

CONSERVATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR THE NATURAL GRASSLAND HABITATS OF COMMUNITY INTEREST FROM THE PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS OF ROMANIA

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Abstract: Until 2011, the Ecological Network Natura 2000 in Romania includes 273 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) - 13,21% from the country surface, designated by the M.O. no. 1964/2007 (5), as a result of the implementation of Habitats Directive no. 92/43/CEE and 108 Bird Special Protected Areas declared by the Government Decision no. 1284/2007 regarding the declaration of bird special protected areas as an integral part of the European Ecological Network Natura 2000 in Romania. The total surface of the sites Natura 2000 (pSAC + SPA - Bird Special Protected Areas) represents 17,84% of the country surface. Partially, some of these sites are superposed, being designated both as SAC and SPA, and a part of them is superposed too over the protected natural areas of national interest (national parks, natural parks and reservations). SACs represent 13,21 % of the country surface, and SPAs represent 11, 89% of the country surface (7). From the total of the natural grassland habitats whose conservation necessitates identifying the special areas of conservation, 37% of them are priority habitats, meaning they are in danger to disappear in their natural area, or they have a reduced natural area, or they constitute representative samples with typical characteristics for one or more biogeographical region. Mainly,

the present paper intends to approach the legal aspects concerning the management way of the protected natural areas comprising natural grassland habitats, the realization of their management plans and regulations, and to analyze the measures imposed by these last in order to assure the favourable conservation status and the sustainable development of the natural grassland habitats, considering that Romania is into an incipient stadium under these aspects. "The main causes contributing to grassland and hayfield degradation are: overgrazing, non-grazing, land clearing and arson of *Pinus mugo* woods, the conversion of the grasslands into arable lands, changing of land usage, the absence of a coherent management and other causes. Also, a special threat is constituted by the precarious state of the local agricultural economy. The traditional agricultural non-profitable methods, the massive emigration of population out of the rural medium led to abandonment of the marginal lands and to intensification of exploitation of the lands easy of access. All the problems and their solving must be introduced within the management plans of the protected natural areas and the authorities of local public administration must respect the obligations stipulated by the law in this field (1)".

Key words: grasslands, natural habitats, priority grassland habitats, Ecological network Natura 2000, conservation and sustainable management measures.

INTRODUCTION

As a consequence of its geographical position, Romania is a country with a high biological diversity, expressed both at ecosystem level and species level.

According to data provided by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, since 2000, when was elaborated the NATIONAL STRATEGY OF BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION, the natural and semi-natural ecosystems represented approximately 47% of country surface, and as a consequence of the studies made by the program CORINE Biotops there were identified 783 types of habitats in 261 areas in whole territory of our country (4), which are graphically represented as following:

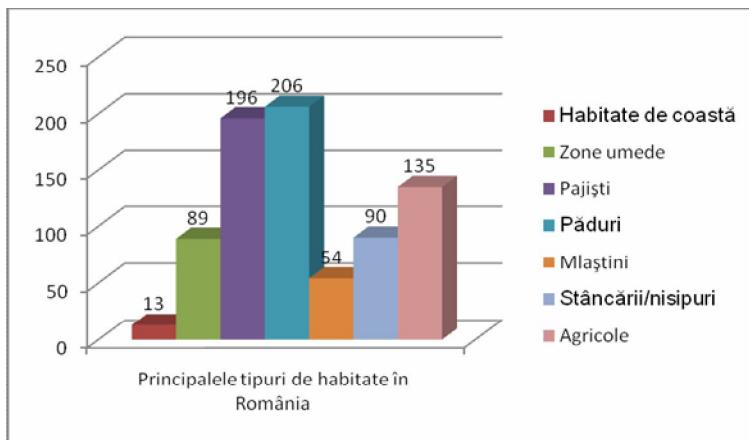


Fig.1 Graphical representation of the natural grassland habitats identified in Romania, according to the National Strategy of Biodiversity Conservation

Ulterior, applying the objectives and the priority actions established by the Strategy, concerning the harmonization of the legislation in the field of nature conservation and ecological biodiversity preservation, basing on the research studies, there was established within the five biogeographical regions delimited in Romania (continental -53%, alpine- 23%, steppe- 17%, pannonic- 6% and pontic- 1%) the existence of different natural grassland habitats, some of them of priority interest, for which Romania, as member State, has the obligation to assure a favourable status of conservation in situ and the coherence of the network Natura2000.

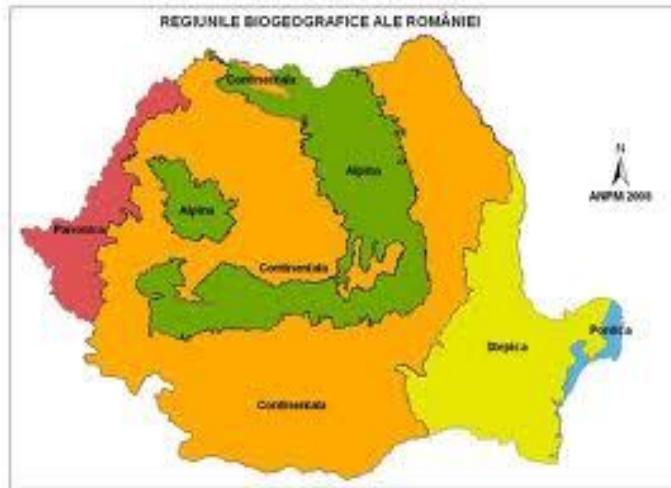


Fig. 2 The biogeographical regions of Romania (State of environment - National Agency of Environment Protection)

Thus, there were designated by the M.O. no. 1964/2007, 273 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) - 13,21% of country surface, and can be observed that the protected natural areas of community interest declared in Romania were also designated because here

exists a high number of natural grassland habitats and semi-natural dry herbaceous formations and facies for surface covering with scrubland, classified and encoded according to the Habitats Directive of the European Council 92/43 EEC regarding the conservation of natural habitats and of wild species of flora and fauna (5). The natural grassland habitats appear irregularly distributed in all five biogeographical regions of Romania.

