

## Zitierhinweis

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**Saska Petrova, *Communities in Transition. Protected Nature and Local People in Eastern and Central Europe***, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014, 191 pp., ill., ISBN 978-1-4094-4850-1, £ 60.00

Literature on national parks and the protection of nature and wildlife most often revolves around the wilderness reserves of Africa and North America, the rainforests of Asia and South America, the great plains of Australia, or other spectacular areas. In other words, Europe has not been one of the main focal points of investigation. In addition, the role of local people in the management and conservation of national parks in Central Eastern Europe (CEE) remains limited, both within the practice of park-management and within academic research. In her book, Saska Petrova addresses these two disparities, and as such forms an important contribution to present day scholarly *and* political debates.

Petrova works as a lecturer at Manchester University's School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED)—an internationally recognized center of excellence in both research and teaching—and is involved in a number of interdisciplinary projects concerning urban political ecology and environmental governance. *Communities in Transition. Protected Nature and Local People in Eastern and Central Europe* is Petrova's first monograph and is based on her PhD research at Charles University, Prague. The book is published as part of the Ashgate Studies in Environmental Policy and Practice. This series covers all aspects of research into environmental change and development, but focuses primarily on environmental policy and management implications.

*Communities in Transition* indeed addresses management of the environment, but instead of taking a classic top-down approach focusing on the higher manage-

ment of the 'great nature parks' of the world, Petrova analyzes the role and attitudes of local residents in management and conservation of national parks in CEE. As such, in terms of subject matter and spatial orientation, Petrova's work is innovative. Moreover, Petrova not only moves beyond the conventional boundaries of hierarchy and geography, she also challenges long-established ideas about the role of local communities in national parks. Based on extensive literature research, she presents an elaborate theoretical analysis, in which she convincingly criticizes a number of academic perspectives. According to her, one of the most important shortcomings of existing approaches is the standardization of modes of environmental governance, the perception of local people as homogenous and monolithic entities, and the limited role accorded to these communities. One of the most important merits of *Communities in Transition* in fact is that it supplements the existing, rather static frameworks with a more nuanced and fluid perspective on local populations in protected areas. Petrova argues that nature protection policies and local attitudes towards those policies are contingent upon wider environmental, social, and political relations.

In sharp contrast to her well-researched and convincing theoretical chapters—which accounts for half of the core content—Petrova's historical research is less impressive. Admittedly, the aim of *Communities in Transition* is not to present a comprehensive environmental history of CEE or the legacy of state socialism in this context. Yet, considering Petrova's goals of 'connect[ing] the attitudes of local residents towards protected areas with the *history* and politics of public participation and environmental governance' (2, my emphasis, Y. G.), devoting only one chapter to the state socialist past of CEE seems both too limited and overly ambitious. In

as little as twenty pages Petrova presents an overview of the legacies, challenges, and opportunities associated with nature protection and municipal government during and after state socialism, including a survey of the main environmental legacies of socialist planning, a review of the main forces and developments that shaped the structures of municipal environmental governance in post-socialism, and a discussion of developments after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Unsurprisingly, Petrova's historical account is superficial at best, and on many occasions would greatly benefit from further elaboration and more extensive evidence. If anything, this brief chapter on the transformation of former Soviet-led states and its connection with present-day political attitudes and opportunities for participation could be seen by historians as an invitation for further investigation. For *Communities in Transition* however, the chapter has limited added value, which is unfortunate because the connections to the CEE states' socialist pasts are so interesting, under-researched, and vital for understanding the political and social dynamics encountered today.

