



Natura 2000

Final Report on the Implementation of the Communication Strategy

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1. ABSTRACT

The completion of the Natura 2000 project resulted in the list of nature conservation sites of Community importance, which Slovenia was to submit to the European Union by the date of accession to the full EU membership. The preparation and implementation process of the project from the end of 2002 to 1 May 2004 **imposed extremely short deadlines**. Owing to a good nature conservation status and based on professional criteria, **a significant number of areas** was expected to fall within this ecological network. Thus, it was all the more of crucial importance that the communication with various stakeholders at the national and local level began immediately. This surpassed the so far practice by which the provision of information to stakeholders was postponed until obtaining final results of the project or scientific and research work. The purpose of the report is to present a summary of key issues, methods of work and communication results of the project, evaluate them and, on their basis, bring forward recommendations for further work in this field.

At the end of April 2004, the Slovenian Government legally approved of 286 Natura 2000 sites. In the process of drawing-up the list, the communication group addressed the major issue: **How to communicate with such a substantial number of stakeholders within an extremely tight deadline** as the concerned areas make up 35 % of the state territory? With a view to providing information to the largest number of stakeholders at the national and local level and to collecting their responses, the project leadership made a decision to use the communication model, which in the past was applied within five pilot projects 'Nature Management in Partnership' (Project IUCN-CEC, 2002-2003). Key elements of the chosen model represent the strategic communication planning with emphasis on the appropriate analysis of nature protection and related communication issues, the analysis of key stakeholders and identification of specific communication objectives, strategy and tactics. By May 2004, pursuant to the communication plans for 30 individual areas, the communication was carried out in 107 out of 183 municipalities to which the Natura 2000 areas extend. Consequently, key stakeholders were informed also on other proposed special protection areas for which the communication plans had not been specifically prepared. A model of personal communication produces greater effects than the indirect (one-way) communication. Accordingly, letters, leaflets and other publicist products served merely as a support to personal communication paying attention to those stakeholders who exercise the greatest influence over changing behavioural patterns and consequently, over broader social changes.

The success of communication was largely dependent on the **efficiency of internal communication**. In view of this, the work was systematically oriented towards establishing strategic partnership among nature protection, forestry and agriculture, teamwork and training, horizontal and vertical flow of information, counselling of external experts. By providing information to stakeholders in the local environment, communication groups considerably reduced the risk of opposition to Natura 2000 mainly on account of the delayed provision of information; however, at the same time, personal communication facilitated immediate elimination of misunderstandings, uncertainties and fears caused by insufficient information.

Advantages of inter-institutional cooperation among forestry, agriculture and nature protection sectors are significant and this model of work is to be further applied since it enables the essential participation at various levels and as a result, synergistic effects within different professions. For the continuation of the project, recommendations have been brought forward as logical upgrading of the initiated process based on further content-related starting points, own experience gained from the first stage of the project, experience of others and

theoretical standpoints.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background to the project

Natura 2000 stands for more than a narrow concept of nature protection brought into the Slovenian social and economic area as an obligation imposed by the European Union (EU). There are some new features and obligations introduced in the national nature protection system, however, its importance is mainly due to a serious commitment of the European Commission to impose sanctions (substantially high financial penalties) for status impairment as a result of improper transposition of the Habitat Directive. Natura 2000 has a wider relevance since it represents one of the basic mechanisms for sustainable development. It involves special protection areas where economic development is not automatically excluded but must pursue the objective of nature conservation; it must neither impair a favourable conservation status nor continue to endanger species. Successful implementation of conservation measures on the areas designated as Natura 2000 primarily necessitates active involvement of people inhabiting these areas or depending on them. This is also the issue covered by the Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation on decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. The Aarhus Convention is a new kind of environmental agreement with long-reaching implications for European citizens. It links environmental and human rights; it is based on the fact that sustainable development can be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders. It focuses on interactions between the public and public authorities in a democratic context and it paves the way for public participation in the implementation of international agreements. Slovenia signed the Convention at the 'Environment for Europe' Ministerial Conference in 1998. The organization of an appropriate information system and systematic development and use of different strategic as well as routine communication as policy instruments are of vital importance for successful implementation of the Convention.

Communication, education, awareness raising and public participation are key instruments relevant for linking many common interests and requirements imposed by international conventions (conventions on biodiversity, climate change, wetlands etc.) and directives (Birds Directive, Habitats Directive, Water Framework Directive etc.) and for achieving synergy among, nowadays isolated, efforts in individual areas.

2.2. Purpose of the project

In compliance with the accession requirements towards EU, Slovenia was to submit a list of sites designated as Natura 2000¹ by 1 May 2004. Basic requirements for the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives in the initial stage encompassed:

1. Technical or expert tasks: **identification of sites (SPA² and pSCI³)**;
2. Legal tasks: **designation of sites**;
3. Implementation of obligations: **management of sites**;

¹ Natura 2000 is an ecological network of areas, which, from the viewpoint of nature conservation, are important for the entire EU.

² Natura 2000 is based on two EU Directives, namely the Birds Directive (Council Directive 79/409/EEC) and Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC). The Natura 2000 ecological network consists of special protection areas (SPA) pursuant to the Birds Directive and special areas of conservation (SAC) pursuant to the Habitats Directive.

³ Under the Habitats Directive, potential Sites of Community Interest (pSCI) are to be identified. After the alignment with the European Commission, the state is obliged to designate these sites as SAC.

When defining the content basis and key activities for implementing the proposed Natura 2000 project within the given time (less than 2 years), two foreign consultants, Frits Hesselink (IUCN⁴) and Eddie Idle (EUROSITE⁵) participated by conveying the experience acquired in the Natura 2000 implementation process by individual Member States (Annex 1). Among different communication experience and strategies adopted by 20 existing and associated EU Member States, the following considerations are to be highlighted:

a) Similar conclusions:

- > (Personal) communication is a condition for successful implementation of Natura 2000.
- > There is no single recipe for communicating Natura 2000 - different approaches;
- > The principle of learning from foreign mistakes and cases of good practice are of great assistance;

b) Common mistakes in communicating Nature 2000, in particular:

- > delayed and poor (not planned) communication; insufficient allocation of time for stakeholder management;
- > inappropriately designed and targeted messages;
- > too general, impersonal or too scientific (technical) information;
- > insufficient expert training for adequate Natura communicating;
- > insufficient attention paid to positive cases and development opportunities based on nature conservation, including the Natura 2000 concept;
- > lack of sources.

Basic questions to be dealt with in communication planning:

- > Who should we communicate with? Priorities?
- > What results or outcomes do we want?
- > What should we communicate to stakeholders?
- > Who should we communicate with whom?
- > Are jobs/responsibilities clear to everyone?
- > Does everyone know what to do and are they able to do ?
- > How important is it to succeed?

The preparation of communication strategy took into consideration:

- > Up to date experience in communicating nature protection, in particular in establishing protected areas (the Snežnik Regional Park);
- > Up to date European experience in communicating Natura 2000;
- > Proposals of external communication experts;
- > Results obtained by the Matra Project⁶ provide a basis for practical model of communicating with stakeholders within the Natura 2000 framework.

2.3. Role of strategic communication in the project and purpose of the report

With Natura 2000, **strategic communication** has assumed a more evident role for the first time in the history of nature conservation and became an **important tool for achieving**

⁴ The World Conservation Union - IUCN brings together states, government agencies and numerous non-governmental organizations at interstate, state and local levels.

⁵ EUROSITE is a non-profit international association joining public and private organizations in managing natural sites across Europe.

⁶ In the 1998-2003 period, IUCN-CEC implemented the project entitled 'Effective Biodiversity Communication' or in its final stage 'Nature Management in Partnership'. Slovenia was one of the five Central and Eastern European countries participating in this project (other than Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary). The project was financed by the Dutch government PIN-MATRA fund (hence the name Matra Project). Within this process, the knowledge has been relatively successfully transferred to Slovenia; at the same time, the network of communicators has been established, assuming a leading role within communicating Natura 2000.

objectives of nature conservation policy. This surpassed the existing communication approach, identified by experts as DAD⁷ ('define, announce, defend'):

- > Communication may begin despite the fact that scientific-research work has not been entirely completed and the data are insufficient or details are missing; scientific data are usually sufficient to begin the communication;
- > Communication does not start as late as the completion of the project, but is a tool used from the beginning to increase acceptability of a certain concept or policy (simultaneous process for the development of participation, particularly within the timely provision of information, mutual understanding, solution seeking and opportunities);
- > Merely official informing of stakeholders (letters and other official communication channels) and different means of transferred communication (publications, media contributions, video etc.) do not yield expected changes in the attitude and behaviour of key stakeholders;
- > In terms of operation, waiting to obtain final results of scientific and research work would increase certain risks. When adopting a legal act or implementing relevant measures in subsequent stages, we would have to deal with even longer delays and time pressure in order to properly manage, through insufficient human resources, resistance of stakeholders or conflicts on the ground and at the level of other Ministries, which can be expected if the stakeholders are not involved in the process.

The concept of Natura 2000 is being introduced in the existing social and economic environment; therefore in view of successful achievement of nature conservation objectives and, consequently, the principles of sustainable development, various stakeholders are of essential importance to bring about changes in attitude and behavioural patterns. Accordingly, **strategic communication can reduce the project risks** associated with:

- > Time pressure to be in time to fulfil technical, legal, communication and other obligations within extremely short time of less than two years;
- > Clear terms of reference from top management
- > Huge ambition of conservationists to submit so many sites
- > Internal organization for completing the tasks of mapping, informing people etc.;
- > Limited human resources and capacities;
- > Inadequate understanding and activation of social mechanisms (communication, education, awareness rising and participation) in order to avoid negative implications that characterize the DAD approach, providing an adequate step forward in active involvement of people, stakeholders' participation and establishing relevant partnerships with them (the AIDA approach)⁷.

