

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