

Participation in environmental conservation and protected area management in Romania: A review of three case studies

THEMATIC SECTION
Biodiversity Governance
in Central and Eastern
Europe

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SUMMARY

Since the collapse of Central and Eastern Europe's communist regimes in the early 1990s, the ensuing environmental, social and economic changes have permitted development of new forms of multi-level governance. However, a coherent participatory approach to environmental conservation is yet to emerge. This review examines the changing approaches in environmental conservation and protected area governance in Romania during the country's pre-communist, communist, transition and current European Union eras. Three case examples are examined in depth to assess how changing environmental governance is playing out in practice in Natura 2000 sites, in a national park, and on privately owned (unprotected) forest land. Similar to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Romania's environmental governance practices still face substantial challenges in consolidating an inclusive and integrated approach to environmental governance and conservation. A lack of historical involvement of communities in decision making, reluctance within government to drive forward more inclusive environmental governance approaches, and a lack of non-governmental organizations focusing on environmental conservation, have resulted in slow progress towards more inclusive environmental governance. Civil society and solutions for institutionalizing participation across all levels of governance are needed to reorient environmental governance towards a more inclusive and multi-stakeholder approach that better links economic, social and environmental objectives.

Keywords: Central and Eastern Europe, communism, European Union, multi-level governance, Natura 2000, transition

INTRODUCTION

Environmental conservation can be defined as the conservation of landscapes and their components, habitat, and species. Environmental governance refers to the processes and structures through which decisions are made about the environment and its management. Environmental governance involves and affects multiple actors, agencies, institutions and scales, and requires transparent and flexible decision-making that embraces a diversity of knowledge and values (Reed 2008). Multi-level and polycentric environmental governance systems have emerged across the world, in which governance is organized at and across different levels and scales (Ostrom *et al.* 1961) and state authority is diminishing to give a greater role to non-state actors (Bache & Flinders 2004).

For some, governance is analytically distinct from 'government' (Stoker 1998), while others such as Rosenau (1992) consider that government and governance are both forms of purposive behaviour that create conditions for ordered rule and collective action. Government is backed by formal authority and law while with governance this is not necessarily the case (Paavola 2007). Jordan (1999, 2001) has suggested that the governance turn in the European Union (EU) diffused power away from state actors upwards to the supra-national (EU) level and downwards to sub-national levels (Hooghe & Marks 2003). This has increased the complexity of environmental governance and expanded opportunities for non-state actors to engage in it at different levels (Paavola *et al.* 2009).

We suggest that this shift is part of the move away from the protectionist, fortress conservation approach that dominated international conservation efforts for much of the 20th century towards a more inclusive and participatory 'sustainable use' approach at the end of the millennium. Ostrom *et al.* (1999) suggested that more inclusive governance arrangements can contribute to environmental conservation and development, awarding greater stakeholder ownership to outcomes, whilst making use of indigenous and local knowledge, and distributing costs and risks more equitably.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD 1992) is a key international policy contribution which has set environmental conservation along a more participatory pathway in those countries that have ratified it. In the EU, the Birds Directive (BD, 1979/409/EEC, <http://ec>.

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europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/index_en.htm) and the Habitats Directive (HD, 1992/43/EEC, http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm) take forward some of the current participatory conservation approaches noted above (Paavola 2004). The BD aims to maintain wild bird populations and protect endangered, vulnerable, rare and other bird species that are considered to merit special attention. The HD provides for the creation of a European network of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), known as Natura 2000 (Paavola *et al.* 2009). Natura 2000 now covers about 20% of the land area in the EU, as well as significant marine areas.

The BD and HD have introduced environmental concerns onto the policy agenda in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, as they had to transpose the provisions of the BD and HD into their national conservation legislation before their accession to the EU (Greenspan Bell 2004; Hicks 2004; Jehlička & Tickle 2004; Pavlínek & Pickles 2004). The BD and HD did not originally include formal provisions for public participation. However, the EU ratified the Aarhus Convention (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/aarhus/>) in 1998 and implemented its provisions through the Directives (see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/>) on access to information (2003/4/EC) and public participation (2003/35/EC), and the EC Regulation on access to justice (1367/2006/EC), which all apply to the BD and HD retrospectively (Wesselink *et al.* 2011). The key EU biodiversity policies thus embody the dominant international environmental conservation paradigm, which emphasizes public participation and the role of non-state actors.

