



Nature Conservation and Rural Development **How to do both?**

Motorways are no good

More roads do not help regions to develop and harm nature; wiser investments are needed.

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Interview

Secret information on the state of SAPARD and LEADER programmes in Romania!

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Slow food movement

Slow Food takes pace and revives traditions for unique local products.

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by Anna Ivanyi, Nimfea Nature Conservation Association

The Shoes of Cinderella or why Motorway Construction is against Rural Development

The popular belief that the roads should be laid for the prosperity of remote communities often proves to be just a fairy tale. Roads are two-way, and they can easily take instead of bringing.

Why Cinderella is mentioned in the title? Because the shoe doesn't fit the lady at all: the environmental impacts of road infrastructure are not proportionate to the physical area covered by roads; the impacts are significantly greater than the area occupied would justify. Road networks and other infrastructure covers about 2 percent of the Earth's surface, but the impacts are expanding considerably over the physical area of roads. And while environmental damage is larger than usually recognised, social and economical benefits are much smaller than public opinion thinks – because public is made to think that motorways are the key to economic development, employment opportunities and social betterment. We have to be aware that most of these arguments are false and ungrounded. Studies and scientific findings of the last 30 years in this field have been neglected, by almost all European governments. Why decision-makers seem to ignore that the shoes simply do not fit?

Negative impacts ignored

As the ecological damage caused by roads is not unknown to most nature conservationists, the

following list only includes some of the negative environmental aspects. Infrastructure development affects the hydrological regime and modifies the microclimate, changes the chemical composition of the soil, significantly contributes to air pollution; and noise disturbance also affects wildlife in a negative way. Roads mean direct loss of habitat and destruction of flora and fauna, but also trigger the fragmentation of habitats and the reduction of the quality of the surrounding habitats. Populations can become completely isolated, because roads mean an impenetrable obstacle for most elements of wildlife (lots of plants, reptiles, amphibians etc.).

'Large scale public infrastructure investment, despite providing a short-term demand boost, has frequently failed to stimulate long term regional economic growth'

Productivity in the UK: 3 - the regional dimension. HM Treasury, 2001.

The resulting changes in the dynamics of the affected populations increase the risk of local extinctions, and impoverish genetic diversity. Landscapes are spoiled, losing cultural, recreational and esthetical value, and giving way to invasive alien

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species. The impacts of road infrastructure on nature are so complex and far-reaching, that we cannot predict or even describe them to full extent.

Nevertheless, huge amounts of public money are spent on building motorways all across our landscapes, justifying this enormous destruction by the social and economic benefits they bring to rural communities. Several studies, for example the "Transport and the Economy" report of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment (SACTRA) in 1991 already underlined that this is not necessarily true: there is no appropriate evidence that road constructions provide high social returns. This report explicitly states, that "the claims of national economic benefits from new roads are exaggerated". The cost-benefit analysis, which is a mandatory part of the construction documen-

tation, usually includes extremely overestimated economic benefits, mainly in terms of GDP and job creation, though without sufficient proof and missing baseline data, while the costs – both environmental and social – are underrated.

Money could be used better

Foreign examples clearly show that excessive infrastructure development is not a heal-all for economy. The case of Portugal and Ireland is well-known. After the EU accession, Portugal spent large amounts (22,8 billion EUR from EU funds) on constructing road infrastructure with a hope to boost rural development. Nevertheless the Portuguese GDP growth was quite modest for years, then turned negative in 2003. On the other hand, Ireland invested in education, social partnership, human resources, research and development.



The construction of yet another road starts. Photo by Anna Ivany.

Irish GDP growth was over an annual 10 percent for years, and the country deserved the label of "the economic wonder of the Western world". Although the Irish economic model also gained certain criticism, this comparison should ring the alarm bell in those who decide to invest public money in infrastructure development.

While not realising the expected favourable results, not appropriately planned and implemented road networks can directly aggravate the problems of already disadvantaged, peripheral regions: roads are two-way, and they can easily take instead of bringing. They take natural and human resources, leaving the affected community just as poor, or even poorer than before.

Tourism is another industry often cited as a winner of road construction, but evidence shows that easy access rather supports transit traffic and short stays; therefore hardly any local income is generated by the passing visitors.