The decision on a strategic approach to communicating required:

1. Process restructuring of the project:

- > Clear deadlines for scientific and expert community and their concentration on the essential matters (rather than to details);
- > Concise milestones, tasks, responsibilities, coordination, internal reports and communication;
- > Activating of existing conservation communicator network from previous Matra project;
- > Inclusion of agricultural consultant and forestry services as strategic partners into the existing communication network;

2. Reorientation of the existing, mainly one-way communication approach into a two-way approach or, to put it differently, to stakeholder management:

- > Communication with other Government Ministries, starting with active involvement of agricultural and forestry sectors;

⁷ Contrary to the DAD approach by which policy or decision makers take a certain political decision within a (relatively) closed circle, announce and, as appropriate, defend it, the AIDA approach (attention, interest, desire, action) first focuses on drawing attention, encouraging interest and desire to act positively or to change behavioural patterns. The mode of making a decision influences the result. Understanding the cause of conflicts and principles of their resolution enables prudent conflict management.

- > Communication within a wider social environment dealing with local stakeholders;
 - > Different own perception of stakeholders, namely as partners rather than enemies;
3. Priority to face to face (two-way), direct, personal communication (internal and external):
- > Establishment of strategic partnerships and teamwork as well as strengthening capacities of the inter-institutional communication team (close to 70 collaborators- participated);
 - > Identification of key stakeholders and opinion leaders at the national and local level;
 - > One-way (indirect) communication merely provides a support to personal (informal and formal) communication.

Having regard to different aspects and warnings, the Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy has prepared a **project aimed at the fulfilment of (minimum) legal requirements**, bearing in mind that other tasks (completion of lists, management) are to follow in the second stage of implementing Natura 2000. The proposed **basic functions of the project** (specified in Annex 2) are as follows:

1. Identification of sites, boundaries, directions;
2. Communication with key stakeholders at the national level;
3. Communication with key stakeholders at the local level;
4. Back – up system (feedback & help-desk) and training;
5. Monitoring and evaluation.

The following main project milestones were proposed:

1. October 2002:

- > Quick assessment of sites, ABC ranking system (A = completed sites, B = sites of which boundaries are still to be determined, C = sites where boundaries and content are not clear);
- > Clarification of criteria for determination of boundaries/sites;
- > Communication plan;
- > Estimation of time necessary for all tasks; border/site criteria; budgets; communication plan;
- > Organization and official verification of the project;

2. December 2002: All A-ranked sites (30) were to be submitted to the state secretary, giving the green light to start the communication on the ground;

3. April 2004: All B-ranked sites were to be submitted to the state secretary.

After having set up the expert and communication group, project tasks and responsible project managers were defined; operational implementation of the project according to the agreed procedures. The report further presents the results of the process based on the identified objectives and milestones of the communication strategy at the national and local level.

3. NATURA 2000 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

3.1. Objectives and expected results of communicating the Natura 2000 project

The process of designating Natura 2000 sites set off the **initial communication stage** - mainly providing information to key stakeholders and increasing acceptability of the concept itself at the national and local level.

Basic communication objectives:

1. Providing information, awareness raising and better understanding of Natura 2000: where and why the sites are being designated and the concerned implications (constraints and opportunities);
2. Immediate clarification of ambiguities and misunderstandings resulting from the

insufficient knowledge of the Natura 2000 content and its different perception;

3. A snapshot of stakeholders' attitude towards nature protection contents, issues and reasons for or against Natura 2000 in individual sites within the local communities;

4. A snapshot of feedback on interests and reasons for greater or smaller acceptability;

5. Better mutual understanding and trust providing a basis for the establishment of partnerships with stakeholders, which is of essential importance for their participation in the subsequent stages of implementing Natura 2000 (conservation measures and forms of network management).

The **expected results of communicating**, based on the mentioned objectives:

1. Reduced risk for potential resistance and new conflicts likely to arise merely due to stakeholders not having been timely informed about or involved in the project;

2. A changed attitude towards the nature protection and an improved reputation of the sector;

3. Identification of interests and reasons to enable active participation in implementing conservation objectives and adequate conservation measures in the Natura 2000 sites in subsequent stages of fulfilling the obligations;

4. A snapshot of positive motives providing a basis for effective management of nature protection sites and cases of good practice in the Natura 2000 sites.

3.2. Basic messages

The basic message is that sites of European importance are to be designated by specialist services following the European criteria, which is an essential requirement of both Directives in the field of nature protection. Many of them were previously identified as sites of greater importance in terms of nature protection. The list of the Natura 2000 sites confirmed and additionally justified their importance. Successful achievement of objectives pursued by the national and European nature protection policy is subject to participation of various stakeholders. The **designation** of the Natura 2000 sites results in **maintaining a favourable conservation status, which allows economic development** provided the latter is in compliance with nature conservations objectives and does not lead to deterioration of habitats and further endangering of species. Failing to provide this, the state may be called to defend the case before the Court of Luxembourg, which may inflict on it a considerable financial burden. Types of measures and management methods in respect of individual sites are being defined since the process is only in its initial stage. Specialist groups are defining **ecological requirements of the species dictating specific measures** and adequate solutions at the national and local level. The implementation of certain measures are enabled already by existing instruments - protected areas (the Natura 2000 sites are not automatically protected areas), contractual protection, sectoral natural resources management (forestry, fishery, water management etc.). The opportunities within the Natura 2000 framework as a concept of sustainable development are many, including different structural funds and other EU development or financial programmes.

3.3. Strategic approach to communicating

Basic communication challenges were how to provide an **efficient formal communication at the national and European level** and how to turn **immediate and appropriate attention to communicating at the local level**. The content of communication strategy (see Annex 3) has been specified by the communication plan (Annex 4).

Main emphases:

> Encouraging informal dissemination of information;

> Not all technical details are necessary for planning and starting the communication;

- > Emphasis on communication with key stakeholders and opinion leaders;
- > Gradual approach by addressing the first five 'less demanding sites', subsequently dealing with more demanding sites.
- > Inter-institutional cooperation among IRSNC, SFS, CAFS⁸ in drawing up and implementation of communication plans for individual sites;
- > Adapting communication approaches to individual sites (standardized communication is inadequate);
- > Consultations with external communication experts⁹ and professional moderators for group processes¹⁰.

Key strategic interventions:

1. The majority of activities are of internal nature:

- > Meetings of decision-makers (occasionally encouraged by visits of foreign consultants);
- > Mobilization of existing Matra communication network and knowledge;
- > Increased planning (80 %) prior to the implementation (20 %) of communication activities with the public (internal consensus of three sectors and common performance);
- > Further capacity building - training, practical skills;

2. Mobilization of internal key players, bearing in mind the gained advantages:

- > Strategic approach: work with stakeholders as compared with limited effects of public relations approach;
- > Strategic partnership: forestry, agricultural, local partnerships;
- > Considerations prior to the action: common planning and teamwork;

3. Back-up system and training:

- > Advisory service and assistance;
- > Training;
- > Feedback;
- > Internal provision of information through e-bulletin;

4. Evaluation of work and stakeholders' feedback.

Key institutional challenges:

1. Communication requires time, which is to be provided (setting priorities!);

2. Internal communication is of utmost importance:

- > Internal and interdisciplinary team work;
- > Engaging 'middle and top management';
- > Identification of internal key players holding the appropriate positions (MESPE) - advocates of inter-ministerial cooperation, constant internal flow of information;

3. Training is immediately followed by practice and learning from own success/mistakes;

4. Continuous capacity building and communication networking;

5. Engaging foreign consultants at crucial moments.

4. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY RESULTS

⁸ Institute of the RS for Nature Conservation, Slovenian Forest Service, Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia

⁹ Outside view and the required expertise.

¹⁰ The cooperation of professional moderators to establish the conditions in which people can connect and focus on reaching a consensus.

On 29 April 2004, the Government adopted the Decree on special protection areas on the basis of which 286 areas of Natura 2000 obtained a legal status. Thereby, the project that had been officially approved on 8 January 2003 was formally concluded. Communication activities started with internal consultations held on 14 January 2003 and drawing up of the first information material. Communication at the local level started with the first planning workshop held on 10 April 2003.

Summary of communication results:

1. Within the period of one year and based on plans, inter-ministerial communication groups presented 30 areas to key stakeholders and assessed the results:

- > All stakeholders were not in favour of Natura 2000, however, they were well acquainted with the matter; communication mitigated the effects of inadequate provision of information and fear largely due to ignorance and uncertainty in respect of what benefits Natura 2000 provide.
- > Natura 2000 faced less resistance and reluctance on the areas where communicators did their job successfully; stakeholders often took pride in their heritage that they managed to preserve;
- > On these areas, there were more indicators in favour of Natura 2000 and/or a positive attitude as well as recognizing opportunities (Natura 2000 as sustainable development);

2. The capacity of recognizing the significance of communication as an integrative social mechanism and a tool for successful achievement of the objectives pursued;

3. Strengthening of institutional capacities:

- > A larger number of qualified workers in public administration;
- > Improved professional attitude and sometimes-greater estimation of nature protection;
- > A network of strategic national and local partners;

4. High-level meetings for decision-making on further steps to be taken as regards the implementation of Natura 2000, particularly aimed at:

- > Common research of the efficient administrative system;
- > Process of participative planning or management.