According to the Habitats Directive (2), a special protected area means: a “site of community importance designated by the Member States by a legal document, managerial and/or contractual, in which are stipulated the conservation measures necessary to maintain or re-establish into a favourable conservation state the natural habitats and/or the species populations for which the site was designated”.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The main materials used in elaboration of the present paper were: the national and community in force legislative documents in the field of nature protection and ecological biodiversity, the strategies elaborated by the central public authority in the field of environment protection, the situation of the Natura 2000 sites put into administration respectively given in custody. The used method was the comparative analysis of these legislative documents, with the adopted strategies and solutions in order to establish the transposing degree and the conservation stage, respectively the degradation prevention of the grassland natural habitats.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The sites Natura 2000 are administrated according to the stipulations of the Ministry Order of Environment and Forestry no. 1948/2010 regarding the approval of the Management methodology for the protected natural areas which necessitate management structures and of the Methodology of Custody Assignment of the protected natural areas which don't necessitate management structures (6).

Starting with the year of 2010 until present, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry organized 3 sessions of custody assignment of the protected natural areas, being put into custody or administration approximately 93 % of the special areas of conservation - SAC (separately or together with other protected natural areas) (8).

According to the stipulations enunciated by M.O. no. 1948/2010 regarding the approval of the Management methodology for the protected natural areas which necessitate management structures and of the Methodology of Custody Assignment of the protected natural areas which don't necessitate management structures, for the sites Natura 2000 put into administration the management plan must be realized in 2 and the regulation in 9 months since the administration contract was signed. For the protected natural areas given in custody, the management plan must be realized within 1 an, and the regulation within 6 months since the custody convention was signed (6).

Also, according to the stipulations of OUG no. 57/2007 regarding the regime of the protected natural areas, conservation of the natural habitats, of wild flora and fauna, the management plans and the regulations of the biosphere reservations, national and natural parks are elaborated by their managers, then these will be supervised by the scientific councils, consultative councils of administration and will be approved by Government Decision, at the proposal of the central public authority for environment protection; for the other categories of protected natural areas, the management plans and the regulations are elaborated by their managers, will be approved by order of the central public authority for environment protection, with the approval of the interested central public authorities.

In conformity with data provided by the National Agency of Environment Protection, the management plans and the regulations concerning the sites Natura 2000 which were put

into administration/custody within the three sessions, are in different stages of realization by administrator/custodian, respectively stages of analysis by the competent authorities in the field of environment or approval stage by the interested central public authorities.

The protected natural areas of community interest from Romania (SACs), include different types of habitats, from which, specific to the grassland and hayfield communities are the following:

1530* - Pannonic salt steppes and salt marshes;

4060 – Alpine and Boreal heaths

6110* - Communities of rupicolous calcareous or basophilic grasslands of the *Alyssum Sedioni albi*;

6150 – Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands;

6170 - Alpine and subalpine calcareous grasslands;

6190 - Rupicolous pannonic grasslands (*Stipo-Festucetalia pallentis*);

6210* - Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco Brometalia*);

6230* - Species-rich *Nardus* grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas;

6240* - Sub-pannonic steppic grasslands;

6250* - Pannonic loess steppes

6260* - Pannonian and west-pontic sandy grasslands;

6410 - Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*);

6430 - Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels;

6440 – Alluvial meadows of river valleys of the *Cnidion dubii*;

6510 - Lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*);

6520 - Mountain hay meadows;

Other modality to conserve the European natural patrimony and to promote the concept of HNV (high natural value farmland) is that established at governmental level by the National Rural Development Programme PNDR 2007-2013 (3), which stipulates the possibility to give deficiency payments to the farmers affected by the restrictions imposed by the status of protected area and site Natura 2000 in the areas where these farmers develop their agricultural activity.

In this sense, through this measure is aimed the extensive utilization of the agricultural lands located in the protected areas and the compensation of the losses appeared as a consequence of the coerciveness to comply with the environmental standards imposed by the legislation in force, helping in this way the sustainable development of the designated areas.

Indirectly, according financial compensations, the measure also supports the authorities designated to manage the protected natural areas, to apply the management plans, contributing thus to the achievement of the objectives concerning the biodiversity and traditional landscapes conservation.

CONCLUSIONS

Grasslands are an important component of the vegetation in Romania and these include significant areas within the protected natural areas and habitats necessitating a special protection regime.

Considering the especial value under aspect of biodiversity, a stable long-term management is obligatory to be established, both as legislative requirements and as sustainable development of the whole ecosystem, the grasslands being frequently essential for the biodiversity.

As can be observed, putting the special areas of conservation into custody, respectively administration, in proportion by 93%, represents an important step, before elaborate and approve the management plans and the regulations of the protected natural areas, in the terms established by law, and after finalization of this process will be effectively implemented the priority measures and actions enunciated by these, in order to assure a high protection level of the species and habitats within the protected area.

Until this process will be finished, the conservation and sustainable management measures of the natural grassland habitats are those general, enunciated in the environment legislation in force, and those specific, adopted by the custodian or administrator, but which have the deficiency to not be opposable for the third parties until they will be approved by the central public authority for environment protection, and the unjustified prolongation of their enactment can accentuates the threats and vulnerabilities upon the sites.

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