Motorways in several cases led to net loss of jobs and the destruction of local enterprises because services and products are brought from other regions at a lower price. Qualified workforce left the region, contributing to the ageing of the population, and local markets crashed because of the "more competitive" central markets – this is one of the findings of the "Economic Impact of Motorways in the Peripheral Regions of the EU" EURES study from 1996. Other development alternatives are never examined, although in most of the cases

better rural development results could be achieved by more cost-effective solutions, with significantly less financial investment and less environmental damage.

Local democracy needed

"It is important that regeneration programmes start from a firm understanding of the needs of an area. While a new road may be a key issue in some locations, frequently the answers to effective regeneration lie in improvements elsewhere. Skills training, more demand responsive public transport services, lower business rates, improved child care facilities or the development of niche markets may all have more of an impact on economic prosperity, depending upon the circumstances of the area. In the rural environment this should also mean more discerning development which is designed to meet specific needs and recognises the importance of a high quality natural environment for future economic success." – states the before-mentioned SACTRA report.

'First, transport infrastructure does not automatically have positive effects on local development; second, the effects are themselves conditioned by the development measures implemented by the local actors'

French Ministry of Transport on the European Conference of Ministers of Transport, 1991

This kind of negligence of local needs directly conflicts with the principle of subsidiarity, local autonomy and self-governance, because local governments do not have any choice on how to spend the money dedicated to road construction, and they are not asked whether they could make better and more effective use of

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by Klára Hajdu

Future Journalists Learn to Write on Nature Conservation

This year CEEWEB organised the International Biodiversity Day in Hungary in cooperation with the Hungarian Ministry of Environment and Water. Special attention was given to involve students as the future generation of journalists.

Media undoubtedly plays an important role in shaping the people's perception of nature and their priorities in life, and this is not different in Hungary either. Thus it would be a great achievement to win journalists round to the issue of nature conservation

and put it more into the focus of media. Hence CEEWEB, in cooperation with the Hungarian Ministry of Environment and Water decided to invite students with ambition to become journalists to the celebration of the International Biodiversity Day (IBD).



Students work in groups to learn the practice of writing about environment.
Photo by Klara Hajdu

One month before the event CEEWEB announced a call for short essays about the importance of biological diversity and the role of media in environmental awareness raising, which targeted students between 12-18 years. The students were invited then to participate on the celebration of IBD on 22 May 2006.

Celebration in the Kiskunság National Park

The event on 22 May took place in Bugac, within the Kiskunság National Park, which is one of the driest parts of Hungary. By this, the occasion was linked to the International Year of Deserts and Desertification and to the 2006 topic of the IBD.

The Minister of Environment and Water of Hungary gave the importance of the event by his personal attendance. He gave a press conference to the "student journalists" and professionals, and later inaugurated the newest educational trail of the National Park. The director of the National Park and the ranger of the area guided the participants on the newly opened nature trail, which is called the "Trail of Birds and Trees" after the numerous species to be found around. As it is all explained on the information boards along the trail, the area on one hand is unique because of the sand dunes with special vegetation, but on the other hand it also suffers from the invasion of alien plant species. The ranger explained the creation of the sand dunes with the help of drawings in the sand.



Sand dunes and juniperus vegetation of Bugac.
Photo by Klara Hajdu

The sand was brought to this flat plain by the wind from the rivers, and the dunes were covered by vegetation until the times of the Turkish occupation (XVI-XVII century). At that time huge areas were flooded, and, as the Turkish army was much less experienced to move around under such conditions, the local inhabitants fled to those difficultly accessible lands. They also hid and grew their cattle on those sandy territories, which through overgrazing lead to the erosion of the sandy dunes. Thus the first open sand dunes were created. Later the junipers were the most fitted, toughest plants to settle on the dunes and the area is still famous for its juniperus vegetation.

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Learning from professionals

After the invigorating walk on the trail and a lunch in the "puszta", the students could hear the personal experiences and advice of professional journalists from daily/weekly papers and periodicals. In small groups they discussed the characteristics of good articles, and how journalists can raise the awareness of people of environmental problems.