A wide range of formal and informal institutions operating at and across different levels from the local to the national, regional and international are consequently involved in environmental governance. Their interplay ultimately generates a combination of governance outputs (such as new conservation policies), impacts (such as a larger total coverage of designated protected areas) and outcomes (ultimately, preserved or enhanced biodiversity) (Baker 2003). This means *inter alia* that the extent to which authority becomes dispersed in environmental governance varies because of different levels of pre-existing decentralization, different strengths of institutional memories in government institutions, and different degrees of provision of opportunities for multi-stakeholder engagement (Wesselink *et al.* 2011).

The existing literature has documented how the emergence of multi-level governance for biodiversity in the EU-15 countries empowered and increased the influence of environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS), particularly at the European level (for example see Fairbrass & Jordan 2001a, b; Weber & Christophersen 2002; Baker 2003; Rauschmayer *et al.* 2009), and how local actors whose interests were not forwarded by the more ambitious European conservation measures organized protests in a number of member states (see Alphandéry & Fortier 2001; Hiedanpää 2002; Krott *et al.* 2000; Ledoux *et al.* 2000; Paavola 2004).

Environmental governance and conservation in CEE countries has received considerably less attention. Earlier literature focused on the transposition of EU Directives in CEE countries undergoing transition (Greenspan Bell 2004; Hicks 2004; Jehlička & Tickle 2004; Pavlínek & Pickles 2004), but only recently have experiences with implementing EU conservation and biodiversity policies in CEE countries started to be examined (see for example Stringer *et al.* 2009; Börzel & Buzogány 2010; Grodzinska-Jurczak & Cent 2011; Niedzialkowski *et al.* 2012). As such, the evidence base on the implementation of European conservation policies in CEE countries largely remains to be generated.

This paper contributes towards addressing this gap by exploring environmental conservation and governance experiences in Romania. We first identify how Romania's environmental governance and conservation history maps onto dominant conservation paradigms such as fortress conservation and more participatory, sustainable use approaches. We then examine three cases that focus on different aspects of environmental governance to explore the extent to which participation has become incorporated in environmental governance practices and the key obstacles and opportunities for it that have emerged. The selected cases include one linked to the demarcation of Natura 2000 sites at the national level; one linked to the designation of the Rodna Mountains National Park; and one case linked to the development of Associations of Local Forest Owners in Dolj County. This allows comparison of two different types of protected areas and the processes involved in their designation; one, Natura 2000, emerging from processes of EU accession, and the other, a national park designated by the state in light of domestic conservation priorities and which was also designated as a biosphere reserve linking to a wider network of conservation areas. The third case provides an example of efforts to conserve the environment outside a protected area. This was deemed important to include because of Romania's endemic species richness, not all of which falls within protected areas.

METHODS

Study area: Romania

Romania has a highly dynamic governance history, while also ranking sixth in Europe in terms of its endemic species richness and hosting species such as wolf, lynx, bear, wild boar, wildcats and stag (Oszlányi *et al.* 2004). The country also has the largest number of biogeographic regions in Europe (five), two of which are only present in Romania (Ioras 2003). Located between 43 and 48°N and 20 and 29°E, the country covers nearly 240 000 km² and has 22 million inhabitants. Nearly half of Romania's population live in rural communities.

Romania's biological and environmental diversity is supported by a diverse landscape including mountains, hills, plains and delta areas; the Danube Delta is one of the largest

wetlands in Europe. Much of the country's terrestrial land surface is covered by forest, arable fields and grassland, while the climate is temperate, moderately continental with sub-Mediterranean influences in the south-east and south-west (Fraser & Stringer 2009). Rainfall varies considerably depending on the topography. The high Carpathians receive *c.* 1800 mm yr⁻¹, while in the Black Sea region, rainfall can be as low as 400 mm yr⁻¹ (Schmitt & Rákossy 2007). Such differences foster a wide-ranging landscape and biodiversity across the country's different ecological and climatic zones.