4.1. Internal and external communication

Natura 2000 project outline was introduced first to staff members of MESPE and MAFF¹¹ as well as to the staff members of IRSNC, SFS and CAFS. Internal communication means communication within MESPE and MAFF, which participated in the implementation of the project as a strategic partner. Such internal communication was directed to providing information and establishing alliances between both Ministries. Internal communication is a condition for effective external communication. Primary stakeholders (other than internal public of MESPE and MAFF) were identified to be the Government and National Assembly, European Commission, specialist services, local communities (municipalities, localities) and land owners. Media, non-governmental organizations and general public are included among other important stakeholders.

4.1.1. Communication activities and products

A summary of activities and products created in 2003 and in the first half of 2004 is shown in Table 1 and Annex 5 providing also a survey of their appearance in mass media.

¹¹ Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food.

Table 1: Summary of activities and products (2003 - 2004)

Activities and products	Purpose and objectives
Consultations, seminars, presentations	Concept and project presentations to internal and external public, obtaining feed-back, identification of methods for cooperation and establishment of strategic partnerships.
Communication workshops and consultations	Training in the role of strategic communication, communication methods and techniques, strengthening personal communication skills, analysis and field communication planning, results following-up and efficiency evaluation
Information material	Overall graphic image, information sheets, website, a series of leaflets (22) aimed at creating a uniform and positive image of the Natura 2000 concept, and support provided for unified performance within different communication methods (Annex 6)
Support to non-governmental organizations	Calls for applications and other forms of cooperation with non-governmental organizations were intended to strengthen the role of various stakeholders and encourage their active participation in awareness rising as to the significance of nature conservation
Relations with media	Cooperation with media through press conferences and contributions, info maps and communication notes for media aimed at providing information to general public at the local and national level on the Natura 2000 concept, requirements and opportunities
Other	Along with the ongoing activities within the communication plan, a range of other internal and external communication activities of specialist and project groups and different performances were carried out

4.1.2. Results obtained by communication groups in the field

Six education and planning workshops were intended for training in communication, current following of the results, exchange of experience and issues that communicators deal with in the field and the preparation of draft communication plans for individual sites. The majority of communication groups achieved a substantial progress in the preparation of plans in terms of unambiguous identification of nature protection, communication issues and objectives as well as key stakeholders. The most important results of their activities include (situation on May 2004):

- > Good inter-institutional cooperation among IRSNC, CAFS and SFS;
- > Efficient team work of certain groups;
- > Continuous strategic and planned communication;
- > Successful implementation of communication plans, cases of good practice and establishing communicators' confidence in the rationality of their endeavouring;
- > Established new or close relations with local stakeholders (greater diversity).

Communication at the local level was organised in four circles (Annex 7). Pursuant to the data obtained by the submitted reports of communication groups or individuals, the following is a survey of areas and contacted communities by individual regional units of IRSNC (status of May 2004):

1. Regional office Maribor:

- > Designated areas (total 9, 5 implemented communication plans, 3 ongoing communication plans): the Mura, Boč, the Bistriški jarek, Kamnik-Savinja Alps and Eastern Karavanke, Goričko and Pohorje range, the Drava, the Dravinja, bat areas;
- > Contacted municipalities (52): Beltinci, Cankova, Črenšovci, Črna na Koroškem, Destričnik, Dobrovnik, Dravograd, Duplek, Gorišnica, Gornji Petrovci, Grad, Hajdina, Hodoš, Juršinci,

Kobilje, Križevci, Kuzma, Lendava, Ljutomer, Majšperk, Markovci, Maribor, Miklavž na Dravskem polju, Mislinja, Moravske Toplice, Murska Sobota, Muta, Ormož, Podlehnik, Podvelka, Ptuj, Puconci, Rače Fram, Radenci, Radlje ob Dravi, Razkrižje, Rogašovci, Ruše, Slovenska Bistrica, Starše, Sv. Ana, Sv. Jurij, Šalovci, Ščavnica, Tišina, Turnišče, Velika Polana, Veržej, Videm pri Ptuju, Vuzenica, Zavrč, Žetale;

2. Regional office Novo mesto:

> Designated areas (total 7, 4 implemented communication plans, *3 ongoing communication plans*): Dobrava-Jovski forests, Rumeni sleč, the Dobličica, the Lahinja, Kočevsko-Kolpa region, Šentjernej plain, bat areas;

> Contacted municipalities (14): Črnomelj, Kočevje, Ribnica, Kostel, Krško, Škocjan, Šentjernej, Brežice, Trebnje, Metlika, Žužemberk, Mirna Peč, Dolenjske Toplice, Novo mesto;

3. Regional office Celje:

> Designated areas (total 5, 3 implemented communication plans, *3 ongoing communication plans*): Boč, Kamnik-Savinja Alps and Eastern Karavanke, Goričko and Pohorje range, the Drava, the Dravinja, bat areas;

> Contacted municipalities (10): Rogaška Slatina, Šoštanj, Luče, Solčava, Slovenske Konjice, Šentjur pri Celju, Sevnica, Celje, Nazarje, Žalec;

4. Regional office Ljubljana:

> Designated areas (total 8, 3 implemented communication plans, *5 ongoing communication plans*): Strojanov breg, marshes Ljubljansko barje, Bloščica, Notranjska triangle, Snežnik plateau, Kočevsko-Kolpa region, Posavje Hills, bat areas;

> Contacted municipalities (8): Bloke, Škofljica, Vrhnika, Borovnica, Ig, Brezovica, Cerknica, Logatec;

5. Regional office Piran:

> Designated areas (total 7, 3 implemented communication plans, *4 ongoing communication plans*): Žusterna, Strunjan salt pans, Sv. Nikolaj, Sečovelje salt pans, Karst, the Dragonja, bat areas;

> Contacted municipalities (3): Koper, Izola, Piran;

6. Regional office Kranj:

> Designated areas (total 2, 2 implemented communication plans): Jelovica plateau, Kamnik-Savinja Alps and Eastern Karavanke (the Zelenci spring has also been designated as the Natura 2000 site, however, since the site is already protected through adequate management and communication, it has not been separately dealt with within the the Natura 2000 project by the group);

> Contacted municipalities (7): Bohinj, Bled, Radovljica, Železniki, Kranj, Preddvor, Jezersko;

7. Regional office Nova Gorica:

> Designated areas (total 9, 2 implemented communication plans, *7 ongoing communication plans*): the Nanoščica, Kobariški Stol-Planja, Nanos plateau-Trnovo forest, Banjšice plateau, Notranjska triangle, the Reka, Carst, Snežnik plateau, bat areas;

> Contacted municipalities (9): Postojna, Kobarid, Ajdovščina, Vipava, Nova Gorica, Pivka, Bovec, Hrpelje-Kozina, Cerkno;

8. Kozjansko Regional Park

> Contacted municipalities (3): Kozje, Podčetrtek, Bistrica ob Sotli;

9. The Škocjan Caves Regional Park
> Contacted municipality (1): Divača;

10. Triglav National Park

Other than with municipalities and many local communities, all groups communicated also with numerous key stakeholders within the given areas, in particular with: foresters, agricultural advisors, vets, hydrologists, regional development agencies, landowners and/or inhabitants, tourist societies, mountaineering societies, fisheries and hunting associations, general public. The results of their activities and responses of stakeholders are collected and recorded on the basis of short reports made by communication groups (Annex 8).

4.1.3. Training and planning

Within a year, six workshops (total 11 days) on basic communication were organized, the contents being of priority importance for the communicators' practical work: planning, organization and implementation of communication plans.

CONTENTS

Communication contents conveyed to participants at individual workshops encompass:

- > Group process facilitation, vision, SWOT analysis, creating a secure communication space, listening skills, ladder of group decision-making competences (Modra -communication and facilitation, ltd.)
- > Public participation processes, dynamics of group processes, interaction process, interpersonal communication (Ph. D. Miro Kline)
- > Public participation planning, planning for communication on Natura 2000, stakeholders' analysis, partnership in nature protection (Ph. D. Miro Kline)
- > Identification of a communication issue and communication objectives (Ph. D. Miro Kline)
- > Communication tools (Ph. D. Miro Kline)
- > Crisis communication, preparing for crisis situations, reactions, key role of communication (Ph. D. Miro Kline)
- > Communication and effective change management (Ph. D. Miro Kline)
- > Creation and management of Natura 2000 sites: Working with people (Ian Mitchell)
- > Communicating old burdens (Ph. D. Miro Kline)
- > Media relations (Manca Šetina Miklič)
- > Significance, role and goals of photography in communicating (Marko Simić)
- > Integrity and visualisation of processes (Modra-communication and facilitation, ltd.)
- > Systems thinking in change management - Nature management is change management (Ph. D. Miro Kline)
- > Professional behavior (Frits Hesselink)

Other contents presented:

- > Presentation of the Concept of Natura 2000, its contents and procedures (Ph. D. Peter Skoberne and M. Sc. Vesna Kolar Planinšič)
- > Presentation of the project for communication to support the overall Natura 2000 project (Manca Šetina Miklič)
- > Progress report on the project and plans (M.Sc. Vesna Kolar Planinšič)
- > Progress report on tasks of specialist group (Ph. D. Peter Skoberne)
- > Progress report on tasks of communication group (Manca Šetina Miklič, Branka Hlad, M. Sc. Breda Ogorelec)

- > Communication as a management tool - Eurosite Annual General Meeting Report (Martin Vernik)
- > The Matra pilot project as a model for communicating Natura 2000 (Tina Trampuš, Branka Hlad)
- > Presentation of results obtained by communication groups (Lara Jogan Polak, Tadeja Šubic, Hrvoje Oršanič, David Fučka, Simona Kaligarič, Matej Demšar)
- > Functioning of the selected communication model (Ph. D. Miro Kline)
- > Presentation of the Birds Directive provisions in respect of Natura 2000 (Andrej Bibič)
- > The selection method of proposals for SPA and communication (Luka Božič, Mateja Nose)
- > Amendments to the Nature Conservation Act (M. Sc. Jelka Kremesec Jevšenak)
- > Project as part of the process, and elements of the communication plan (Branka Hlad)
- > Regulation concerning compensatory payments in agriculture (Marta Hrustel Majcen)
- > Rules on financing and co-financing investments in forests (Maksimiljan Mohorič)
- > Measures to ensure a favourable conservation status of habitat types and species in the forest (M. Sc. Aleksander Golob)
- > Leaflets about the sites (M. Sc. Breda Ogorelec)
- > Evaluation of the Natura 2000 project (Ph. D. Miro Kline)
- > Basic biology of bats, importance of shelters in cultural heritage buildings (Primož Presetnik)
- > Threats and protection measures, protection of bats in cultural heritage buildings (Maja Zagmajster)
- > An overview of legal acts relevant for the protection of bats (Jana Kristanc)

The participants were given a certificate on training provided if they took part in at least three training sessions on theoretical communication.