Thirty thousand such postcards were distributed in Hungary in commemoration of the International Biodiversity Day (IBD). The drawing is one of the winners of a school contest that was organised by the Hungarian Ministry of Environment on the occasion of IBD in 2005.

The students could try soon what they have learned, as they were asked to write an article about the International Biodiversity Day. Their articles were forwarded to the professional journalists, who helped the students to further polish them with their comments and advice. The final articles were then all posted on the Hungarian CEEWEB website and on Hungary's Clearing House Mechanism. The best pieces were even selected for publishing in the printed media!

Reaching the wide public

Organising the press conference and the workshop for students in the Kiskunság National Park was, however, only one element of the programme related to the IBD. A much wider audience was targeted in the nationwide postcard campaign. On the week of the IBD, 30,000 postcards were distributed in the country in pubs, cinemas, restaurants for free. It bore a message that explained the relationship between human well-being and biodiversity in an easy language.

Also prepared for a wide dissemination, the Hungarian summary of some of the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment focuses on well-being and biodiversity in a more professional way. The digital publication shows the changes in biological diversity and the characteristics of natural ecosystems, which should be taken into due consideration when humans make decisions related to their management. The essential changes identified in policy and decision making and practical implementation provide enough to ponder over for all of us.

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the given resources. Local citizens, the NGOs and certain authorities (such as nature conservation authorities) are often not informed timely or they don't have a voice in influencing the decision. This approach is against all principles and policies of public participation and contributes to the serious democracy deficit of the European Union. In several cases these investments involve the direct violation of the law, for example with reference to the Aarhus Convention about the accessibility of environmental information.

Road constructions violate other principles formulated in the Treaty of the European Union: the principle of free economic competition is distorted by the subsidies provided to road transportation. Even the Sustainable mobility 2000-2004 action program lays down that the current pricing schemes give unfair and unjust advantage, environmentally harmful subsidies to certain transportation modalities, while

others (railways, ports) are clearly disfavoured. The "polluter pays principle" (also a basic principle of EU environmental policy) would mean that the users of roads should pay the environmental and health damages they cause. The EU transport policy adopted in 2001 also states that each actor of the transportation market should pay for the damages caused. Nevertheless, the real beneficiaries of road infrastructure are not taking their fair share of the burdens.

What could be a feasible alternative to excessive road construction? The solution could be the overall reduction of mobility and a decrease in the number of vehicles, the maintenance of already existing micro-regional road networks instead of new motorways, the development of public transportation – and first of all wise rural development creating local employment, based on local needs and local resources.

Further reading

The Cinderella principle: www.cnr.usu.edu/faculty/jbissonette/documents/Cinderella.pdf

Principles of road ecology: www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/ab/banff/docs/routes/chap2/routes2_E.asp

Transport and Ecology conference: www.icoet.net/ICOET_2003/03proceedings.html

Highway Mitigation Research: www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/ab/banff/docs/routes/routes1_e.asp

Campaign to Protect Rural England: www.cpre.org.uk/publications/transport/road-transport.htm

Blueprints for Sustainable Transportation in Central and Eastern Europe: www.bankwatch.org/project.shtml?apc=--3197961--1&x=175194&d=n

Roads, Jobs and the Economy: www.eco-logica.co.uk/GPRoadsJobsEconomy.pdf

EU support for development

The CEEWEB member interviewed Samuel Szabo, the head of the payment offices of SAPARD Agency in Romania.

Is the SAPARD programme successful in Romania?

Yes and no. Essentially we can call it successful in the light of the developments during the recent months. People learnt to use the financing opportunities as a useful tool, so it is successful in this respect. Not necessarily the beneficiaries themselves wrote the projects and implemented them. Very often they hire specialised firms to submit the projects and the administration is subcontracted, too. But they successfully learned to use the opportunity. On the other hand, SMEs will be the major beneficiaries of the European funds after EU-accession, so these programmes are a good experience for them.

So Romania can absorb 150 million euros every year from the SAPARD programme and much more after the accession?

I think yes, especially because the post-accession financial aid system is more flexible as it is the SAPARD and it is preceded by a very strict programming process. The SAPARD is a very rigid system and it is possible that we can't spend all the money (more than •150 million per year is available for Romania).