Case studies material

Our analysis draws on secondary materials in the form of journal papers and grey literature such as NGO reports, and uses desk-based analytical methods to undertake a systematic review. The research was undertaken in two phases. First, an extensive literature review was undertaken of publications on conservation in general, in order to provide the authors with an overview of the dominant paradigms within the field of environmental conservation. This involved an online search using Web of Knowledge, Google and Google Scholar for materials using the keywords 'conservation approaches', 'conservation paradigms', 'participatory conservation', 'fortress conservation', 'sustainable use' and 'top-down conservation'. The search yielded a range of sources that provided insight into changing conservation approaches across the world. This literature review was used to elucidate the dominant shifts in conservation (see for example Goldman 2003) from the early 1900s to the present day, providing a framework for our analysis in the second phase.

In the second phase, a more specific online search was made for literature sources that focused specifically on CEE and Romania. This led to a second body of materials, the analysis of which involved identifying how and when the fortress conservation and sustainable use paradigms identified in the first phase played out in the wider Romanian context, in both the pre-Communist and post-Communist eras. Shifts from strictly protectionist to sustainable use paradigms were also evaluated (see also Gomar & Stringer 2011), and we assessed the type, sources and nature of knowledge being used to inform environmental governance and associated policies, with a particular focus on biodiversity (see Raymond *et al.* 2010). The second part of the review process also helped us to assess the institutions and governance structures and processes onto which the environmental conservation approaches of today have been superimposed.

Some texts in Romanian and French on the Romanian environment were identified from the reference lists of some of the papers used in the second round of analysis. Where deemed relevant to the focus, these were located and translated to provide English language summaries, adding to the general body of materials in which our analysis was grounded. However, we did not attempt to make a systematic review of non-English literature on the Romanian case and do not

reference these sources here beyond the pertinent policy documents, as they tended largely to provide useful contextual information rather than forming a substantive part of the analysis.

Based on the two rounds of literature review, we identified three case examples for in-depth exploration. These cases were selected on the basis of the different governance and institutional frameworks they represent given the dominant approaches in policy today and the depth of information they provided on environmental governance.

RESULTS

Pre-Communist and Communist governance in environmental conservation

Romania has a long tradition of conservation. During the 1400s, the monarchy established nature reserves for recreational purposes, an exclusionary form of proto-conservation. Within some of the recreational reserves, hunting and the felling of trees were forbidden, while others were established specifically for hunting (Soran *et al.* 2000). These proto-conservation measures are aligned with the fortress conservation approach, which excludes some people or groups from particular areas or from undertaking certain practices.

The inter-war period (1918–1945) witnessed the establishment of the first modern protected areas in Romania because they were perceived to be of important scientific value. This led to the first Romanian Law for the Protection of National Monuments, adopted by a Royal Decree 2/478 in 1930. At this time, scientists highlighted the need for environmental education. Borza (1924, cited in Soran *et al.* 2000) argued that the 'lack of culture and of training, as well as wickedness and indolence permanently destroy the beauty of landscapes and natural monuments in Romania'. This view echoed colonial views of the time according to which populations destroy the environment precisely due to their ignorance (Dickson 2000; Brockington 2004). It also held that scientific knowledge should determine conservation goals and priorities, a position compatible with the state-centric governance of the era, which prioritized science over other types of knowledge and ways of knowing.

Romania was under Communist rule between 1948 and 1989. Central planning led to governance by dictatorial decree in a particularly oppressive regime compared to other CEE countries (Manser 1993). All earlier environmental laws were repealed (Soran *et al.* 2000) in order to implement Marxist principles: nature had no intrinsic value other than to serve human needs. Environmental protection was considered unproductive and inefficient. The state was the only regulatory body in the absence of markets, which in practice meant the emergence of a *de facto* open access regime for most environmental resources (Klůvanková–Oravská *et al.* 2009). The government exerted considerable control over

society. Independent scientific research on the environment was restricted and censored, while public protests and NGO activity were prohibited (Parau 2009). Any dissent towards the central government's National Committee for Environmental Protection was repressed (Mazurski 1991). Environmental policies were handicapped by 'obtuse and contradictory implementation procedures' (Novac & Auer 2004) and were only weakly enforced (O'Brien 2005). A series of misguided investments by the central state also resulted in huge foreign debt, leaving few resources for environmental conservation and protection.

