

## Is nature a cultural heritage?

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*In this paper, I will focus on the landscape and its protection in the territory of the Czech Republic. What are protected areas and why are they so important for the Czech Republic? How is nature related to culture? These are the main questions that shape the outcome and the discussion.*

### Introduction

Territories with special protection, such as national parks and protected landscape areas, are created and regulated according to Czech law. The government of the Czech Republic determines which zones should be under special protection. According to the definition of the law, a protected landscape area is an area that has a harmoniously shaped landscape, a development relief that includes a natural ecosystem of forests and permanent grasslands, an abundance of forests or a historical settlement. National parks are larger zones with significant ecosystems that are not or only minimally affected by human activity. In this work, I will focus on protected landscape areas (PLA) and also national parks in the Czech Republic. Although there are differences between them, in my work I will use both as one and use the umbrella term - protected areas (PA). From my point of view, both have a fundamental role in the preservation of the landscape character and ecosystems (local, national, international and possibly even global). This article examines the multi-layered process through which PAs are created and managed in the Czech Republic.

The society we live in makes a huge difference between nature and man. It is implicit in the way we think. (Law 2015) In the case of conservation zones, the more natural/natural a place is, the more valuable it is. Places that have been used and transformed by humans lose value and can perhaps be considered worthless. At least without ecological value. We tend to believe that ecosystems are somehow connected to nature, clear water in the rainforest, mountains with white snow, wild animals, species diversity, places full of colorful life. But ecosystems are also made up of areas that have been changed by man and form its natural roots. In Czech, there is this curiosity when thinking about the landscape and returning to the roots. Currently, there are opinions that if we have more forests, we are returning to tradition and to normality. The point is that the extent of afforestation or deforestation has always depended on human activity. For example: in the 19th century there were fewer forests than there are today, and we also tend to believe that when we protect forests and fight against deforestation in Czech, it is about protecting tradition. And as it was said, it is even more interesting when we recall the bark beetle calamity that was all over the Czech Republic in the past years. It was claimed in the media that this destruction of ecosystems would have a huge impact, but just after the calamity passed, the forests decided to restore and recover. Biodiversity increased surprisingly, dozens of critically endangered animal and plant species began to appear spontaneously.

### Landscape

There are areas that can be remodeled and used by humans and some that humans cannot. It all depends on how we, and how I mean the government according to the law, thus the creators of the police, thus the demos, label it. The designation of a landscape as a PA usually involves the implementation of regulatory frameworks and management structures aimed at preserving natural resources, preserving biodiversity and limiting human activities according to the given rules. If the landscape is institutionalized, there are established administrative bodies, government agencies or non-governmental organizations responsible for enforcing regulations. The creation of a PA may

affect land tenure arrangements and local community rights to access and use natural resources. When someone owns land and then has to give it up under some law, conflict can arise between the parties involved. This debate leads to a rethinking of ownership, resource management and cultural heritage conservation. (Jurkevics, 2022)

It is interesting that when classifying the state of protectionism in the Czech Republic, it is divided into four zones. The fourth and third zones include ecosystems that have been clearly altered by human activity. The less human activity appears, the more natural it is. (Law 2015) The fortress zone is represented by fields used for mass production in agriculture, mainly arable land and fully built-up areas, industrial areas. The third zone includes ecosystems that are heavily built by man, that are economically exploited and whose species (flora and fauna) have been altered and reduced by human activity. It can be represented by farms, forests and woodlands, smaller fields, pastures, meadows. Now that I have represented the less valuable landscape areas, it is suggested that those that remain are not touched by people. Not so in this case. The second zone is represented by landscapes affected by man - forest with a partial change in the species structure, areas with preserved and original species, endangered species are also found here. The ratio between the natural object and human works is balanced, there are not so many people living there in square kilometers. When there are buildings, they are mostly for recreation, not for living, and they usually also have historical value. The first zone is the one we protect the most. This zone can be described as one that has hardly been touched by man. Here are ecosystems that are close to nature and/or the natural state of being. Only those that have been slightly modified. They are clean, in a suitable condition and this must be perceived according to the law, according to the thinking of the demos, according to the belief system.

Why do I even care about this rating? I want to focus on these groups and see if this system is relevant to the perspective of modern western society. How does the breakdown of these zones tell us more about us than the landscape itself? The system of assessment/zones of landscape thinking is created by society's values. These values are institutionalized as law, and this law gives us a mantle and an objective form of understanding the environment and the rules. When seeking protection, rules and restrictions are given by institutionalization. *Summum ius summa iniuria?*

The beginnings of establishing protected landscape areas in the Czech Republic go back to the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. They were developed as response to industrialization and urbanization. On bases of ecological research, there were establishes areas that was described as significant and those deserves protection according to the scientific base. It is important to mention that even the technological research and new technological tools, techniques and advance provide monitoring marks and separate significant zones from the others. Scientific research provides valuable insights into the biodiversity, ecosystem services, and ecological processes within conservation areas. To put it simply, protection means restriction. PAs are that areas where certain activities (such as logging, mining, or mass agriculture) may be restricted or completely prohibited in sake of environment and biodiversity. Banning these activities always has an impact on the people and the social system in the area. The health of the biosphere and its diversity is good, its deficiency is bad and needs to be treated. Even there you can see the binary and this way of thinking about reality. It can cause a lack of job opportunities, for example in the Czech Republic there are areas with long coal mining in which many people work. When mining is banned, even though it marks a no-man's land, people lose their jobs and thus their land as well. On the other hand, prohibition can lead to the recovery of the landscape and the growth of biodiversity in areas that were originally heavily

used for agriculture or, as already mentioned, for mining. Communities adapt to the new opportunities, when, at first, they made money from hard work, now they can be fed on tourism. I think good example is industrial campus of Dolní Vítkovice as part of Ostrava region. This is also a landscape, made by man and according to the zones system, it would be the worst, no. four. From land of nobody it is experiencing a renaissance by new form of usage and draw attention of many – locals, Czechs and even international people. By changing its usage that landscape in its old scenery became brand new. (Berghofer, Goyal, Wiltsche 2021) Is it the change of perspective that changes the reality?