PLANNING

Selection criteria for sites intended for communication:

- > In the 1st and 2nd circle, the areas selected were assessed to be relatively simple and undemanding in terms of the chosen communication method and existing communication capacities (number of co-workers, their competence, low-status position or absence of communication fields in the institutional system);
- > In the 3rd and 4th circle, the decision on communicating all SPA areas was made in view of the measures becoming applicable as soon as the legal status is obtained:
 - o Along with communicating SPA areas, the presentation covered also many pSCI sites which were entirely or partly included in SPA areas or they covered part of the land within the municipalities with which the communication was ongoing;
 - o Recommendation to link communication with ongoing LIFE projects (i.e. brown bear under the guidance of SFS (Slovenian Forest Service) which also provides for the communication strategy);
 - o Recommendation to link communication with the drawing up of new LIFE projects,
- > As far as possible uniform burdening of IRSN regional units;
- > Priority is given to identification of key stakeholders, mainly opinion leaders, as communication with all landowners viewed as a group of primary stakeholders is not feasible in such a short time period.

Based on monitoring the effects of existing knowledge and skills for strategic communication, training in this field and the results of implemented communication plans, we can summarize characteristic features common to the majority of local communication groups and/or some of them common also to the entire process at both (also national) levels. In general, these features directed the course of individual consultations. In view of their main purpose, each group had to examine in detail the specific contents of individual areas and related specific issues as regards the identification of key stakeholders or opinion leaders, their ranking by significance and method of communicating with them. The consultations focused on addressing specific issues, providing feedback: what is efficient, effective, and ineffective and how to simplify and specify communication objectives, strategy and tactics. Concurrently, the

consultations were also an immediate training session (based on the concept 'learning by doing').

1) Content-related features:

- > **Being well acquainted with the site**, practical professional issues and conditions as well as with the stakeholders in the local area;
- > Too vague and **oversimplified analysis of issues and objectives**; achieving abstract objectives is difficult, expected results of communication plans are vague and unspecified;
- > **Specific identification of issues and objectives** and their classification in terms of nature protection and related communication objectives dealt with at individual consultations was primarily on the starting points:
 - o What is the **subject of designation** in respect of Natura 2000 areas (species, habitats) and what are the threats encountered by the discussed species and habitats according to ecological requirements and other reasons);
 - o Specific identification of **causes and consequences** related to the issues providing a basis for nature protection and communication objectives and classification of stakeholders by their significance;
- > **Specific identification and clarity of the contents of the communication plan** (subject being Natura 2000 rather than a protected area or overall nature protection) resulted in significant simplification of mostly abstract and over demanding, too exhaustive and therefore unfeasible communication plans;
- > Communicators often classified media, schools and general public **among primary stakeholders**, which is not the case in communication strategy classifying them as secondary or tertiary stakeholders¹².
- > **A substantial progress in terms of quality was made in drawing up communication plans** in the 3rd communication circle (at the beginning of 2004); consequently the subject, issues and objectives became clearer, more focused and simplified, strategy and tactics more feasible and the achieved results more evident.
- > In the 4th communication circle, **an increased tendency to look for shortcuts in drawing up the communication plans** was noted. Establishing a formal standard form in drawing the plan without thorough and concerted consideration of the essentials of the plan and expected results, which is imperative since each environment is specific and there are no single recipes for communication.

2) Organizational features:

- > **Overall graphic image** (logotype, business printed matter, transparency bases, leaflet image and other carriers of visual communications) was designed and financed with the purpose of creating positive image of the project or process and the overall concept of **Natura 2000 in Slovenia** (examples given in Annex 6), being of supra-institutional significance:

- o Uniform graphic image and contents of communication documents and aids contributed to the recognisability of Natura 2000 (substantial contribution in this regard was made by the improved interpretation capability of individual members of communication groups for which the preparation of

¹² None of these stakeholder groups is able to address current issues since suitable instruments for this purpose are missing. Issues and conflict of interests are not best addressed through media; the same goes for radical changing of attitude and behaviour patterns of people and developing a social consensus. However, media are indispensable in providing information to general public, highlighting the issues, encouraging discussions and exercising pressure on politics and industry, encouraging people to act when their standpoint on a certain issue is clear. General public is an abstract group that does not necessarily hold power to act in spite of their awareness. Schools are a target group through which communicators influence parents and not a group focused on when they want to change the behaviour of pupils and their teachers in the long-term.

short and concise presentations to key stakeholders was rendered easier);

o Uniform overall image of the concept and/or Natura 2000 project, facilitated its use also to both partner organizations, namely Slovenian Forest Service and Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia. The requirement to use the graphic image of the Institute of the RS for Nature Conservation for presentations transformed the promotion of the project as a whole towards promotion of organization and fragmented the image of the Natura 2000 as a common process.

> **Affirming Natura 2000 as a priority** in the Slovenian nature conservation system has strengthened up the hierarchy according to the opinion of groups (in particular nature conservationists)

o There is no programme of further activities on the Natura 2000 project (follow-up to stage 1), which would indicate the vision and direction for the implementation of suitable activities;

o Individual collaborators faced the problem of perception by their superiors complaining that too much time and energy have been invested in the implementation of communication plans and consequently, their regular obligations were being neglected.

> **Contractual obligations** of MESPE and their strategic partners CAFS and SFS were not clearly communicated to the appointed co-workers in the field of agriculture and forestry, in particular allocation of their time; contractual relation has formally defined professional work and due to vaguely defined framework, many were of the opinion that they perform their tasks as a hobby rather than a contractual obligation;

> The effectiveness of the communication activities was conditional upon the **identification of individuals and/or groups with the project** and upon the awareness that due to the commitments to the EU, Natura 2000 as a nature protection task had to be given priority, which is contrary to some rare cases of a formal technocratic approach to implementing communication tasks where the motivation for achieving effective results appeared to be less strong.

Appropriate internal communication is a pre-condition for effective external communication.

There are two essential directions of communication:

a) Horizontal:

> **Inter-institutional cooperation of IRSNP, SFS and CAFS is estimated by the majority of groups:**

o As a major success of the Natura 2000 project on the grounds of cooperation among practitioners from different fields within the framework of common interests and in addressing the issues in the same area;

o Closer cooperation of nature conservation, agriculture and forestry introduces new quality in a routine work process;

o Certain regular activities in the field of agriculture and forestry (e.g. set of lectures) cover also provision of information on Natura 2000 and its integration into the sector activities;

> Cooperation between the communication and expert group:

o According to the communicators, the activities in the 1st and 2nd circle were rendered difficult by delays in delivering expert bases; data on ecological requirements of species, and consequently potential measures, were deficient, yet essential for defining communication contents and planning of priority communication activities;

o Data on land ownership and basic information on management plans are also essential for the communication group since they provide a basis for a long-term vision of action in the Natura 2000 sites;

o Participation of an expert group representative in briefing the communication groups about species and ecological requirements is imperative, among other things also to deal with the following common

questions of external stakeholders: What will be the conservation regimes? Are there any funds allocated for this purpose and what are they for? What are the implications for the landowners? Answers to these questions mainly derive from ecological requirements and appropriate activities for maintaining a favourable conservation status;

> **Efficient team work** that certain groups managed to set up, brought out better communication results (internal and external) as it was expected; the submitted communication plans clearly indicated:

- o whether the outcome was made by an individual (the contribution of group members were merely provided as their comments on the outcome) or by a group (group members clarified relevant issues, drew-up communication plans together, achieved a consensus on all items of the plan and divided their roles and tasks as regard its implementation);
- o if the internal communication among the groups was satisfactory and the pre-conditions for efficient and effective group work were met, the effective implementation of the plan was carried out.. These qualities were: such as a qualified team leader¹³, clearly defined roles and tasks of members, efficient strategy and communication tactics set out;
- o Evaluation of success and failure factors of team work is the field, which needs to be strengthened since it enables greater efficiency of further activities.

b) Vertical:

> **Ministerial leadership (Minister, Secretary, Undersecretary):**

- o The Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy in principle agreed with the proposed communication model, however, it used the communication as a tool within a limited scope (downward the hierarchy and horizontally among the Government Ministries), which resulted in a limited level of support to the overall project;

> **Project leadership:**

- o Management rules, transparency of roles and tasks assumed by all project collaborators as well as the support to all holders of activity may ensure greater efficiency of the established system as well as reduce the barriers to achieve the success.
- o Communication groups in the field were given numerous signals (real issues in the real life of people), which the project leadership should have considered and addressed more seriously. Often, these were about systemic issues and it is the communication task of the Ministry to deal with them in cooperation with other Government Ministries (e.g. tax relieves on the protected areas, improved active integration of Natura 2000 into the regional development, inter-ministerial seeking for other systemic solutions as win-win solutions);
- o A clarification of the framework for communicating the areas of existing (paper) parks without managers (eg. the Lahinja River) or parks under establishment (e.g. the Snežnik regional park) and providing answers to stakeholders who are confused by the fact that these areas are not undergoing any activities and that they are not familiar with the role they can play in this regard (problems with old burdens);
- o A flow of relevant information to communication groups is to be more accurate since this concerns the implementation of common policy at different levels and it is particularly for the purpose of field communication that the directions and solutions developed at the highest levels (consistency and avoidance to controversial information which are likely to generate different interpretations and assumptions, and consequently, possible conflicts in the field) are to be well-known.
- o The same goes for communicating stakeholders' responses at the national level (ministerial policies reflect in the field, therefore they provide an important clear-sighted framework within which the communication groups are to act);
- o Similar planned communication with key stakeholders at the local level should be applied also to the communication with ministries at the national level, which would result in the increased synergistic effects between vertical and horizontal levels.