Given the ideological context of conservation, it is surprising that protected areas increased in Romania during the period 1954–1985. This was largely due to Ministry Council Resolution 518 of 1954, which established the legal base for nature conservation. However, protected areas still amounted to just 15 000 ha or 0.06 % of Romanian territory (Oszlányi *et al.* 2004). Despite the rhetoric of protection in Resolution 518, mining, tourism, timber extraction, poaching and agricultural activities continued in protected areas. Coupled with poor waste management and lack of regulation and enforcement, the situation is unlikely to have differed had the Resolution not existed. Exclusionary measures reminiscent of the 1400s reappeared when the Communist elite built large lodges in protected areas for use as bases for recreational hunting. Conservation thus remained a secondary concern and the exclusion of the general public from protected areas served other priorities.

Multi-level environmental governance in the post-Communist era

With the collapse of Communism in 1990, Romania's approach to conservation began to change, although the authorities were initially lethargic towards the environment. Conservation initiatives were mostly *ad hoc*, as the economic and social problems caused by the fall of Communism took priority over environmental concerns (Scrieciuc & Stringer 2008). In some CEE countries, such as Hungary and Poland, a relatively well-developed civil society started championing the environmental cause. In Romania however, the political party that came into power after the 1990 elections distrusted civil society, and the number of ENGOs remained small: there are still fewer than 100 in Romania, just 5% of registered NGOs in the country (Stringer *et al.* 2009). Most of them operate at local or regional level, and have limited national visibility and influence.

The Romanian government eventually realized that they had to confront problems of environmental degradation and biodiversity conservation if they wanted to ensure accession to the EU. At the same time, the country's scientific community took more of an interest in environmental protection. It also became clear that after the collapse of Communism many CEE countries, including Romania, had turned to traditional land management techniques (Schmitt & Rákossy 2007): this meant that a landscape used for agriculture

remained rich in biodiversity, more so than in much of the rest of Europe. Land reform and restitution processes were initiated (Romanian Law 18/1991; Law 1/2000; Law 247/2005) and land was returned to its pre-war owners or their heirs (Stringer *et al.* 2009). Privatized plots of agricultural and forest land were highly fragmented, with owners typically having 3–6 discrete parcels of forest and land totalling about 0.5–1 ha (Sabates-Wheeler 2002). Law 5/2000 established national parks and nature reserves, and Government Decision 1284/2007 approved the designation of Natura 2000 sites. Today, approximately 20% of Romania's territory is covered by the country's protected areas network, with much of the increase being since 1989, over which period seven National Parks and 27 Natural Parks were designated, alongside 382 protected areas as part of the European Natura 2000 network (Ioja *et al.* 2010).

The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development is responsible for environmental policy and decision-making, but Romania's national parks and protected areas are managed by the National Forest Administration (NFA) (Lawrence & Szabo 2005). During Communism, the NFA was a powerful organization, but since restitution processes began the area under its jurisdiction has significantly decreased. With this came a loss of status and respect for this former top-down hierarchical structure (Szabo *et al.* 2008). In addition to the shifts in power and property rights, regulations for designating and managing protected areas (Romanian Emergency Ordinance 236/2000) require that all protected areas develop management plans. Protected areas are to be administered by the Scientific Council and the Consultative Council, which involve both national and local stakeholders (Szabo *et al.* 2008).

While the arrangements for the governance of protected areas across the different designation and land-use categories have started to include a greater range of actors, their effectiveness remains rather limited. New land owners were not afforded a meaningful role in consultations on the designation of protected areas. While local people emerged from the early years of transition as new land owners, they faced restrictions on how they could use and manage their land if it was in a protected area. Sustainable use paradigms had not been embraced. The top-down government-led process through which protected areas were designated had substantial economic impact, reinforcing land owners' belief that protected areas are an inconvenience entailing an opportunity cost, especially because many owners have not received any form of compensation for the use restrictions that they face (Szabo *et al.* 2008).

It is against this background that our case study analyses focused first on the countrywide process of designating Natura 2000 sites, and then on two local-level case studies in the Rodna Mountains National Park and in Dolj County. Despite the different environmental governance contexts in which each case was established, common themes were identified with relevance for wider environmental governance and conservation across Romania.