Samuel Szabo.

Some measures that are important for nature conservation have got the accreditation from Brussels only in summer 2006. What were the reasons?

Because of multiple reasons. One of the most important is related to the fact that accreditation is a complex and time-consuming process. In addition, we had a government change in this period in Romania, so the SAPARD Agency didn't have a director for several months. I came in April 2005 and I knew that immediate action had to be taken, so we sent these four dossiers to the Commission. The measures were at Brussels for accreditation, but the Commission didn't give priority for these measures, the official audit was in October 2005. Finally we have the approval to announce the applications and what we see is that from these four measures only two aroused public interest: the forestry measure (3.5) and the modernization of veterinary and

food quality laboratories (1.2). The modernisation of the laboratories is our obligation; otherwise we won't be able to sell our products in the common European market.

The problem with the producers' groups support measure is that in Romania we have only two of them registered officially, so they are the beneficiaries of this measure.

The 3.3, the agro-environmental measure, was prepared in 1999-2000, and it was introduced only as pilot-projects in those counties where NATURA 2000 areas were designated. We are talking only about ten or eleven counties in the whole country. In the Central Region, Transylvania, it functions only in Alba County but hasn't got any applications for this measure till now [June 14] (although the call is open for two months already).

Was the SAPARD Agency involved in the elaboration of the programming documents for the period 2007-2013?

In some form or other we were involved, but of course the things could have happened more favourably for us. The process was often that we were given a version of a document and after suggesting some changes we received the first version again. Our role is mainly the supervision of the plan: if the Ministry of Agriculture has a political point of view we check if it is possible to implement it. We try to achieve that they don't set up such monitoring criteria that are not possible to measure or that they don't set up such requirements that nobody can fulfil.

Anyway, we are at an early phase of the process; I think the final version of the Strategic Plan will be finished

in September 2006 and then will start the elaboration of the National Rural Development Plan. This means that in the first months of 2007 we won't have a functional NRDP. We will know about the financing opportunities, but we won't be able to receive money from them.

The LEADER programme also starts these days in Romania...

Yes, and in my opinion this is a very important programme. This pilot phase means the formation of the final beneficiaries (micro regions, local communities from rural areas). Local communities can realise their own development ideas and find money for the elaboration and implementation of their local development strategies. The bad news for this programme is the same: we will not be prepared for the implementation by the beginning of 2007.

What do you think, the Romanian farmers will be the winners or the losers of the EU accession?

Unfortunately the institution building process is behind schedule. The area based payments should be the most important income for many farmers, although we haven't elaborated the digital maps necessary for these payments, and I do not foresee that the system will be functional before 2008. Therefore, if we are not able to pay the farmers, the agriculture will be loosing during the first phase. But if we manage to set up the registration system on time, that would be a very pleasant surprise... So it is possible that during the first year Romania will have to contribute more than will be offered by the EU in the field of agriculture.

Thank you.

What Europeans Think of the CAP?

What an interesting question! The EC wanted to know the answer, so they launched a special Eurobarometer survey entitled "Europeans and the Common Agricultural Policy".

The survey was conducted among 25 thousand European citizens aged 15 years and above in the 25 Member States in 2005. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in citizens' homes in their national language. This survey reveals how European citizens perceive the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in terms of the benefits, the main priorities as well as its reform.

Overall the results show that majority of the EU citizens has a positive opinion of the way the Common Agricultural Policy is working. The main advantages of the CAP, according to EU citizens are that it ensures that the food purchased by the consumers is safe and of good quality. Ensuring stable and adequate income for farmers is the priority most respondents would like to see the EU's agricultural policy focus on.

Positive evaluation

Two thirds of European Union citizens believe that granting more funds for the protection and development of the overall rural economy and for direct support to farmers is a good thing. A clear majority have said that they support recent changes in the common agricultural policy and would like to see the way in which it supports EU farmers continue to evolve further along these lines.

