

How Slovenia achieved high recognition of Natura 2000¹

In November 2007, Europeans were asked: “Have you heard of Natura 2000 Network?” In Slovenia 20% of respondents said “I’ve heard of it and I know what it is”. This is three times more than EU average, which positions Slovenia on third place, according to Eurobarometer (See Fig. 1).

The visibility of Natura 2000 in Slovenia is high and growing, as have shown consecutive public opinion polls carried in last two years. The percentage of people who connect this term to protected areas which relate to plants, birds and other animals is rising also. On the other hand, a decreasing minority of people regard these sites as areas, where all activities are forbidden (See Fig 2).

We assume that Slovenia's approach to communication of Natura 2000 contributed to these results. It was characterised – in brief – by being ex-ante, site-specific, direct and inter-institutional. The following pages summarize three characteristic phases of communicating Natura 2000.

The differences among EU countries regarding visibility of Natura 2000 call for interpretation. This presentation however, is focused on the Slovenian experience that we would like to discuss with you as a potential example of good practice.

2002-2004: Designation of Natura 2000

Countries entering EU in 2004 had an obligation to designate Natura 2000 sites before the accession date. In Slovenia, the designation process was based on a project approach, developed at the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP). An inter-ministerial working group was established and in-house experts and expert partners (academia, NGOs...) carried out majority of tasks.

Based on the lessons learnt in the EU-15, Slovenia decided to communicate Natura 2000 from the start. Communication support to the designation process was steered by experts from Slovenia (M. Kline), Netherlands (F. Hesselink) and UK (E. Idle). It ran parallel to technical/expert work, prior to designation. A communication strategy was developed; training and a back-up system were established. Communication was based on intense inter-institutional cooperation, thus a network of communicators (over 80²) was developed, primarily composed of field services of [Nature Conservation Institute](#), [Slovenian Forestry Service](#), [Agriculture Counselling Service](#) and park authorities³.

Independently but co-ordinated with MESP, a few national NGOs communicated Natura 2000 at national level (esp. [DOPPS-BirdLife](#), [SDVPN](#)).

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² Currently, the Sector for Nature Conservation Policy at the Ministry has 9 employees.

³ [Final Report on the Implementation of the Communication Strategy, 2004 \(pdf\)](#)

2004-2006: Focus on local projects

In 2005-06 yearly tenders for NGO's for communication of Natura 2000 were published by MESP. They were oriented in direct communication, esp. field visits and lectures for inhabitants of the sites. Numerous national and local NGOs (13-15 each year) participated.

Several EU co-financed projects (Phare), based on Natura 2000 and biodiversity issues, were launched in 2005. They developed strong initiatives and enthusiasm (due to visible results, eg nature trails) in local communities. LIFE projects were also important.

Communication support at national level was focused on monthly eNatura bulletin and www.natura2000.gov.si website. The bulletin, initially aimed at communicators, increased its reach five times: experts, NGOs, local communities, teachers, journalists etc. were added to the subscribers list.

2006-2007: Natura 2000 National Campaign

Because it was assumed that the visibility of Natura 2000 was rather low at national level, the [project of communication support to Natura 2000](#) (co-financed by EU Transition Facility) was launched in 2006. It was composed of a national campaign, training and consultancy. Public opinion polls were conducted at the start of the project and at its end (See Fig 2), showing that the goals of the project were reached.

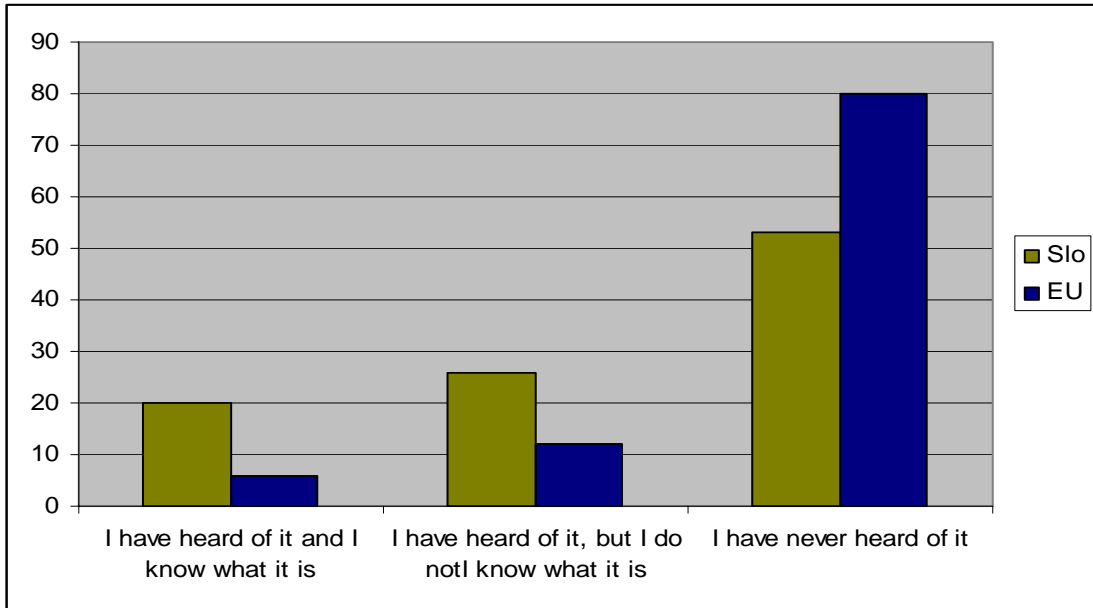
Meanwhile, preparation and adoption process for [National Natura 2000 Sites Management Programme 2007-2013](#) brought intensive communication and participation of key stakeholders in future management of the sites (esp. institutions responsible for forestry, agriculture, fishing, hunting and park authorities).