Case study 1: Natura 2000 sites

Natura 2000 seeks to promote sustainable natural resource management in partnership with local communities, although it retains an important role for scientific knowledge and evidence in deciding which species and habitats should be targeted (WWF [World Wildlife Fund] 2004). Nevertheless, site designation is required to consider local social, economic and cultural realities (Stancioiu *et al.* 2010). The designation of Natura 2000 sites followed a process similar to those described above, and had similar outcomes. Romania's Natura 2000 sites cover 17.84% of the country's territory, and have significant overlap (96.19%) with the pre-existing protected areas network, including many of the country's national parks. However, the former are distinct from Romania's network of strictly protected sites. Romania's Law 462/2001 distinguishes between scientific reserves, nature reserves, national parks, natural parks, natural monuments, biosphere reserves, wetlands of international importance (Ramsar sites), World Heritage sites, special conservation areas and special protection areas.

Site designation occurred rapidly within a year, primarily on the basis of out-dated scientific literature and personal communications. No field verification was undertaken, which left considerable uncertainty regarding the existence, location and extent of certain species and habitats (Stancioiu *et al.* 2010). The designation process was top-down and government-led, failed to engage local communities (Ioja *et al.* 2010) and, despite the engagement of NGOs (WWF 2004), did not draw on local knowledge or consider local needs, despite the policy rhetoric that stated it should (see Stringer *et al.* 2007).

Few landowners affected by Natura 2000 designation attended the scant public hearings, even though the authorities were to restrict many human activities, regardless of their likely impact on protected species or habitats, and thus the acceptance and support of landowners was likely crucial for the successful implementation of conservation measures (Stancioiu *et al.* 2010). Failure to provide compensation for the restrictions has caused significant tensions between the authorities and landowners who feel their use rights have been violated. This outcome is similar to that of the designation of other protected areas which are not part of the Natura 2000 network (Szabo *et al.* 2008). Instead of promoting a multi-level collaborative model of conservation in line with the policy rhetoric, in which communities work together with the authorities to conserve important species and habitats, the governance practice has highlighted that, for uncompensated landowners, the costs of conservation at the local level may exceed its benefits.

Case study 2: Rodna Mountains National Park

The Rodna Mountains National Park is within the Carpathian Mountains of northern Romania. Environmental conservation in this area first took place in 1932, when 1823 ha surrounding

the Pietrosu Mare peak was designated as a protected area. The area under protection expanded to 2700 ha in 1971, 3300 ha in 1977 and 46 399 ha in 1990 (PNMR [Parcul Național Munții Rodnei] 2010). It currently covers an area of 46 417 ha (Anthony & Szabo 2011). The status of the Rodna Mountains National Park and Biosphere Reserve is complex as it is a national park, biosphere reserve and Natura 2000 site under both the HD and BD (Ioja *et al.* 2010).

The Park administration needed to improve relations with and to give a greater role to local communities, in line with legal requirements for the development of a management plan for the Park. These stemmed from the Government's Emergency Ordinance 236, which compelled all protected areas to establish management plans, in line with the experiences gained through the World Bank's Biodiversity Conservation Management Project (Szabo *et al.* 2008). The management plans of sites under multiple designations should include conservation measures suitable for both the national park (linked to national policy guidelines) and UNESCO MAB (United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization Man and the Biosphere) requirements. In the case of the Rodna Mountains National Park and Biosphere Reserve, there was just one management plan that was still in place in 2006. However, due to issues linked to a lack of zoning, a separate management plan was later developed in order to meet the UNESCO requirements (Szabo 2007; PNMR 2010).

There were no NGOs active in the area that could have acted as brokers between the authorities and communities to channel local knowledge into the Park's management plan. Indeed, Romanian civil society is characterized by low levels of citizen participation and a lack of voice over issues of public concern (Pichler & Wallace 2007). Yet social capital and trust between stakeholders are vital for successful multi-stakeholder processes, particularly in post-Communist contexts where considerable value is placed upon social ties and extended family networks. This represents a key gap between the policy discourse and dominant conservation paradigm and practice on the ground. Participation in the environmental governance of the Rodna Mountains National Park is nevertheless considered to have delivered both social and environmental benefits (see Szabo *et al.* 2008), though this required the development of new institutions to foster participation.

The lack of NGOs led to the development of a participation model involving clubs of school children in the communities surrounding the Park: school children engaged in participatory data collection activities to help monitor biodiversity. The clubs were coordinated by local teachers, who were trusted by both the communities and Park administration. Participation took place across three different dimensions: (1) management planning, (2) management plan implementation through participatory biodiversity assessment and (3) improved environmental education, community understanding and engagement. For the first time in the area, use was made of an adaptive management approach that drew on the knowledge and understanding of community

members, rather than a top-down management approach that drew only on the understandings of the scientific council, as had been the case in the past. The new adaptive approach also provided opportunities for 'learning by doing', in which management decisions could be adjusted as experiences were gained (Szabo *et al.* 2008).