¹³ A bureaucratic or 'top-down' delegation by a team leader with whom communicators occasionally meet may have a limited effect and does not always work. It is deceptive to expect that everyone has personal characteristics and/or proper qualifications to assume the role of a leader and not every person is comfortable with this role. Therefore a team-leading issue is of great importance since the effective team performance and achieved results depend on the personality and/or qualification of the team leader.

> **'Middle and top management'** (heads of organizational units and directors of participating organizations) should take a more active role in the project, since they are decision-makers within their organizations or regional units, delegate work to their subordinates and allocate the time required for a certain task to be carried out:

- o Consent to the vision (and thus to project significance) and concerted action on the part of 'middle and top management' enables undisturbed performance of subordinates with a view to achieving the objectives agreed upon and also ensures that objectives and expected results are defined more clearly.
- o 'Top management' alliances among individual organizations with regard to common interests and dealing with potential conceptual issues facilitate elimination of content-related and procedural doubts within the framework of project implementation or contractual obligations among strategic partners;
- o Necessary support to subordinates in terms of providing adequate atmosphere and assistance ensures communication on the ground to be more effective.

c) Characteristics of stakeholder management:

> In some cases, it is the **size of the area** that imposes a more demanding communication level and the need to develop new communication approaches (e.g. division into smaller parts, cooperation of professional mediators, cooperation of crisis management experts);

> **Contacts with local stakeholders** (municipalities, local communities and other key stakeholders and opinion leaders) were established in some parts, strengthened and intensified in other parts, which was the result of proper informing and systematic development of the platform for further cooperation (some local communities expressed a substantial interest in favour of Natura 2000, e.g. municipalities of Preddvor, Komen, Črnomelj and other);

> **Evaluation** of results based on communication was too poor, mainly in terms of summarizing key starting points for communication within the framework of public participation in the forthcoming process for the implementation of management obligations on the areas.

Individual consultations were carried out according to different needs, of the groups and based on:

- > encouraging better internal communication in groups;
- > focusing group members on essential elements of communication plans;
- > providing guidance to group members to specify abstract or simplify too complicated and unfeasible communication plans according to communication objectives set in the 1st stage of the project;
- > facilitating individual consultations with regard to the identification of opinion leaders, selection or drawing up of the strategy and tactics as well as the evaluation of performance and results, conveying messages through written communication and other communication issues.

4.2. Compliance with the project assignment and financial report

Communication was performed fairly in compliance with milestones set in the Natura 2000 project. Planned tasks of the communication group are referred to in Table 2 (detailed review of tasks of core and broader communication group is provided in Annex 9).

Table 2: Implementation of communication tasks in compliance with the project

No	Task	Expected result	Implementation & proposals
24	Preliminary identification of key sectors and influential groups Definition of the approach to individual key sectors and influential	Plan of communication with ministries and key persons, being a constituent element of the project.	Indicative, insufficiently specified plan. <i>The model to be applied in the future is the one</i>

	groups in terms of contents and status position of persons/organizations.		<i>introduced at the local level.</i>
25	Acquainting individual sectors and influential groups at the state level with the proposed special protection areas and conservation measures. Coordination with them in compliance with the communication plan for the state level.	At the state level, there is no major opposition to the designation of special protection areas.	Insufficient and delayed participation of some sectors in the process. <i>In future, internal communication with sectors, such as spatial planning and water management etc., is to be strengthened.</i>
29	Determining and organizing the approach to individual key influential groups and to decision-makers in terms of contents and status position of persons/organizations.	Plan for communicating with decision-makers, key influential groups and key persons	Indicative, insufficiently specified plan. <i>The model to be applied in the future is the one introduced at the local level.</i>
30	Acquainting individual key influential groups and decision-makers at the local level with the proposed special protection areas, conservation measures and mechanisms for guidance and promotion of the development in accordance with communication plan for the local level.	Providing reliable and proper information at the local level in accordance with the communication plan for the local level.	85 % of communication plans implemented within the given deadline. <i>In the future, active participation of internal management structures is to be enhanced in order to ensure increased implementation and strengthen internal communication and consultations.</i>
31	Drawing up the documents on Natura 2000 providing basis for education.	Documents with key facts about Natura 2000 and its implementation within the EU and cases of good practice.	Implementation in accordance with the plan.
32	Additional training of the basic group (constitutes a part of the internal presentation of methods with reference to task 1 and 2)	Members of group I qualified for conveying the key knowledge on Natura 2000, uniform consideration of special protection areas and unified external communication.	Insufficient cooperation between the expert and communication group as regards definition of the common subject matter and joint data with respect to the progress of the project. <i>The cooperation of both groups to be further strengthened as to develop a common apprehension of the contents and measures.</i>
33	Education of nature protection target groups (employed with MESPE, Environmental Agency,	Nature protection target group qualified for presentations of key contents on Natura 2000	Training was carried out mainly in the form of workshops, consultations and meetings with the expert group I.

	IRSNC (excluding those participating in the selection of areas), Triglav National Park, Kozjansko Regional Park, Škocjan Caves Regional Park).	within the process of presentation and coordination at the local level.	<i>Mutual exchange of data on achieved results, issues and stakeholders' responses to be further enhanced.</i>
34	Rising awareness of target groups to obtain expected positive attitude towards Natura 2000 (e.g. water management sector - Environmental Agency, MESPE, SFS, Fisheries Research Institute etc.). Awareness rising is developed by means of workshops (based on adequate material).	Target groups comprehend the Natura 2000 concept and they integrate it into current activities (drawing up of plans for the natural source management).	Rising awareness of external stakeholders took place within communication of local communication groups and communication at inter-ministerial level. <i>For the successful implementation of the undergoing task involving sectors of this and other Ministries, it is essential that the own Ministry develop the vision on priority integration areas and support it with actual initiatives to organise meetings with sectors of other Ministries.</i>

Outstanding activities and initiatives

- > Production of small promotional material based on the overall graphic image;
- > Publication of the proposed areas with simplified descriptions on the website;
- > Internal presentation to sectors within the Environmental Agency, IRSESP [Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for the Environment and Spatial Planning](with branch offices in regional units);
- > Presentation of results and plans to CAFS and AAS [Agricultural Advisory Service];
- > Presentations to forest management companies;
- > Presentation at the expert meeting SIP - Slovenian Space (participation of the Minister!);
- > Presentation to the Farmland and Forest Fund:
 - o Presentation of sites to staff after the proposal is submitted to the Government;
 - o Hand over the sites as digital layer (enabling identification of sites that fall in with areas under the Fund's ownership).
- > Initiative of communicators to organize excursions to the Natura 2000 areas in the neighbouring Austria; the interest in content-related cooperation was previously expressed by WWF;
- > Communicators' initiative for drawing up a handbook for ecological requirements of species for forester, agricultural counsellors and nature protectionists and a subsequent multiplication in the field of regional development, economy, transport and tourism;
- > Initiative for the external evaluation of project management and implementation ('management review' with independent assessment, indicators of success and failure, what to support, what to change and what to eliminate);
- > Enhanced integration of communicating Natura 2000 and preparation and implementation of LIFE-Natura projects;
- > Completion of the project and cases of good practice as an opportunity to promote Natura 2000 (also in national media);
- > Conference on the cooperation between nature protection and tourism. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia offered to organize it, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Economy; the conference would be organized for tourist organizations and municipalities, presentation of Slovenian cases of good practice pointing at the economic potential of the

Natura 2000 and other protected areas as well as available EU financial mechanisms for such development of local economy;

- > A programme or project for the implementation of both Directives, at least for a short- and medium-term period; the so far communication results may facilitate the management of these areas;
- > Initiative on the part of the Society of Foresters from the Koroška region for consultation (postponed to September 2004);
- > Managers of protected areas already implement the conservation regimes and manage the areas; therefore they are given priority in upgrading communicating activities and integrating protection into social-economic development and in establishing closer partnerships in the local environment; such upgrading within the project was not effected.

Costs of communicating the Natura 2000 project

The overview of budget funds expenditure for communicating Natura 2000 in 2003 and 2004, provided by the Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy as well as the Environmental Agency is given in Table 3.