Comment

The key reasons for Slovenia being well above EU average – regarding attitude to Natura 2000 - might be:

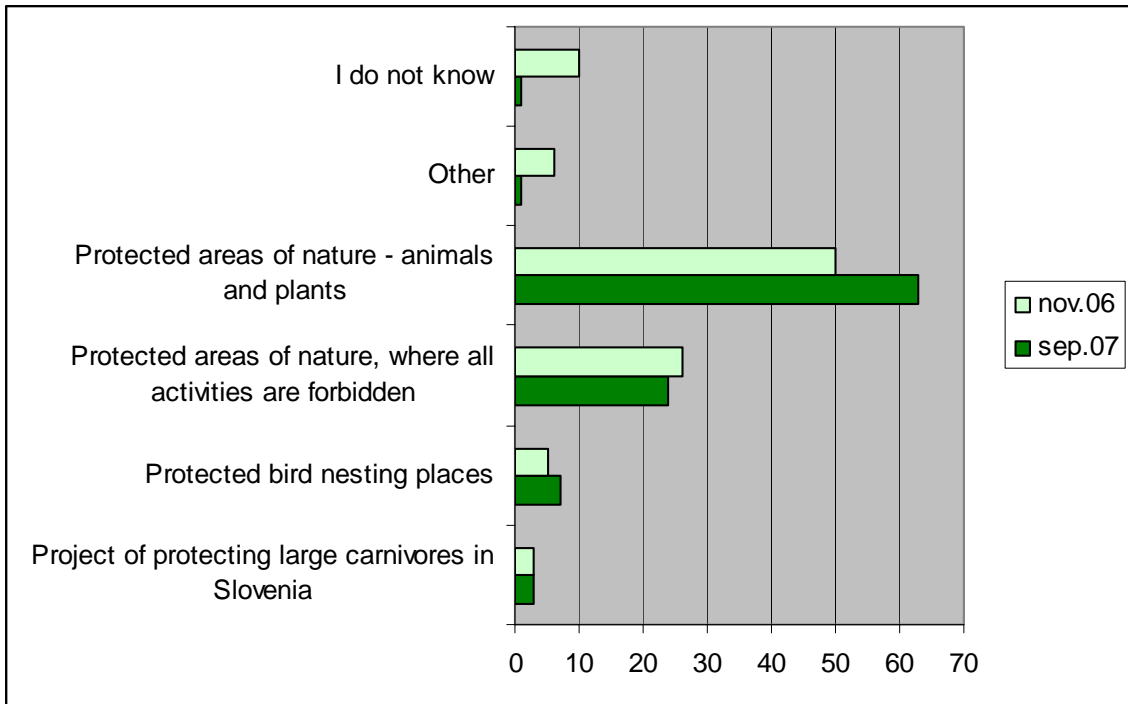
- communication from the start (before designation of sites, while EU-15 countries predominantly communicated *ex-post*)
- close co-operation among institutions (which is difficult to achieve, esp. between different sectors),
- direct, personal, site-specific communication with key stakeholders in individual sites in initial phases (compared to much easier impersonal approaches through leaflets, mass media etc.),
- 35% of national territory lies in Natura 2000, thus a substantial number of inhabitants have experienced a contact with this network (e.g. 198 out of 210 municipalities have at least one site within its borders, 9 have its whole territory in Natura 2000).

Figure 1: Have you heard of Natura 2000 Network?



(Eurobarometer: [Attitudes of Europeans towards the issue of biodiversity](#), fieldwork: November 2007)

Figure 2: Which of these descriptions defines Natura 2000 the most?



Only respondents that have heard of Natura 2000 answered this question.
 ([Communication Support to Natura 2000 in Slovenia 2006-07](#), Pristop & Episcenter)