The experience with participation in this case has been generally positive. The school children are reported to have a sense of increased ecological consciousness; communities have had the opportunity to voice their views; and the Park administration gained experience in following a participatory process in the development of their management plan (Szabo *et al.* 2008). However, the participatory approach was driven by national laws and policy requirements, and obligations to agreements such as the Aarhus convention (which provides for public participation in environmental matters), as well as efforts to integrate EU legal provisions into national policy implementation strategies. Despite the reported social benefits, participation has not yet been culturally embedded.

Case study 3: development of Associations of Local Forest Owners (ALFOs) in Dolj County

Marșani community, Dolj County experienced extensive deforestation at the fall of Communism and is in one of the poorest areas in Romania. During land restitution and redistribution, 850 ha of forest and 1100 ha of degraded former forested land were shared among 1325 owners (APPP [Asociația Proprietarilor de Pădure Privată] Mârșani 2006). However, deforestation, desertification, overgrazing and the breakdown of the formerly-centralized irrigation system (Jonesco-Balea 1923; Fraser & Stringer 2009) led many owners to consider their plots to be degraded and beyond productive use. The Government made support available for afforestation and reforestation of degraded areas, but it was only accessible for planting of trees over large areas. Landowners realized that they could not act on an individual basis to access the support because their land parcels were too small, so they agreed to work with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development to develop an Association of Local Forest Owners (ALFO) to act on their behalf (Stringer *et al.* 2009).

Members of the Association retain individual land ownership but their plots are managed by the ALFO. This arrangement helps the landowners to obtain formal recognition from the authorities and makes them eligible to access support provided by the Land Reclamation Fund (Romanian Law 18/1992 updated). Establishment of the ALFO involved a variety of stakeholders including the mayor's office, forest owners, private forest management enterprises, as well as local and international experts (Stringer *et al.* 2009). The overall goal was to foster long-term cooperation among all stakeholders and the surrounding community, and to improve environmental quality in the area. Despite an initial reluctance to associate (largely due to the memory of forced cooperation during the Communist era),

the ALFO was established in 2007. Since then, trees have been planted on 1100 ha of degraded land.

In this case, thickening of governance structures to incorporate multiple stakeholders across levels was economically motivated and took place outside of the framework of protected areas. Participation in environmental governance was used to access financial resources in order to return economically non-viable land to productive use, drawing on local knowledge, understanding and preferences in conjunction with scientific knowledge in the development of the management plans. Landowners expect to obtain income from their reforested and afforested land, through timber production and the sale of carbon credits and non-timber forest products such as honey and mushrooms (Stringer *et al.* 2009).

DISCUSSION

Our findings highlight that the EU's policy framework and expectations are key drivers of the move towards more inclusive and participatory modes of environmental governance and conservation in Romania (see also Greenspan Bell 2004; Wesselink *et al.* 2011), rather than it being a manifestation of grassroots level environmental and conservation values. This assertion is also supported by the literature (Popescu 2007; Anthony & Szabo 2011). The case of Dolj County contrasts with the legal and political drivers of more participatory forms of environmental governance in the Rodna Mountains National Park case. In both of these cases, as well as the process of Natura 2000 designation, the rationale for pursuing participation was instrumental, a means to an end, rather than following normative or substantive motivations (Stringer *et al.* 2006; see also Wesselink *et al.* 2011).

The Communist regime's practice of substituting bottom-up civil society organizations with top-down, centralized arrangements for control, have prevented the strengthening of civil society, and have created a real challenge for inclusive participatory modes of governance (Klůvanková-Oravská *et al.* 2009). Our analysis corroborates the low stakeholder awareness regarding the implementation of Natura 2000 and calls for awareness raising and capacity building as a matter of urgency (WWF 2004; Popescu 2007). Our case analyses further suggest that stakeholders have little previous experience that would facilitate their meaningful engagement in participatory processes, and they have rather neutral attitudes towards the environment (Anthony & Szabo 2011). Again this resonates with the wider literature on environmental conservation in Romania. For example, Anthony and Moldovan (2008) found that in Romania's Măcin Mountains National Park (MMNP), less than 25% of a population of 374 households sampled had experience of, and knowledge about the MMNP authority activities and 95.2% were unfamiliar with the Consultative Council, the environmental governance body that represents community interests in MMNP decision-making.