Let's have a look at some interesting findings:

- 57 percent of Europeans believe that the CAP is doing a good job in ensuring that agricultural products are healthy and safe.
- 55 percent think that the CAP plays its role fairly well in promoting the respect of the environment.
- 48 percent believe that the CAP is making European agriculture more competitive on world markets.
- 47 percent of EU citizens believe that the CAP is supportive in favouring methods of organic production.
- 29 percent of Europeans (9 percent more than in 2003 and 2002), recognise the importance of information on the geographical origin of the food and the role that the CAP plays in this respect.

And what do YOU think of the CAP?

This question will be asked in 2008 when there will be the mid-term review of the CAP. It is expected that the mid-term review lead to a new CAP reform where environmental NGO's can lobby for a better policy.

Floodplain Farming for the Living Tisza

In the spring we are concerned about high water running between the dikes, which is missing so much in the summer. Too much or too little?

Floodplain farming had been a method, which ensured the harmony of nature and man in the Carpathian Basin for centuries. This farming system reserved the excess water of floods for dry periods. Communities cultivated less ploughland than today and adapted the farming system to the water coverage in the landscape. That resulted in a mosaic-like landscape with wetlands, reed-beds, grasslands, meadows, orchards, forests – a more diverse farming system than today. Diversity resulted in greater stability not only for the ecological system, but for farmers too: they harvested many kind of crops.

There are a number of initiatives in the floodplain of the river Tisza in Hungary which try to reconstitute this farming system. Nature friendly farming systems and complex, integrated rural development programmes may be the last chance for regions with high unemployment rates, and with no economic perspective today.

The Project "For the Living Tisza" aims to facilitate the coordination of floodplain-farming initiatives along the river. The project will empower local communities to drive their development process and integrate biodiversity concerns into it. The initiatives will form local action groups and design plans on

land-use change to a sustainable floodplain-farming system. The execution of these plans will be (partly) helped by a Microgrant Fund facility of the project. It will also articulate the needs of local communities and of biodiversity into national plans and guidelines. The project participants founded the "Alliance for the Living Tisza" on 29 June in Nagyköru.

The three-year project is funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and co-financed by the Bureau for Nature Conservation of the Ministry for Environment of Hungary. The office of the project is located at the Hortobágy National Park Directorate.

For more information check the webpage of the alliance at <www.elotisza.hu> or contact Péter Kajner via <kajner.peter@makk.zpok.hu>.



Devastating floods or long droughts are likely to get more frequent in the future. Wise river management may prevent many impacts of such extreme weather conditions. Photo by Géza Molnár.



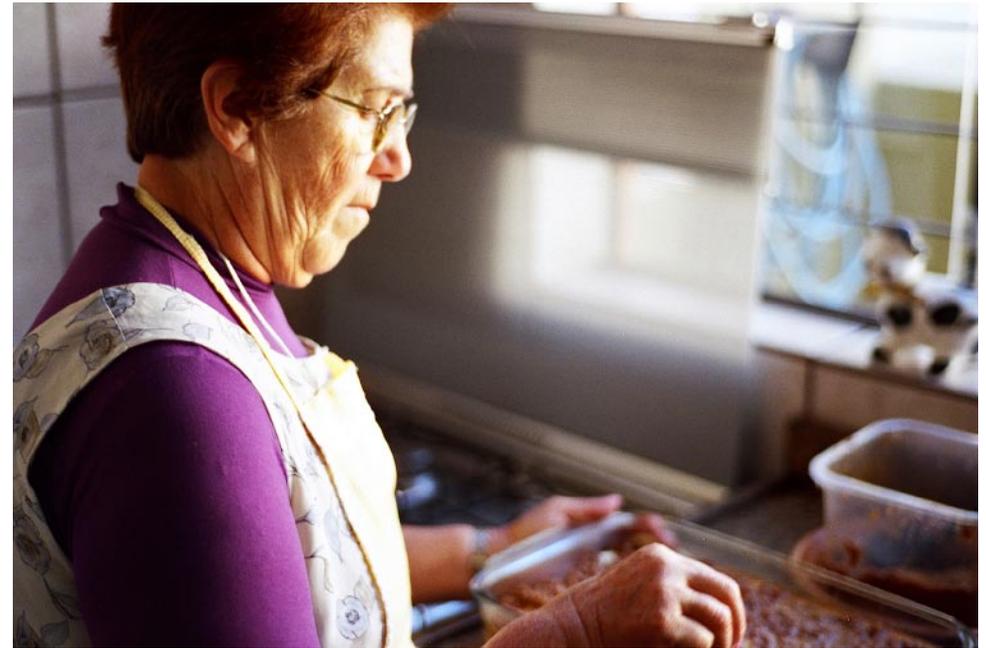
by Todd Schenk

Chewing Slowly in CEE

Slow Food is working in the region to ‘protect the pleasures of the table from the homogenisation of modern fast food and life.’

