

Nature Conservation in Europe: Approaches and Lessons

Annex AT.2. Regional Economic Effects of Natura 2000 in Austria

Wolfgang Suske and Kathrin Horvath

In 2016 a study of the regional economic effects of Natura 2000 areas was conducted in Austria (Getzner *et al.*, 2016). The analyses focussed on agriculture, forestry and tourism, as these economic sectors are characterised by economic activities that are directly related to natural resources.

The results show that communities with and without Natura 2000 have developed positively in parallel, and a connection between Natura 2000 site designations and negative population development can be excluded. The study did not find any influence of Natura 2000 site designation on investment activities and the financial scope of municipalities. It was found that the degree of urbanisation of the municipalities was more decisive for their development than the existence of a Natura 2000 area. Despite structural difficulties faced by Natura 2000 communities, the number of workplaces and employees developed similarly positively as in non-Natura 2000 communities, starting from a lower baseline. The analysis of employment and unemployment rates also indicated a varying impact on the local economy, which could clearly be attributed to the designation of Natura 2000 sites.

Regarding farm development, no systematic impact of Natura 2000 on the decreasing number of small farms (less than 10 ha of agricultural land) was found. The number of medium-sized farms with 10 to 50 ha of agricultural land tended to decrease more in Natura 2000 communities than in non-Natura 2000 communities. A monocausal link with Natura 2000 was not deduced from this result, as many factors play a role in the abandonment of a farm. Regardless of Natura 2000, part-time farmers are more affected by structural change in agriculture than mainstream farmers. The results of the analysis show that the decision of farmers to run the farm as a main or a side-line farm was not influenced by Natura 2000. The influence of Natura 2000 sites on agricultural and rural development subsidies was reflected in the compensation payments for natural disadvantages. Municipalities with Natura 2000 areas tended to receive higher area payments per ha of agricultural land under the Austrian Development Programme (ÖPUL) and the compensatory allowance than municipalities without Natura 2000. In contrast, municipalities without Natura 2000 areas tended to receive higher market regulation premiums per ha of agricultural land than municipalities with Natura 2000 areas.

In the tourism sector, a positive effect could be observed in Natura 2000 areas. Despite the already long existence of Natura 2000 sites, the municipalities with Natura 2000 sites were in line with the Austrian-wide trend in tourism development, even if they differed in terms of time and location, or were at different levels. The increase in overnight stays was even higher in communities with Natura 2000 than in communities without Natura 2000.

References

Getzner, M., Haber, G., Huber, J., Preisel, H., Suske, W. & Withalm, G. (2016) *Natura 2000 und Wirtschaft – Regionale Wirkungen von Natura 2000-Schutzgebieten in Österreich*. Wien: Studie der Technischen Universität Wien im Auftrag des Umweltdachverband GmbH.

Recommended citation

Suske, W. & Horvath, K. (2023) Regional Economic Effects of Natura 2000 in Austria. In *Nature Conservation in Europe: Approaches and Lessons*, ed. G. Tucker, online Annex AT.2. Cambridge: United Kingdom / New York, Cambridge University Press. www.cambridge.org/natureconservation