Table 3: The overview of indicative costs by individual communication activities

Activity	Amounts in SIT			
	Item	2003	Item	2004
Overall graphic image of Natura 2000 - maps, general information leaflets, presentation forms, press etc.	(MESPE)	977,837		
Specific site eaflets (design, layout and press)	(Environmental Agency)	2,724,451	(MESPE)	5,452,430
Other info toolkit and services (CD, website, multiplication)	(Environmental Agency)	1,472,524	(MESPE)	1,652,889
Call for tenders for non-governmental organizations	(MESPE)	6,400,000	(MESP)	5,730,000
Excursions of communicators	(MESPE)	55,000		-
Organization of workshops and consultations	(Environmental Agency)	1,664,336	(MESPE)	1,459.968
Organization of local communication activities	(Environmental Agency)	381,950	(MESPE)	275,571
Advisory service on communication	(Environmental Agency)	7,680,000	(MESPE)	5,685,120
CAFS Contract - communication	(Environmental Agency)	4,316,629	(MESPE)	4,532,460
SFS Contract - communication	(Environmental Agency)	6,200,000	(MESPE)	6,200,000
Total		31,872,727		30,835,549
TOTAL 2003-2004		62,708,275		

5. EVALUATION OF WORK AND COMMUNICATION RESULTS OF NATURA 2000

5.1. Evaluation platform

Any activity evaluation or assessment is basically measuring of achievements in relation to what had been planned and defined before the action commenced. Therefore, we based our

evaluation of the Natura 2000 communication results on the following main suppositions:

- > Project's communication objectives were set realistically and defined appropriately;
- > Communication activity programme was properly planned;
- > Level of funds allocated to this activity was adequate to the estimated difficulty level of the (communication) problem faced by the examined organization.

Prior to any evaluation, the following questions should be answered:

- > What can be measured and evaluated as the outcome of performed activity?
- > Which is (are) the feasible and adequate method(s) to be used in the given case?
- > What is the purpose of assessment resulting from the evaluation?

To a large extent, answers to those questions define the most suitable approach to evaluation in a given situation. In case of Natura 2000, the project results cannot be quantified yet since at present they are not tangible in the behaviour of individual stakeholders. When evaluating we must therefore predominantly rely on the quality assessments of indirect effects of communication. We take into consideration that the evaluation's primary goal is to control effectiveness of earlier work with the aim of improving critical drawbacks of the implemented communication programme. Consequently, the following text places stronger stress on all proven drawbacks; especially because the concept of performed communication action was conceived as a **'learning organization'** model and the action in the field of communication largely based on the idea of **'learning by doing'**, which by nature requires quality feedback.

Evaluation of the first stage of the Natura 2000 project activities, in total duration of a year and a half, should be perceived from micro and macro point of view. This chapter first follows such approach, which in the conclusion enables to summarize basic instructions for future work on the project to the end of 2004 and to give some suggestions given for the long-term future action. As to the nature protection, Natura 2000 has become one of the underlying foundations for a significant number of future decisions and activities concerning nature protection. Following are three types of assessments together with their evaluations attempting to find critical success factors:

1. Macro effects of the approach used in the Natura 2000 project;
2. Performance assessment of the overall communication and every set of individual supporting activities;
3. Joint assessment of attaining the defined basic communication goal of Natura 2000;
4. Analysis of potential critical factors in successful communication.

5.2. Effects of the applied project approach

Foreign experts suggested proactive approach to the introduction of Natura 2000 in Slovenia. Such approach was a novelty in the functioning of the Ministry and lead to positive effects and results, which we estimate as favourable. They are also significant because they had substantive influence on the success of communication, within this project understood as a combination of verbal, visual and behavioural messages. We indicate only two most outstanding positive effects:

1. Focusing on stakeholders – acknowledgement of different individuals in the decision-making process always facilitates the process and enhances acceptability of decisions. The result was also favourable in case of Natura 2000 and enabled, to a large extent, the communication process itself.
2. Activating the entire (internal) network of experts – division of the entire communication group into smaller autonomous groups responsible for various areas and active work with them resulted in:
 - > Increased motivation for working on the project;

- > Relatively strong identification of group members with the project and the idea, as well as with the individual proposed and executed activity on the ground;
- > Concurrent training and concrete pursuit of activities contributed to swift development of new competences (communication, change management, ...) providing the essential basis for successful implementation of the project.

5.3. Communication performance assessment on the basis of partial assessments

As the first level in the evaluation of communication results of Natura 2000, we have chosen the analytical approach of partial assessments regarding particular action components and their potential impact on the final result. Table 3 shows all partial assessments for the two selected activities and their respective variables used for the evaluation. They were obtained by examining various available materials, reports of individual communication group members and systematic expert observation of the project implementation itself.

Table 3: Assessment of individual project variables

Activity/result	Assessment score 1-5		Joint assessment
1. Organization			2
o Formal	+		
o Informal	+++		
1.1. Designing the project	+++		
1.2. Work organization	++		
1.3. Training and education	+++		
o Acquisition of new knowledge	+++		
o Improvement of skills	++		
o Development of competences	+++		
o Team work	+		
1.4. Decision-making process	+		
2. Communication / performance			2/3
2.1. Adequacy of defined objectives			
2.2. Internal communication			
o Formal	+		
o Informal	++++		
o Vertical	+		
o Horizontal	++		
o Inter-sectoral	++		
2.3. External	++		
o Extensiveness	+++		
o Efficiency	+++		
PR activities	+++		
Group appearances in public	++++		
o Structuring / plans implementation	+++		
o Supporting materials	++++		
o Internet support	+++		
o Completion of public appearances	+++		
o Interpersonal communication	++++		
2.4. Funds allocated to communication	+		
3. Objective results			

o Number of areas dealt with			30
o Number of municipalities			107
o Percentage of state territory designated as NATURA 2000			35%
o Number of complaints sent to Brussels			No data available!
JOINT ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION EFFICIENCY			
o Attained level of acceptability among stakeholders			3/4

Following is the short interpretation of the results from Table 3 in respect of identified key drawbacks of the communication process.

5.3.1. Organization of the project

Organization and project management are two **weakest links** within the overall process of preparing and implementing the Natura 2000 project. It is however obvious that this is not only the weakness of this project, but also a general systemic phenomenon characteristic of new administration structure. Due to motivation of the vast majority of working group members this shortcoming is often overlooked at first glance. The fact remains, though, that many tasks consume too much time and energy, more than needed, which is in consequence revealed as decreased efficiency of communication itself.

The most critical components of the organization are as follows:

- > Formal organization;
- > Teamwork;
- > Decision-making process; and
- > Internal communication.

These are also the issues that must be gradually redressed during the continuation of the project. Not only to increase project efficiency, but also to strengthen the operation of entire nature protection sector and the Ministry of Environment as a whole.

5.3.2. Communication performance

We must address the communication process in its entirety, as made up of **internal and external** as well as **formal and informal** part of communication. We, thus, follow the basic action premise, which was founded on thesis that project communication performance on external market – in public – depended largely on internal (managerial and organizational) communication and hence organization itself. Here as well, joint assessment score is rather high, again due to good work of the communicators themselves, predominantly performed as informal rather than formal communication. At least partly, this is due to the fact that on the other hand inadequate level of formal and vertical communication is perceived within internal as well as inter-ministerial operations.

Critically low scores appear only in the following areas:

- > Formal communication;
- > Absence of vertical flow of information of any kind;
- > Underestimated amount allocated to this part of the project.

All three said weaknesses are related to the previously mentioned critical point ‘decision-making process’ and represent lack of adequate support to project by top management at ministerial level, but also at the level of individual regional units of the Institute of the RS for

Nature Conservation. The latter also results from divergent workload regarding various projects and activities on the part of the ministries.

5.3.3. Objective results of communication / action

As a rule, evaluation anticipates that the attained result is considerably a consequence of activity carried out. In this case, this means that we assess communication and organization of the project from the viewpoint of their impact on results attained during less than a year and a half since the beginning of the project implementation. Insofar as the results shown in Table 3 are considered, we can be extremely satisfied, especially regarding the risks due to the fact that a large percentage of state territory is designated as Natura 2000 sites (32 %) and much of them are to be still communicated (30 of 268 were communicated on the basis of specific communication plans) and numerous municipalities (107/183) in which communication activities were carried out. Subjective assessment concerning the level acceptance of Natura 2000 concept (according to communicators' assessments based on their contacts with various stakeholders) is relatively high. This fact was confirmed, amongst other, by the results of analysis of generated media publicity.

However, one must recall the fact that so far communication has been limited mainly to familiarisation with basic information on Natura 2000. Henceforth, following the adoption of the legal act, the situation will change substantially, since the main communication task will be to motivate chosen stakeholders to maintain the attained status by using different modes of (co-)decision-making and cooperation related to the sustainable development approach and logic. Therefore, it is logical to expect a higher degree of opposition.

5.3.4. Joint assessment of communication performance

Joint assessment featuring to support the Natura 2000 project reveals a relatively high communication performance, particularly if we take into account certain critically low assessment scores for individual components shown in Table 3. Apparently, its communication effects are satisfactory. At this stage, it is not yet possible to assess its impact on the behaviour of stakeholders, mainly because a year and a half is too short a period to reach tangible changes in individual stakeholders' behaviour. These should be determined at the national level as well as at particular most critical areas of Natura 2000 after one year and henceforward every year.

Regardless of the foregoing, we may conclude that the bases for further work in the field of communication are sound. They provide not only for the idea of Natura 2000 to be asserted, but also for the upgrading, asserting and strengthening of the very concept and profession of nature conservation. The latter might be the most significant added value of the work carried out so far by all members of expert and communication group.