Jacek Szklarek returned to Poland in 1996 after spending a few years in Italy – the birth place and heartland of the Slow Food movement, and a widely accepted culinary hotbed – only to realise that his homeland also has traditional products made according to nearly extinct traditions that deserve to be preserved. Having learned about the Slow Food organization while in Italy, he set to work with friends, opening a chapter in Poland and launching one of the first international Presidia – a slow food project to promote and protect a specific traditional product – oscypek cheese from the Tatra Mountains.

Zoltán Erdos of Hungary came to believe in the importance of the Slow Food movement in a very different, yet no less interesting, way. By day, he is a food systems safety specialist, working for some of the biggest multinationals in the food industry. He sees first-hand how the advancement of technology in the food industry, and related growth of hypermarkets, is lowering the availability of traditional products. He believes that, while industrial-scale food must inevitably play a role in the market, this trend is disturbing, as human health is inextricably linked to food traditions. And so he gives his evenings and weekends to



Slow Food, and has played a major part in its development in Hungary.

What is this Slow Food they are both passionate about? According to the organisations website:

"Slow Food, founded in 1986, is an international organisation whose aim is to protect the pleasures of the table from the homogenization of modern fast food and life. Through a variety of initiatives, it promotes gastronomic culture, develops taste education, conserves agricultural biodiversity and protects traditional foods at risk of extinction."

In Szklarek's opinion, "the most beautiful thing that Slow Food is promoting is diversity – bio diversity, cultural diversity". He

believes that "this diversity obviously has to be based on something real, and food is [an appropriate] thing because we are [eating] at least two or three times a day."

Central and Eastern Europe undoubtedly has a wealth of food traditions in need of preservation. These are products that survived the challenges that the socialist era brought to agri-food in the region, with collectivisation, industrialisation and international trade within the bloc; a time when, as Szklarek notes, "Practically, we had two or three types of bread for the whole Poland, two or three sorts of sausage and so on.... The idea of the communists was that everything should be equal for everyone... the same houses, the same weddings and

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Top left: oscypek cheese, photo by Szymon Kierat.

Top right: cooking grandma, photo by Sérgio Henrique Schüler

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the same food.... In some vil-
lages, people are still maintaining
old food traditions [but often the]
chain from the father to the son
and so on was broken”.

Far from safe, the food traditions
that survived now face the
homogenization, industrialisation,
and focus on convenience that
globalisation and our fast-paced
consumer lifestyles bring. “Ham-
burgers, Doner Kababs, Gyros
and other street foods are very
popular because people are more
and more nervous and running,
and so take food on the street,
and take no time for families,
gastronomy or food preparation”,
says Erdos. He relates the story
of a recent experience purchasing
a bottle of Schweppes Szolo
(grape drink) – a mass-produced
copy of a product traditionally
made in Hungary – and noticing
that it contains only 1.4% grape
juice. “All the rest is special
components, artificial sweeteners
and aromas; for young people it
has a good taste, and they forget
the traditional one, which would
be no problem if it was healthy,
but I don’t think that it is so
healthy for the future”, he says.

Similarly, the majority of oscypek
production in Poland is not carried
out using traditional techniques,
and cows’ milk is often used
instead of that from sheep herded
in to the mountains, as was
traditionally the case. Cows milk
is obviously much cheaper, and
traditional oscypek can only be
made in season – from May to
September – while consumers
expect it to be available year-
round, says Szklarek.