Börzel and Buzogány (2010) have suggested that the Europeanization of environmental policy in CEE countries has professionalized and strengthened environmental NGOs in CEE countries like Poland, Hungary and Romania, whilst nevertheless leaving state–civil society cooperation on rather weak ground. We partly concur, but also consider that the situation is more complex than they suggest. Our analysis indicates that the ability of the new Romanian democracy to move towards a more inclusive and participatory mode of environmental governance has been substantially challenged by the pre-Communist and Communist era legacies. Current solutions have not been built in an institutional vacuum. They were erected upon the foundations left by the Communist era: these include the central role of state, low degree of decentralization, an emphasis on scientific knowledge about biodiversity and a lack of awareness and provision of opportunities for multi-stakeholder engagement. They all became incorporated within current environmental governance from the outset, and are commonly recognized in the (albeit limited) academic analyses of environmental governance and conservation in Romania (see Popsecu 2007; Anthony & Moldovan 2008).

Supra-national governance structures such as those of the EU require changes to the power structure and distribution of authority, and the key disempowered actors are often the formerly central state organizations. This situation is likely to create inertia and resistance to governance reforms that would entail substantial diffusion of power and decentralization of roles, responsibilities and authority (see Grodzinska-Jurczak & Cent 2011). While inclusivity and participatory rhetoric is now found in conservation policy, the imposition of unfounded use restrictions in protected areas demonstrates that the Romanian administration still clings to its authority and has not yet adopted sustainable use approaches or participatory models of environmental governance.

Romania, like other CEE countries, often construes participation as intersectoral cooperation because it represents the smallest departure from the *status quo*: governance practices seek to involve other government ministries and departments and international actors, rather than pursuing multi-stakeholder and multi-level participation involving local communities and NGOs (see Kluvankova *et al.* 2009; Wesselink *et al.* 2011). The tendency of state-sector stakeholders to pursue cooperation amongst themselves again arises from the state- and science-centric past. It can have detrimental consequences for conservation, which either lacks entirely, or only has a weak state champion at ministry or departmental level. For example, WWF (2004) found that sectoral planning in Romania scarcely takes any serious note of the requirements of the Habitats and Birds Directives, while other analyses report a similar situation in relation to sustainable tourism initiatives that are expected to involve multiple stakeholders across multiple levels (Cottrell & Cutumisu 2006). Associating and playing an active role in civil society is still often viewed with suspicion in Romania due to the forced cooperation under Communism (see also Botcheva

1996). This, together with the low level of NGO activity in Romania, means that new solutions for participation, such as the school clubs and associations of local forest owners discussed in our case studies, may need to be developed to engage stakeholders in multi-level biodiversity governance.

Many of our findings are not just the result of local contextual factors and are more widely applicable. The specific features of property regimes, formal collective choice mechanisms and the length, strength and nature of the Communist legacy vary between CEE countries. However, post-Communist governance structures face comparable challenges throughout the region (Scriciu & Stringer 2008). The emergence of more inclusive multi-level governance inevitably creates conflicts across levels and between sectors and actors (Niedzialkowski *et al.* 2012). However, the demands for such governance in both conservation and in meeting other environmental obligations could pave the way for greater interplay between formal and informal institutions, fostering learning between them.

CONCLUSION

This paper has situated Romania's current approaches to environmental governance and conservation within an analysis of past and present conservation paradigms. It has explored three case studies to assess the extent to which participation has become embedded in environmental governance practices. It has also identified some of the key barriers and challenges that remain. Accession to the EU has played a key role in driving more inclusive environmental governance practices in Romania. While some successes have been identified, several challenges remain. The lack of civil society remains a barrier to the more widespread internalization of conservation and a lack of previous experience with participatory processes shapes current levels of involvement in environmental governance. Our case studies suggest that small steps starting from instrumental solutions may be warranted, to create early positive social and environmental outcomes, as well as models which can be replicated. But strengthening of civil society also demands opportunities to learn through participation, which means that wider solutions for participation will also need to be fostered, including the development of new stakeholder engagement processes.

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