

Nature Houses in the Czech Republic

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Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic (NCA) is a state organisation that administrates 25 protected landscape areas covering more than 10.000 km² in total and several hundreds of nature reserves and monuments of national importance. NCA is responsible for state administration as well as for practical measures, monitoring, reporting, expert support, etc. Environmental education and spreading information are ones of priority activities.

10 years of state nature conservancy partnership programme realisation

Conservation of nature and landscape is not possible without support of wide public. Most of large protected areas in the Czech Republic are traditional tourism destinations and are hugely visited. Oversize and just a little regulated tourism causes some negative impacts. Reduction of such impacts is managed through construction of high-quality and targeted visitor infrastructure and services leading to regulation of visitation and building positive relationships between nature conservation and visitors. Construction, running and care of visitor infrastructure and work with visitors directly in the field are ones of the most important ways of public relations (Pešout, Šulová & Licek, 2014). The Nature House programme becomes the most demanding and key part of the visitor infrastructure system. Visitor centres (Nature Houses) and information centres in protected landscape areas are being constructed within the programme. The programme started in 2006 and since then it was designed on principles of PPP projects (Public Private Partnership). It is a partnership programme realised always in co-operation with municipalities, businessmen, NGOs, land owners and other regional stakeholders.

Nature House provides following activities in a protected landscape area:

- welcomes and in different forms informs public about phenomena in a protected area; attractive permanent interactive exhibition on nature and landscape both in interior and exterior is the carrying part,
- increases awareness on basic principles and reasons for nature and landscape conservation, encourages interest and creates positive relation of visitors to the site as well as to nature conservancy in general,
- helps in environmental education of visitors and regulation of their dispersal in a protected area,
- provides teaching and educative programmes for schools and visitors,
- provides basic information on tourism in cooperation with local destination management,
- supports meeting of local people in pleasant space,

- provides selling of printed material, regional products, quality souvenirs, promotional goods, maps, educational material,
- allows watching educational films related to particular protected area.

Unified frame and project realisation procedure performed by many partners was set up at the beginning with clear and firm rules (Pešout, Šoltysová & Licek, 2009) with help of NCA Visitor Centres Suggestions Manual (David & Velková, 2009). The manual defined a system of negotiation, unifying elements and requirements for joining the Nature House network. Nature Houses and expositions are designed to appeal on emotions and to develop sensual discovery of authentic nature. Authors start from basic presumption, that impression of enjoyable landscape, long-term formed by generations, is intuitive based and that a deep affiliation to nature is connected to sensual recognition, cheerful experience, feel of happiness, adventure and discovery.

Construction of visitor and information centres in the Nature House network was co-financed by European Regional Development Fund through the Czech Operation Plan Environment, by the Czech State Environmental Fund and from partners' budgets. Operation of centres is managed by local partners using multisource financing (national programmes, municipality and regional authority subsidies and local businessmen support, income from own activities).

There are 8 finished visitor centres – Nature Houses – open for public in 2016 and seven information centres, all in 12 protected landscape areas. Discussions are being held about further Nature Houses with partners in other PLAs, too. By the end of 2023, at least 20 buildings should be in service - 12 Nature Houses and 8 information centres. The 10 years of the project duration are considered successful, even though faster development of the Nature house network was assumed. To convince own employees and responsible people at the ministry of the Environment of advantages of such solution was one of the most difficult tasks.



Pešout P., Šulová K., Licek T. (2014): Návštěvnícká infrastruktura chráněných území. *Ochrana přírody* 6: 36-39.

Pešout P., Šoltysová L., Licek T. (2009): Dům přírody. Nový program AOPK ČR. *Ochrana přírody* 2: 26-28.

David L., Velková E. (2009, 2014): Jednotný architektonický koncept, manuál pro navrhování návštěvníckých středisek AOPK ČR. – ms. [depon. In AOPK ČR, Praha].