

BOOK REVIEW

Wrbka, T. – Zmelik, K. – Grünweis, F.M. (eds.): THE EUROPEAN GREEN BELT – BORDERS. WILDERNESS. FUTURE – Publisher: Verlag Bibliothek der Provinz, 2009, 343 p.,

The phenomenon of “the Iron Curtain” dividing Europe into two separate parts and its impact on social, cultural and natural conditions of adjacent countries represents a great topic for European landscape ecologists and other professionals dealing with landscape history and change. Forty years lasting existence of “no man’s land”, a broad strip of relatively untouched landscape led to conservation of natural values across the whole continent. Since intensive land use was impossible between barbed wired fences, many border areas were left undisturbed and forgotten. Natural oases formed here into a Green Belt represent a great challenge for transnational conservation.

A team of 66 authors from several European countries under the editorship of Thomas Wrbka, Katharina Zmelik and Michael Grünweis describes wide range of aspects of this specific heritage. Bilingual book is divided into 15 parts introducing outstanding richness of landscapes spreading along the former Iron Curtain. After general introduction of the project, its aims and history, particular landscape types are characterized. Several examples covering biogeographical regions from arctic tundra and boreal forests to the stepic coast of Black sea and from Pannonian lowland to alpine or Dinaric high mountains are presented. Text of single chapters is supplemented by many boxes referring to specific issues of nature conservation or landscape protection along the whole Green Belt, such as fragmentation of large Karelian forest on the Russian side, protection of wildlife populations in Central European mountains or sustainable fishing in the Danube and in Prespa or Ohrid Lakes. Number of pictures and maps shows great diversity of European landscapes, however cartographic standard varied, therefore identification of local situation of some places presented could be difficult for non-experts. More detailed maps of each described section of the Green Belt could have provided the reader with extended information about landscape character.

From the Central European point of view is quite surprising, that nobody from the Czech Republic participated on this comprehensive book to represent attitude of country strongly affected by the existence of the Iron Curtain. Analysis of situation in the Sumava National Park or examples of cross border cooperation could undoubtedly enrich the publication by general findings such as the necessity of collaboration with local communities. I am sure that a suitable partner for collaboration would be found here.

Nevertheless the main aims of the book – to introduce the exceptional richness of landscapes along the former Iron Curtain and to present the unique project to protect natural and cultural values conserved by military fences – are excellently fulfilled. This publication is intended for general public; however its scientific contribution is considerable, therefore it should be recommended to all experts interested in landscape change and conservation.

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