Most refreshing about Petrova's book is precisely this encounter with the situation of today. In two interesting case studies Petrova explores the everyday reality of the relationship between nature protection and local communities of two national parks: the Pelister National Park in Macedonia and the Šumava National Park in the Czech Republic. The analysis of these cases is based on on-site research, including in-depth interviews with local policy-makers, nature protection experts and local inhabitants, as well as questionnaire surveys of the residents of villages in and around the two parks. Outcomes relating to people's attitudes and practices are then further explained within the wider context of nature protection management, economic wel-

fare and political structures, resulting in interesting insights that support Petrova's theoretical arguments. Unfortunately, this potentially lively account of people's views and experiences is interlaced with discussions of quantitative evidence and long enumerations of protected species—the relevance and usefulness of which is not always clear. At times, this makes Petrova's account somewhat dry and less appealing for a wider public than it could have been. Despite this mostly stylistic discrepancy however, the analyses of the Pelister and Šumava National Parks serve their purpose as illustrations of Petrova's main arguments. The empirical evidence supports the idea that local communities in national parks are not mere obstacles towards the sustainable management of national parks, that their involvement and attitudes largely depend on the wider context and are therefore diverse and subject to change.

Given this on-site research in Pelister and Šumava National Park and Petrova's academic background—she completed a Bachelor's degree in Macedonia, and a Master's and PhD in the Czech Republic—one aspect of her book cannot be left unmentioned: the striking imbalance in the selected literature. With over twenty pages of references, only nine non-English publications can be found, two of them Italian, and only seven in a Slavic language. Whether this is a sign of Petrova's own neglect of locally produced works, or is the result of a gap in local knowledge production on environmental management in CEE is an open question. Most probably there is truth in both speculations, which would mean that the contents of Petrova's reference list reflect the strengths and weaknesses of *Communities in Transition* in general: it has some deficits, especially in what claims to be the historical part of the book, but, more importantly, it signals a wider chasm in contemporary scholarship. With

this book, Saska Petrova has made a significant step towards a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of local communities and their role in the protection and politics of the environment.

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**Adam Fagan / Indraneel Sircar, *Europeanization of the Western Balkans. Environmental Governance in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 198 pp., ill., ISBN 978-0-2302-9651-0, £ 63.00**

When Croatia joined the European Union as its 28<sup>th</sup> member state in 2013, accession to the EU seemed one step closer for the remaining states in the Western Balkan. It was proof that 'Europeanization', the enigmatic process designed to lead (potential) candidates to EU membership, actually yielded results. As Fagan and Sircar point out in their latest book, for the nations of the former Yugoslavia, Europeanization has been a more complex endeavour than for their Central Eastern European post-communist neighbours (1). Disrupted in their economic, social, and political development by years of war, the Western Balkans still face enormous challenges to meet the demands of the *acquis communautaire*. What is more, the attitudes towards the EU and European integration differ significantly from those in, for example, Poland and the Czech Republic, where accession to the EU was regarded as a 'return to Europe' and a 'non-negotiable foundation of their transition from Soviet-style communism' (2). For Western Balkan citizens and elites, by contrast, there is no such unequivocal identification with Europe, and engaging with EU conditionality is, for the most part, a rational undertaking. Despite these obstacles, however, progress

has been made throughout the region towards compliance with European standards. Europeanization, in other words, is on its way in the Western Balkans, and in their new book Fagan and Sircar seek to better understand how this complex process works in an equally complex world region.

Since the very beginning of the European project, Europeanization has attracted attention from a wide variety of scholars, trying to understand the multitude of variables and actors involved in the process. With this same goal in mind, Fagan and Sircar approach this somewhat elusive concept in a very practical and revelatory way, by using environmental governance as a perspective to study EU impact in the Western Balkans, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) and Serbia in particular. The choice for a comparison of these two nations is very instructive, especially given their different political and social structure. BiH—a potential EU candidate since June 2003—is highly fragmented in terms of ethnicity as well as institutions, while Serbia—a full candidate since 2012—is a centralized state that inherited its administrative capacities from Yugoslavia. With environmental politics as a lens, BiH and Serbia as case studies, and Europeanization in the Western Balkans as the subject of examination, *Europeanization of the Western Balkans* promises to be an interesting read.

Fagan and Sircar, two political scientists at London's Queen Mary University, definitely succeed in their undertaking. Using the results of their extensive empirical research project 'European Compliance in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia' (ECOB-HAS), they present a well-founded and original examination of the state of environmental governance in these two nations. Instead of limiting their analysis to the level of governmental institutions, their use of the concept of governance allows for the