In the face of this adversity, local
chapters – or Convivia in Slow
Food slang – are, however,
working to preserve a variety of
products, from mead (a honey
beverage) and oscypek cheese in
Poland to pozegaca plum slatko
(a preserve) and sir iz mijeha
(cheese in a sack) in Bosnia and
Herzegovina, and mongolica pork
products and plum marmalade
from Penyige – one of the newest
Presidium products – in Hungary.

The approaches that Convivia take
are diverse, but include writing
about them and promoting them in
the media; holding fairs to promote
their products; targeting key
consumers, such as upscale
restaurants; supporting producers
and recognising those that stick to
traditions; and simply bringing
together those that enjoy and feel
that it is important to make and
consume these products.

Slow Food works directly with
producers within its product-based
Presidia in a variety of ways,
ranging from simply bring them
together and helping them to
coordinate marketing and promo-
tion, to building the necessary
supporting infrastructure, such as
a slaughterhouse. In most cases,
the establishment of quality and
authenticity standards for the
product is a critical step.

Interestingly, both Szklarek and
Erdos do see room for Slow Food
in the hypermarket environment.
“Slowly, they are trying to intro-
duce some quality products,
because every person – even from
Poland – goes [to Western Europe]
and notices that you can go to a
supermarket and also find special

sections with quality products ...
now we are finding that supermar-
kets that first offered only indus-
trial products are starting to offer
quality ones as well... It is not that
they are going to be really involved
in promoting such products... but,
every kind of selling point is good
for these [small] producers”, says
Szklarek. In Hungary, the ‘small
products on big shelves’ campaign
to introduce local traditional
products in to hypermarkets was
met with limited success, says
Erdos, but was accepted by the
Cora chain, for example.

Szklarek’s advice to consumers is
to “be curious and be open to
different traditions.... [we] are
always moving towards the same
things, but from time to time if
you have some different point of
taste – not point of view, but

point of taste – you can enlarge
your perspective and you can
[cultivate] this curiosity for
culture, for people and so on”.

Erdos advises that everyone take
a break once a week with family
to prepare something together.
“Eating is a traditional [ritual for]
human beings that is related to
the right part of the brain, which
has developed over millions of
years of evolution, and if we start
to eat, we forget about the left
part - about logic, and manage-
ment and time keeping; we are
opening and ready to receive
culture, music, friendship and so
on... Eating is a trick to open the
human part of people”, he says.

Bon Appétit!

For more information, visit the Slow Food
Foundation website at <www.slowfood.com>.



Slow mushroom soup. Photo by Simona Jakov.

The EU Acts to Prevent Losses

The EU marked the International Biodiversity day by issuing a Communication on halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010. But will the measures prescribed in the document be enough?

After long years of discussions, consultations and negotiations, the review of EU biodiversity policy, which started in 2003, at last delivered the final outcome. The European Commission produced a Communication on 22 May, the International Biodiversity Day: Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 and beyond – Sustaining ecosystem services for human well-being. The document was published after long delays, which was clearly a sign of playing down biodiversity issues on the European agenda.

Though in certain fields lacking strong objectives and necessary actions, NGOs and NGO coalitions (like the European Habitat Forum) generally welcomed the document. It outlines the seriousness of biodiversity decline and stresses the negative implications for nature and people arising from these trends. Most importantly the Action Plan (Annex I of the Communication) contains detailed steps that urgently need to be undertaken to meet the target of EU leaders to halt biodiversity loss by 2010.

Very importantly, the Action Plan does not only target the Community level institutions, but unlike

the EU Biodiversity Strategy, it also identifies tasks to be delivered by the Member States.

In order to be able to measure progress towards the 2010 target, Annex II describes the 16 headline indicators for biodiversity, in line with the proposed global indicators endorsed by the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Impact Assessment, which is also released as annex, aims to analyse the impact of the Communication. It also provides the European institutions and public with information on the impacts of biodiversity loss and of proposed measures to halt this loss.

