Europe's hay meadows in decline

How nature benefits from tourism

a case study from Eastern Transylvania

Firenze, May 2014
The Pogány-havas Regional Association

- Founded in 1999
- Members:
  - The Harghita County Council
  - 6 municipalities (33 villages)
  - 11 NGOs
  - 9 local enterprises
- 23,000 residents
- of which 36% Székely, 64% Csángó, both Hungarian minorities
- and a very small number of Romanians and Gypsies
The area
Uniqueness of Pogány-havas and Transylvania

- Probably the largest remaining medieval landscape of Europe
- Very high species richness of agricultural areas
- Vast seminatural grasslands (thousands of km²)
- The management regime is: extensive farming, i.e. managing such large nature conservation areas would not be possible by state institutions
Hay meadow biodiversity

• World record:
  – Mountain hay meadows are among the most biodiverse areas in the world:
    under 100 m² scale no other habitat on Earth is as rich in vascular plants

• Pogány-havas records:
  – Local ecological knowledge: highest number in the word of distinguishing habitats in the local language
  – Number of plant species in a 16m² quadrat: third place in the EU, second in Transylvania
  – As much butterfly species on one meadow as in the whole of UK
Pogány-havas plant species composition

- Altogether 623 plant species found so far
- 390 species on grasslands (63% of all)
- 81 species in a 16m² quadrat (3rd place in Europe)
- 38 internationally or nationally protected species
- 33 red listed species
- 12 endemic species
Threats to mountain hay meadows

- Abandonment
- Land use change: sheep grazing
Threat: Abandonment

Mountain hay meadows measured in the Pogány-havas area in 2011, 35 km²
Threat: Abandonment

Mountain hay meadows mown (in green) in 2011: 4,3 km², 14% (!)
Threat: Grazing

Location of sheepfolds in the 1990-s
Threat: Grazing

Location of sheepfolds in 2012
Our activities to protect mountain hay meadows

• Biological and social research
• Organizing scientific conferences
• Developing policy recommendations
• Lobbying in Bucharest and Brussels
• Increasing of the profile of family farming: celebrities visits
• Article about hay culture in National Geographic (July 2013)
• Support local farming by:
  – Support farmers associations to collect EU standard milk
  – Develop and market new HNV products
  – Write grant applications
International Hay Making Camp

• Tourists learn all steps of traditional hay making
• They learn about local nature and culture
• They eat local food for every meal
• They network – we network
• Locals learn about the importance of their farming methods
• Rather low number of participants
• Environmentally and socially sensitive
Activities during the Hay Camp

- Hay making
- Learning about tool making
- Learning about traditional cheese making
- Learning about each others work – evening presentations
- Having fun: traditional dance, music
Downsides of tourism

- Built heritage vs. new building culture – “we have a sophisticated taste too”
- Not organised, individualistic and opportunistic
- Showing off – playing the traditions
- Often no sense for the actual uniqueness of the area
- Risk of mass tourism: damages places, industrial scale kills real traditions
Prince Charles learned how to mow in our garden in 2011.

He created a Transylvanian meadow in one of his gardens – in Highgrove.

His grandson, Prince George received a wildflower meadow in the Transylvanian hills for his christening.
Results

- Around 70 participants during 5 years
- Local income generation (more than 10 hay stacks 😊)
- A model for locals to copy
- Yearly awareness raising around traditional farming
- Increased local interest and pride on farming
- We inspired other hay making actions in the region
- We inspired two hay festivals launched in the UK
- PHA became part of international networks of hay culture
Come and learn from locals how to mow!

International Hay Camp in Gyimes

4 - 10. August 2014
Thanks for your kind attention!

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