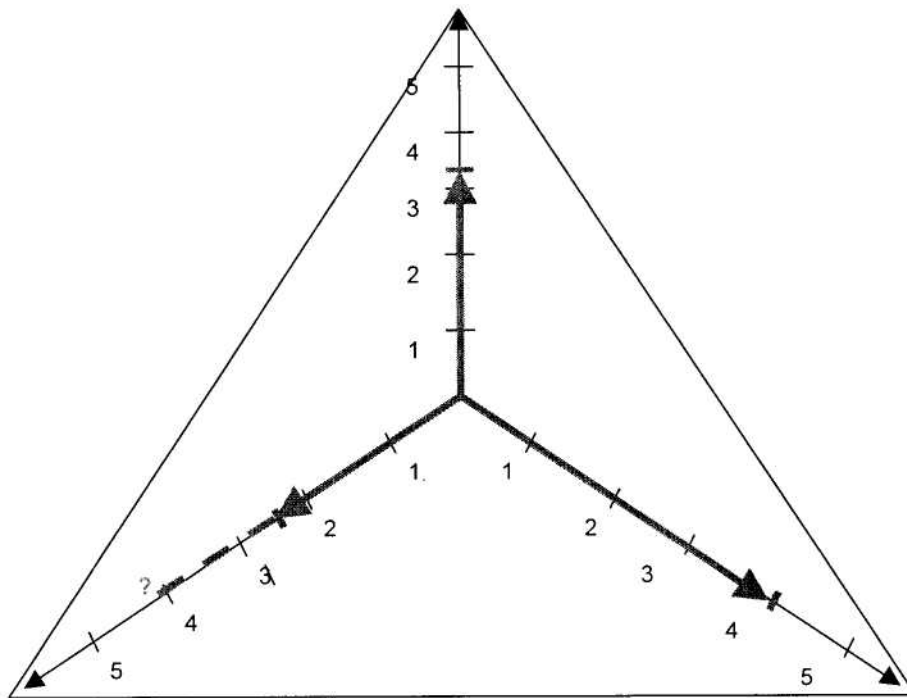
5.4. Joint assessment concerning the attainment of basic project goal

The result of communication effectiveness presented above does not show the outcome of action oriented towards attaining the defined basic goal of the Natura 2000 project. Namely, the basic goal was defined as **'attain the satisfactory acceptability level of Natura 2000 idea'**. This means that all modes of communication must be used to disseminate most basic information and to establish first contacts. This is a starting point to build relationship with local community within particular area, which is composed of similar stakeholders groups having, however, different priorities and expectations. It must be stressed that communication always involves behaviour (!) of each member of the project group as well as of the respective

institutions. That is to say, the aforementioned jointly influences the process of aggregating the notions of individual stakeholders and is, finally, recognised as social acceptability of the Natura 2000 idea at the national level.

Picture 1: Assessments on individual triangle dimensions of relations with community in all designated Natura 2000 sites

DOING THINGS RIGHT = reputation (of profession/team/projects)



DOING THE RIGHT THINGS

- Preserve nature status
- Initiate appropriate development initiatives

I (WE) FEEL GOOD*

(co-workers identification)

The attained level of overall joint assessment of work on the Natura 2000 project is shown in Picture 1 as the established level of balance between three key factors creating relationship with local communities and thus indirectly with whole society:

- > Doing things right – acquired reputation of individual team, profession and project,
- > I (we) feel good – attained level of members' identification with the project; and
- > Doing the right things– for all community members, every individual and society as a whole.

Picture 1 displays that the project has attained an adequate high quality of work – **‘doing things right’** (expert and communication fields). This is dependent on the existing level of expertise and development of new, additional competences in the communication field. Thus, contribution was made in strengthening reputation of every individual member, his group, the entire Natura 2000 project and nature conservation profession. Such result is undoubtedly a solid basis for further development of the project and the promotion of entire profession, having in closed loop a favourable impact on greater effectiveness of communicating the

Natura 2000 idea.

For this very fact, the results are then reflected in a very high assessment score of the dimension **'I feel well'** and/or work satisfaction level of the project members, the entire working group. This is primarily mirrored as a high identification level of majority team members and of entire communication groups with the project. With enhanced cooperation of project management it is possible and imperative to use this situation to strengthen motivation for further quality work. The latter will become an essential component of the management of crisis situations that are altogether usual within as complex project as Natura 2000.

We assessed the third factor in the model as reaching halfway point. The assessment is not high, even though the so far expressed opposition to the project by the stakeholders has been minimal, except for the specific stakeholders groups with manifested specific interests. The apparent fact is that they grasped the idea and the Natura 2000 project as work well accomplished (**'doing the right things'**) for them and entire community. Time was too short to allow the development of more than just a few initial foundations to build relationships with particular local community (various stakeholders). More can be accomplished only through a long-term relationship building, i.e. through work carried out over next few years.

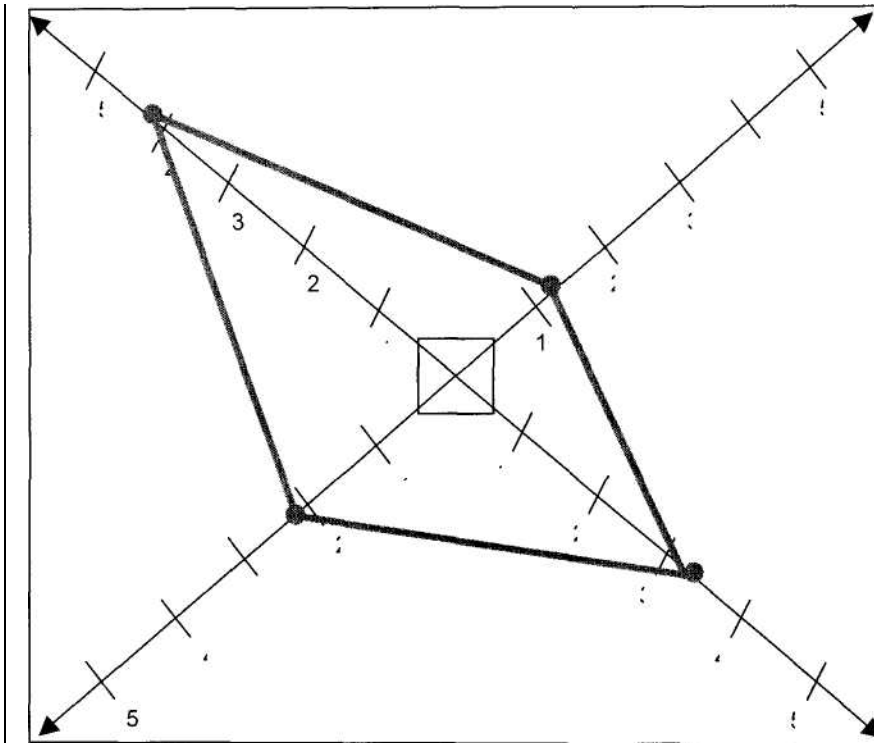
5.5. Analysis and assessment of critical factors for communication performance

Due to great complexity of the project and its novelty to all participants and organization as a whole, the major part of preparations for the implementation was aimed at developing competences necessary to prepare and implement the Natura 2000 project. Therefore, communication performance can best be evaluated by using the concept of 'organizational learning effectiveness' at this stage. Institutional learning always requires an efficient conversation process, namely communication within organization itself. Consequently, it is essential to assess the quality of internal communication as a key precondition to start the project as well as to further implement it.

To demonstrate the internal results of the Natura 2000 project work we used the 'organization learning square'. Picture 2 indicates four relevant basic organizational factors hampering and promoting learning, guiding and implementing strategic decisions; respective assessment scores are graphically displayed. Strategic decisions are understood as a system of activities, objectives and policies jointly influencing long-term competitive advantage, existence of the project or its basic idea and the institution implementing the project.

1. MULTIDIMENSIONAL OBJECTIVES

2. SHARED VISION



4. USE OF TACIT KNOWLEDGE

3. CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Picture 2: Results of communication support to Natura 2000 project shown in learning square of the project group – its teams and individual communicators

5.5.1. Multiple objectives

Complexity of the problem dealt with and its long-term orientation required the definition of numerous and intertwined objectives. As for the overall project, its objectives were defined in rather general terms; they were much more precise and defined for each specific communicated area. For the time being, it is possible to check their attainment at global level only, since too few detailed empirical data is available. As yet, evaluation of the outcome remains merely at qualitative level. We estimate that group members made a substantial quality shift in communication due to numerous objectives realized in the field of competence development of individual communicators.

5.5.2. Shared vision

Basically, members of the extended project group followed rather diverse presumptions, nevertheless they comprehend the basic aim of the project well. The assessment on this dimension is still rather low because we estimate that for the time being communication group members differ considerably, notably regarding various possible ways to realize the idea of Natura 2000 itself. In addition, significant number of members has not comprehended yet that the Natura 2000 in fact provides basis for their future professional, occupational as well as institutional work. This situation is a result and at the same time indirect evidence of the previously mentioned weaknesses in internal communication within the entire organization. To develop a stronger unified vision among group members it is essential to provide for the improvement of all communication modes within the organization, project group and individual teams responsible for each selected site. **The management must communicate**

the vision of Natura 2000 more consistently and systematically, first internally and then externally as well.

5.5.3. Continuous learning

In this case, we regard the project work as continual learning of all project members. This is a continuing activity improving members' work on following Natura 2000 sites in which communication is carried out by the same or slightly differently structured group of communicators. A high level was achieved in respect of continuous improvement of work, pursuit of activities and faster adaptation to environment and new circumstances in which specific group and the entire project functioned. Irrespective of such good score, we have to emphasize that the process must be further improved to prevent dangerous rigidity resulting from the self-satisfaction with the achieved level of competences. Notwithstanding the achieved, training and education must continue in the field of work with stakeholders and particularly in participative management, which does not function without communication.

5.5.4. Use of implicit (tacit) knowledge

The Natura 2000 project used a substantial portion of the so far non-articulated knowledge of individual members. Thus, it showed the importance of teamwork, which has not been an established practice in nature conservation up to the present. Tacit knowledge means relevant knowledge possessed or generated by individuals in the process of project implementation. We speak about the knowledge that was not articulated or set up in the functioning of individual members although they had already gained it. This very knowledge, combined with the development of new competences in the field of systematic communication, proved to be a sound basis for successful fieldwork, contacts and for establishing relationships with selected stakeholders groups. Again, a fact must be noted that all this is insufficient for the long-term Natura 2000 project success. It is essential to provide for further development of the existing and new competences of every project group member. This is the only approach to ensure further enhancement of communication performance. As a prerequisite element of interactive, participative work with selected stakeholders groups it will contribute to successful work in the field of nature protection.

