

The almighty state for the protection of nature: the Hungarian case study of post-socialist national parks¹

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The creation of national parks was a special situation in the states of the former „Eastern Block”. The Soviet Union supported every international movement for ideological reasons, also the construction of the network of nature conservation. Protected areas of different size and type were created with great pride in the huge state. The western “imperialist” expression of ‘national park’ had not been translated also for ideological reasons until the start of Détente. In the new period of improved relations in the 1970’s it was possible to create national parks not only in the satellite states but in the Soviet socialist republics too.

The rural society and its relationship with the land was a significant factor in the history of these states. The construction of Soviet-based economic system made the situation of land owners and users impossible in these societies with peasant dominance. The state control over the territories provoked significant anxiety in the countries of Eastern Block, which has led to latent tensions in these societies for decades. These circumstances have not resulted positive attitude toward the state-controlled national parks. Because of this the regulations for nature conservation raise anxiety among local people, even after the change of regime; they are considered as the revival of restrictive power.

But people became landowners after the change of regime also had to face the difficulties of becoming competitive producers. In the absence of capital, traditional farming activities were dropped in a few years and farmers were looking for better jobs. In this context the territory of national parks were appreciated, because of foreign (western) subsidies, increasing number of tourists, revenue and jobs. In our study we show the special situation of post-socialist national parks in post-socialist societies through a Hungarian case (Aggtelek National Park).

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