Why do we tend to believe that areas that are untouched by humans have more value than agricultural and built-up areas? These unspoilt parts of our country attract people to nature, to trips and spending free time in nature. In the Czech Republic, a common way of spending free time is tourism. We also have a dense network of hiking trails. PAs, mostly zone two and one, often attract tourists and outdoor enthusiasts looking for opportunities for recreation, hiking, or observing nature and wildlife. Tourism is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can generate economic benefits for local people (hotels, restaurants, etc.), but on the other hand, it can cause damage to fragile ecosystems just by the presence of people in the area. I even heard once that environmentalists don't want to publicize or share the most threatened areas, just because it will attract people and destroy it. I also have one example that comes to mind. In Brno there is natural monument called Kamenný Vrch (Stone Hill) in which grow the Pulsatilla. When many people go there to see them bloom, they have been trampled on and destroyed. Therefore, lately there is only a limited space, a way for people to go - no other way! I think this demonstrates the problem perfectly. Tourism as a hobby and/or lifestyle has a long tradition here, so it goes hand in hand that the perception of nature and the creation of a distinctive PA are well known to the inhabitants of the Czech Republic. Locals, which can be illustrated as people who have a relationship with the land that they have used for generations, have a deep relationship with the land and influence it. The practices of how humans use land (eg for animals to feed them) or to preserve the purity of nature have cultural and aesthetic values. (Morton 2013) I would say that even if we focus on zone one and the protection of wild animals or insects in virgin forests, or if we focus on artificial fields and pastures, people feel the same way about them. Understanding their position is key to understanding what I mean when I say they both do the same thing. I must mention here that I am focusing on the first and second zones. When a man guards the wilds of nature in zone one or when a man protects the meadows, both do so for the sake of tradition. The tradition of man is from the point of view of the Earth/landscape/nature, from the point of view of shepherds and ancestors. Both practice the same, their value is the same.

It is interesting that even in the first zone of protection, in the most admirable and purest areas, man has insight and effect. From a materialistic point of view, it is precisely the paths or steps that make it easier, more comfortable and safer to pass through. This too can be considered a violation of nature. This is where the practice to order system comes in. Man can change nature to deal with danger, to use it better and more smoothly. Yet we really leave some areas as they were, just for their natural, environmental value.

## **Discussion**

Landscape preservation corresponds to the effects of greenness and sustainability, which construct climate and environmental justice. In the Czech Republic, as in other countries, there are communities that are founded to protect nature. We implicitly know that making urban areas instead of planting trees is not good. Sometimes we fight against it when it is easy to understand. Sometimes

we tend to be sceptical about climate change and there are many who do not even believe in climate change (the former president of our nation, Václav Klaus, should be mentioned). These appeals, strikes and high-powered political appeals for justice are underestimated. Community involvement and traditional knowledge systems play a key role in shaping conservation strategies and supporting natural resource management. It causes trouble and quarrels. It causes emotions and misunderstandings. In comparison, if we brought the topic to Pas, there would probably not be voices against its importance. There is a general opinion that if there are old people, young people, if these people live in the city or in the village, that PA is valuable and deserves its protection.

PAs in the Czech Republic face various challenges and conflicting land use practices. In order to maintain the protection of the territory, cooperation and a joint strategy of the parties involved is necessary. This can contribute to the protection of these areas and increase their resilience. It also has something to do with the aesthetic way of thinking. Nature on its own is beautiful. Landscape is beautiful. This beauty (as value) deserves to be kept for the future, for others to see and admire. This landscape (usually) is reworked and done by human and is subordinate to the present style and aesthetic. (Lynch 2019) Is it possible that nature is just an aesthetical construct? Groves did not look the same in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, nor in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. It all seems to be forbidden in sake for imaginary traditionalism that is not inherent. This prism is false but gives us guidance, a line that connect then and now, ancestors with followers. It is heritage.

Protected areas are natural monuments, not nature itself, it is a heritage that permeates the cultural and social understanding of the world. They play a significant role in shaping local identities, cultural heritage and community cohesion. Rather than viewing the landscape as static and natural, it is rather a socio-technical phenomenon that has been shaped over centuries by human activity and their interactions with each other, the technology they produced, and the surroundings and environment. They can provide a space for education about environmental issues, conservation of cultural and natural heritage and traditional practices (associated with traditional ways of life), as well as a sense of belonging to others and community/regional/national/global connectedness. By the global context that comes to mind, I mean this: Here in the Czech Republic we have protected areas, and some others are miles away. We as humans are the same.

Nature is socially constructed. There is no objective reality and no landscape that is just out there. When we think about protected landscape areas in the Czech Republic, they are also shaped by man. Overall, the designation of a landscape as "protected" has profound and significant political and social impacts that affect land use, governance structures, economic activities and community dynamics. Even the word we use to demonstrate – protect has its own connotation and would it be valuable to make research about discursive practises around it. Nature is not static, but is constructed and reorganized by the social realm. (Morton, 2013) As stated at the beginning of this post - what is and is not PA, what is and what is not deserving of protection is politically but socially constructed through the demo. And that is the story of how the landscape and the way we preserve it tells us more about people than about nature.

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