

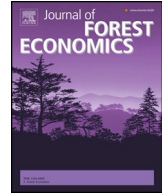


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# Public support for forestry from EU funds – Cases of Czech Republic and Slovak Republic



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## ABSTRACT

Rural development policy in the European Union (EU) has been implemented through different instruments. This paper is focused on support for the forestry sector from the EU funds in the years 2004–2006 in two EU Member States – Czech Republic (CZ) and Slovakia (SK). The comparison of support for forestry activities from the EU funds, delivered through the implementation of National Operational Programmes, showed differences at country level. Both countries had the opportunity to apply for support based on common EU policy, but they were able to select measures that reflected their specific needs and priorities at national level. Within Operational Programmes the following indicators were evaluated: description of forestry measures, financial support, number of

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applications, beneficiaries, outcomes and impacts. The comparison of financial support showed that the greater part of support in SK was granted to non-profit investments, whereas in CZ into profit making investments. The main difference was in the interest shown by applicants for support. In CZ nearly 80% of submitted applications were approved compared to 59% in SK. The analysis showed that the main reason for differences in utilisation of available sources was that different principles were applied when selecting supported measures or defining the activities to be supported within the measure.

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## Introduction

Since 1997, forest policy has been considered an integral part of the European Union (EU) policy on rural development (Elands and Wiersum, 2001). Rural development policy in the EU has been implemented through a range of instruments. The rural development policy during the programming period 2000–2006 was implemented through three different approaches, depending on the country status (EU member or associate country): Special pre-accession assistance for agriculture and rural development (SAPARD), Rural Development Plans (RDP), and Sectoral Operational Programmes (SOP) Agriculture and Rural Development (EC Directives No. 1260/1999 and 1257/1999). SAPARD was used during that period in countries with pre-accession status (until 2004 also in the Czech Republic and Slovakia). In EU Member States rural development policy was implemented at the national or regional level through Rural Development Plans and Sectoral Operational Programmes Agriculture and Rural Development. The main financial instrument in rural development policy in the period 2000–2006 was the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF).

After 2004, when 10 further states joined the EU, the forested area covered 160 million hectares of the EU-25 with an average forest cover of 42%. The EU forestry sector was composed of 350 thousand enterprises which employed approximately 3 million people. The average size of a private-owned forestry property was 13 ha, while the publicly owned one was 1000 ha (Eurostat, 2007).

Within the EU, the Czech Republic (CZ) and Slovakia (SK) represent countries whose forest cover is on the edge of the European average forest cover. In 2005, forests in the Czech Republic covered an area of 2653 thousand hectares – 33.6% of total area (Ministry of Agriculture, 2006). Slovakia at the same time had forest land area of 2170 thousand hectares, which represents 40% of the total area (Šmelko et al., 2008).

CZ and SK are two very close states, nationally, geographically and linguistically. They were interconnected historically, too, and in 1918–1992 (except during World War II) they were in one state. Their common history has been long – and that concerns the forestry sector as well – foresters' education, conditions and management of the whole sector. The common Forestry Act from 1977 was applied later in both successive states; until 1996 in CZ and 2005 in SK. Even the very recent history has been similar. Both states acceded to the EU on the same day (May 1, 2004). This has led to an assumption that all of these common factors have similarly influenced decision makers in forest economy in both states in the context of both EU accession and in the subsequent exploitation of European funds. It is also emphasised by the fact that both states acceded to the EU under the same time stress in the middle of the programming period 2000–2006, and therefore were pressed to fulfil all criteria set for the period.

The EU has set the programme evaluation as an indispensable component of the subsidy policy. For the evaluation of programmes' and projects' financed from the EU funds, the European Commission produced the following guidelines: "Evaluation Methods for the European Union's External Assistance, Guidelines for Project and Programme evaluation" (European Commission, 2006), which sets out the principles applied in every member state. The evaluation methods of the European Commission are

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