

Sinergies at a national scale as a contribution to connectivity. Landscape, rural development and financial support

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Putting the Natura 200 Network into effect has brought about the acceptance by governmental bodies of the concept of connectivity, as well as the fact that they are starting to take measures intended for the designing and the designation of ecological corridors that make it possible to guarantee the maintenance of biological diversity, the habitats and the species. Thanks to a specific provision concerning it included in the Habitat Directive and in the Royal Decree 1997/1995, enacted on the seventh of December, by virtue of which measures are laid down intended as a contribution to guarantee the biodiversity by means of the conservation of natural habitats as well as that of the wild fauna and flora, the configuration of a network of natural areas goes beyond the notion of a set of areas within a given territory, and evolves into the conviction that it is not possible to guarantee the conservation of biodiversity if there is no connection between the spots or isolated areas in the landscape, with a view to providing a network, in this case the Natura 2000 Network, with cohesion and coherence.

In Spain, regardless of the acknowledgement of the importance of the definition, the planning and the management of these unbroken linear structures within each Self - Governing Region and among them, by means of the appropriate agreements, the General Directorate of Nature Conservation is committing itself to giving impetus to conservation efforts in the territorial weft, by comprehensively promoting action in all significant types of landscape elements, spots / areas, corridors and weft, in keeping with the principles of landscape ecology.

On the one hand, the tradition of the management of the environment within the scope of the Central Government and the Self - Governing Regions, by linking

the natural heritage to the cultural one in the legislation for the protection of areas, and in the management thereof, has been embodied, in advance, in the European Landscape Agreement, signed in Florence in October 2002.

Nowadays, we are in the path leading to the ratification of this Convention, by virtue of which both the countries and the regions are committed to grant legal recognition to the landscapes, to define and to put into effect policies aimed at the protection, the management and the regulation of the said landscapes, to lay down procedures for public involvement, by local and regional authorities and by other interested parties, as well as to integrate the landscape into sectorial policies and, specially, into the regulation of the territory and that of urban planning. For that purpose, specific measures must be taken related, at least, to the sensitization, training and education, identification and valuation, in order to arrive at the recognition of its quality.

Our task consists now in gradually introducing into society and into economic activities those mechanisms that guarantee respect for the quality of the landscape, by understanding it in all its dimensions, not only in the aesthetic ones, but particularly in its ecological roots and in the natural dynamics as modelled by the cultural processes that develop in parallel.

In this regard, it is important to contribute to the construction of a system of guidelines for the regulation of natural resources, as envisaged in the Act 4/1989, enacted on the twenty - seventh of March, for the conservation of natural areas and the wild fauna and flora, that incorporates the appropriate measures concerning the landscape, among other matters, as a form of expression and integration that facilitates the permeabilization of the territorial web for the conservation and the dispersal of biodiversity.

In this particular field, the strategic environmental assessment plays a predominant role, since the scale being used meets the requirements for the treatment of the landscape and the policy guidelines, it being crucially important to check the spread of the dangerous process of habitat fragmentation, which currently is one of the greatest problems facing the conservation of nature, as a result of the synergy effects which converge on the fragmentation.

One of the factors that create fragmentation, namely transport infrastructures and its effects, is being thoroughly paid attention to by COST 341 Action, which

is being carried out within the scope of the European Union, and by an international monitoring group known as Infra Eco Network Europe. Its goals, the preparation of national reports on the state of the matter, of an European report, of a technical manual and of a wide information base, are being reached in Spain thanks to the establishment of a technical national working group in which the departments of the natural milieu and public works or transport of the Self - Governing Regions are participating, as well as the corresponding departments of the State's General Administration, under the co - ordination of the Directorate General of Nature Conservation.

Setting the dynamics of the marine environment aside, the most important fragmentation processes originate in the rural environment, be it as a result of the creation or the improvement of infrastructures, of the expansion of urbanized land, of industrial effects, but, particularly, as a result of the agrarian policy.

Activities related to agriculture, cattle raising and forestry, as well as those related to hunting, are inseparably associated with natural dynamics, where relations positive and negative for the latter are combined. Be that as it may, the fact is being openly recognised that the rural world is both the main recipient and actor of the natural milieu, which is why its satisfactory linkage is of paramount importance.

Hence the fact that the European Commission be pledging its firm commitment to make known and to promote the acknowledgement of the rural natural and cultural heritage as a generator of development, within the context of the sustainable development.

These expectations are quite difficult to live up to, since the ecological dynamics requires commitments failing which it does not operate, so that, as it has been currently verified, the conservation of biological diversity is experiencing a negative trend.

Because of that it is of paramount importance that the owners as well as the tenants of farms do include in their income the profit yielded by the conservation of the natural milieu, thus becoming the main architects of territorial permeability, of landscape conservation, in order to maintain in a stable manner the cultural and the ecological diversity, and to improve the quality and the health of the ecosystems and those of the human population themselves.

In the last two years a major co - operation scheme with the Ministry of Agriculture has been launched, and efforts are being made to try and influence the adoption of environmental requirements really being of benefit to the conservation of nature, in addition to being legally binding on the recipients of direct incentives under the common agricultural policy (CAP), according to the Council's 1259/1999 Regulations enacted on the seventeenth of May, by which common stipulations are established as applicable to the direct - incentive regimes within the framework of the community's agricultural policy. But the effort has been more intense within the scope of the CAP's second pillar, namely, rural development; specially so with regard to the guidelines concerning agricultural - environmental measures, the underprivileged areas and the development of Article 33 of the Council's 1257/1999 Regulations enacted on the seventeenth of May, on the aid to rural development by the European Agriculture Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF).

The incorporation with full rights of the conservation of nature , and, specifically, of the Natura 2000 Network, into rural development, has been highlighted in the group of financing experts of the Natura 2000 Network (Article 8 of the Habitat Directive) of the European Commission.

The previously stated circumstances were already discerned during the definition of the regional Planning of the structural funds for the 2000 - 2006 period, in such a way that the General Directorate of Nature Conservation suggested, within axis 3 (environment), some lines of action aimed at facilitating connectivity through the conservation of species, habitats and landscape, specially within the Natura 2000 Network, to be jointly financed by EAGGF. This programme has justified some budgetary lines through which actions undertaken by the Self - Governing Regions are being co - financed, by means of capital transfers. For the monitoring of the implementation of the programmes, Nature Conservation suggested some action indicators to be included in the Natura 2000 Network, for the purpose of fostering the use of the funds to achieve the objectives set by the Habitat Directive.