5.6. Final assessment

We have assessed the work of communication group on the Natura 2000 project to be good, though we recorded numerous comments and weaknesses through the evaluation process. The most significant value of the work performed so far is the high level of motivation of individual members who are linked up to a well-structured network of collaborators and their identification with the project. The high level was reached due to the fact that members succeeded in using and asserting their tacit knowledge in contacts with other group members and stakeholders on the ground. They strongly tied all these attributes to further development of their competences rendered possible by the applied approach 'learning by doing'.

The attained level of work efficiency (communication) probably shows a real current situation. At the same time, we perceive that a sound basis is established for a possible quick leap to substantially higher performance level. By doing so, it is necessary to ensure the fulfilment of following conditions:

- > Enhancing involvement of the management in the project – to unify the vision, define the mission, take available opportunities to communicate them etc;
- > Improving the process of internal communication, first of all at the level of entire organization and to a lesser degree at the level of individual field teams;

- > Stronger, systematic external environment support – to ensure systematic publicity at the national level;
- > Accepting participative management as a basic guidance for activity in a sensitive and important field of nature protection.

6. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGING AND COMMUNICATING NATURA 2000

The summary of recommendations for managing and communicating Natura 2000 brings forward few key instructions to be taken into account when planning and implementing next stages of the Natura 2000 project. They are recorded as short theses; two tables sum up a rather extensive material presented in Annex 10 to the Report on the implementation of the first stage of the project.

Even the professional work of utmost quality in the field of nature conservation, and Natura 2000 as well, needs effective communication support, which is the only means to attain the needed level of attention and acceptability.

The second stage of the Natura 2000 project has to be founded on the chain concept ‘listen-communicate-follow responses’ of all stakeholders involved in the overall nature conservation system and in each defined nature protection area separately.

Fundamental premise of the next stage of the project shall be the use of change management concept that indicates the planning of targeted intervention supported by communication, involving stakeholders in the management process of each Natura 2000 area.

In terms of successful action, a constant dialogue with and between stakeholders is required to reduce potential conflicts. If conflicts occur, it is necessary to start immediately with conciliation by using crisis communication principles. In such case, previously established dialogue enables normal continuation of communication and its intensification. Otherwise, the conflict may only be solved through mediation and other similar procedures.

Nature protection management depends largely on the attained quality level of supporting communication within and outside organization(s), because this implies change management through modifying behaviour of individual stakeholders.

Indicative proposal for upgrading the communication strategy and substance concepts of the second stage of Natura 2000 project is shown in Table 1. As such, it represents a potential outline based on achievements and difficulties of the project’s first stage; it is necessary to upgrade it to allow successful continuation.

Logical framework draft of the second stage of Natura 2000 project pools experiences from the first stage and adds amendments necessary to commence the implementation of management processes and related communication (Table 2).

Natura 2000 is a concept whose objectives contribute not only to the establishment and conservation of species and habitat types of the European ecological network but also provide concrete input as regards compliance with other requirements of the EU legislation as well – e.g. Water Framework Directive – and other global international agreements – e.g. Convention on Biological Diversity, Ramsar convention, Aarhus convention etc. Therefore, the success in attaining Natura 2000 objectives is reflected and/or examined in global nature conservation and in environmental frame of each country and the European Union as a whole.

Table 1:

Survey of differences in terms of content as regards individual communication strategy sets during the first and second stage of the Natura 2000 project.

Communication strategy during the first stage	Communication strategy during the second stage
CONTENT SET	
> Identify species and habitat types. > Determine sites boundaries. > Define ecological requirements. > SDF.	> Management – measures/zoning based on ecological requirements. > Monitoring – nature status indicators and indicators of administrative performance in attaining goals. > Reporting – standardization of procedures and forms based on content and indicators.
PROBLEMS	
> Provided information on the new concept. > Incorporation of communication as a chain: communicate – listen – follow feedback. > Prevention of conflicts caused by ignorance.	> Provided information, apprehension, acceptability. > Opposition and resolving conflicts. > Management of internal and external processes – effectiveness of participation to reach adequate conduct of stakeholders.
ROLE OF COMMUNICATION	
> Familiarisation – knowledge, feelings, behaviour. > Positive image – action. > Support – behaviour patterns. > Reduce the risk of opposition to the designation of areas	> Engaging stakeholders – motivation for shared decisions and implementation of joint decisions. > Examples of best practices. > Support to positive measures, understanding. > Reduce the risk of impairment of favourable conservation status.
OBJECTIVES	
> Familiarisation with the content and implications, identification of opportunities. > Getting feedback – basis for upgrading results of the first project stage. > Motivation.	> Participatory planning and implementation of decisions/measures/management. > Feedback analysis of the first project phase (resolution of conflicts, upgrading local interests, partnerships). > Examples of best practice – models.
STRATEGIC APPROACH	
> Encourage informal dissemination of information. > Planned communication. > Communication with key stakeholders. > Gradual approach from less to more demanding. > Establishing network of communicators for communication on the ground and their help.	> Strengthen existing partnerships and establishing new ones. > Planning of participation and communication. > Operational plan on national level – helicopter survey, activation of partners. > Local management plans – synergy and activation of field communicators.
STAKEHOLDERS	
> Internal and external. > Primary – internal community, ministries, local communities ...; secondary – media, NGO ...; tertiary – schools ...	> Internal and external. > Primary – internal community, ministries, local communities ...; secondary – media, NGO ...; tertiary – schools ...

COMMUNICATION TOOLS	
> Two-way communication – personally with stakeholders. > One-way communication – support to personal communication.	> Two-way communication – personal communication targeted at stakeholders participation. > One-way communication – as a support to direct communication and raising public awareness.

Table 2: Logical framework of the second stage of the Natura 2000 project based on recommendations for managing and communicating Natura 2000 and on other international agreements.

General objectives – Biodiversity conservation – Implementation of Council Directives and the Convention on Biological Diversity – Support to nature protection practice by exchanging knowledge/models – Promotion of partnership approach in nature conservation – Implementation of other international agreements and the EU legislation	Objectively ascertainable indicators – Status of habitat types and species in the Natura 2000 site does not deteriorate or it improves – Objectives of Natura 2000 and the Convention on Biological Diversity are attained – Management interactivity and policy-making become programming instruments of MESPE and nature protection organizations – Priorities of international agreements are clearly implemented	Verification sources - Reports on the Natura 2000 Project – National reports to COP on Convention on Biological Diversity – Annual reports of nature conservation organizations – Reporting system within international agreements	
Purpose of the project – General and sectoral (integration of principles of sustainable development) support to the sustainable management of natural resources based on interaction with stakeholders at national, regional and local level	Objectively ascertainable indicators – Preparation and implementation of management plans for Natura 2000 sites in interaction with stakeholders – Preparation of sectoral plans for the use of natural resources and their implementation in interaction with stakeholders – Other types of measures	Verification sources – National reports – Contributions in nature conservation publications	Assumptions – Added value of pilot projects for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in local communities, demonstrate partnership in nature protection and provide the examples for international exchange of experience
Results and products – A number of nature conservationists and/or	Objectively ascertainable indicators – National operational programme and new	Verification sources – Reports on the Natura 2000	Assumptions – Reorganizations do not weaken the

managers capable of effective communication with stakeholders throughout the political loop and within individual nature conservation organizations – Synergy between various initiatives and projects	project proposal deal with national priorities in natural resources management – Management plans for respective areas deal in detail with national priorities and areas in which a clear nature conservation interest was expressed in the first stage.	Projects, Life, Interreg, Transition facility ... – Reports from nature conservation organizations/MESPE regional units and agencies – International meetings	administrative system efficiency and enable the optimal use of human and financial resources – No occurrence of greater conflicts in areas chosen for communication of the second stage of the Natura 2000 project
Activities – Selection of national priorities, plan for the second stage of the project, local and regional level support – Project plan is created with international and national communication experts – Project implementation supported by national experts – Coaching at national level in cooperation with international experts – International exchange of knowledge and good practice	Means – Kick-off meeting at MESPE – Local focus groups, target groups research, workshops, consultations, round tables etc. – Training at national and local level – Appropriate guides on participative methods, crisis communication etc. – Coaching and advisory service – Electronic communication and meetings	Costs – National budget – LIFE – Possibly the 'transition facility' project – Possibly other types of sponsorship and donations within the implementation of projects, area specific	Assumptions – Management of national organizations and their regional units is cognisant of the importance of partnership management and setting the priorities – National organizations are able to engage and guide national experts providing support to projects at local and regional level
			Preconditions – MESPE and nature conservation organizations are prepared to place employees and their time in the project in accordance with priorities and engage them so as not to allow overburdening as regards their exceptional abilities

7. ANNEXES (not available on website)

Annex 1: Communication & Natura 2000

Annex 2: Suggestions for Natura 2000 project approach

Annex 3: Natura 2000 communication strategy

Annex 4: Planning Natura 2000 Communication

Annex 5: Communication activities and products

Annex 6: Overall graphic image and the example of leaflet

Annex 7: Communication dynamics by areas

Annex 8: Results of communication in the field and stakeholders' responses

Annex 9: Detailed review of tasks of core and broader communication group

Annex 10: Recommendations for managing and communicating Natura 2000

Annex 11: Slovenia Natura 2000 – Reflections

Annex 12: Good Practice Handbook: Public Participation in Making Local Environmental Decisions, The Aarhus Convention.