The main points of the Communication are listed in the box on the next page. The full text of the Communication is available at the DG Environment's nature and biodiversity homepage, and at the CEEWEB website:

ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/current_biodiversity_policy/biodiversity_com_2006/index_en.htm

www.ceeweb.org/workingareas/policies/Bidi_policies.htm

The four key policy areas and ten priority objectives in the Biodiversity communication

POLICY AREA 1: Biodiversity in the EU

Objectives

1. To safeguard the EU's most important habitats and species.
2. To conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider EU countryside.
3. To conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider EU marine environment.
4. To reinforce compatibility of regional and territorial development with biodiversity in the EU.
5. To substantially reduce the impact on EU biodiversity of invasive alien species and alien genotypes.

POLICY AREA 2: The EU and global biodiversity

Objectives

6. To substantially strengthen effectiveness of international governance for biodiversity and ecosystem services.
7. To substantially strengthen support for biodiversity and ecosystem services in EU external assistance.
8. To substantially reduce the impact of international trade on global biodiversity and ecosystem services.

POLICY AREA 3: Biodiversity and climate change

Objective

9. To support biodiversity adaptation to climate change.

POLICY AREA 4: The knowledge base

Objective

10. To substantially strengthen the knowledge base for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, in the EU and globally

The four key supporting measures

1. Ensuring adequate financing
2. Strengthening EU decision-making
3. Building partnerships
4. Building public education, awareness and participation

by Ildiko Arany

Poland Fails at Natura 2000 Site Selection

While the Czech Republic and Slovakia presented full National Lists at the Natura 2000 Continental Biogeographic Seminar, the official proposition of Poland was sufficient for just ten percent of the species and habitat types.

Following the EU enlargement in 2004, the ten new member states had to undertake the obligation to designate their Natura 2000 sites. In 2005, a series of Biogeographic Seminars started. Now this process has come to an end, the last remaining Biogeographic Seminar for the Continental region (covering extended parts of the territories of the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia) was held on 26-28 April, 2006 in Darova, the Czech Republic.

In the seminar, Sites of Community Interest were officially adopted by the Commission

through the evaluation of proposed Sites of Community Interest (pSCI, so called National Lists). Decisions were made about the sufficiency of national proposals (for species by species and habitats by habitats, each country was separately evaluated). The decisions were based on three requirements: quantity of sites, quality of sites and the coherence of network.

The participants of the seminar were delegates of the European Commission, the European Topic Centre (that provided scientific background to the EC), the official



Land users, NGO representatives and governmental delegates worked together at the meeting. Photo by Andrzej Kepel.

delegates of the three concerned member states, independent scientists, land user organisations, neutral observers and – which is the most important for us – NGO representatives. This was the first Biogeographic Seminar where two NGO representatives per member state could participate. Three CEEWEB member organisations participated in the event: the Polish Society for Nature Protection "Salamandra", Naturalists Club Poland and the Czech Union for Nature Conservation – Ecological Institute Veronica. All NGOs were well prepared and constructive, as Ladislav Miko, the director of the Protecting the Natural Environment Directorate of the DG Environment, emphasized at the end of the seminar.

As for the outcomes of the seminar, both the Czech and Slovenian National Lists were substantial, with very few gaps. However, the Polish

Government proposed only 4.2 percent of its territory for Natura 2000 habitat sites (Special Areas of Conservation). It is the smallest percent in Europe and according to NGOs estimation - about 1/3 - 1/4 of the territory, which should be included into a sufficient proposal. Therefore only for 9.7 percent of species and habitat types (4 species of animals, 4 species of plants and 9 types of habitats) the official proposition was sufficient. The EC had initiated proceedings against Poland for the Special Areas of Conservation (under the Habitats Directive) and Special Protection Areas (under the Birds Directive). Poland is therefore obliged to propose further sites (either SCIs proposed by Polish NGOs in the Shadow List or new ones) for the species and habitat types in question. DG Environment will hold another seminar for them after Poland will have sent officially a more detailed list of proposed sites.

The EHF Meets DG Environment

The European Habitats Forum (EHF) represents 14 international NGO networks committed to the restoration and sustainable use of habitats and species in Europe. CEEWEB is among them. EHF meets normally twice a year, the last meeting having taken place in Brussels, in early May. Besides their internal meeting, EHF members met Nicholas Hanley, then still the head of the Unit Nature and Biodiversity at DG Environment.

Various topics connected to Natura 2000 were discussed internally and also with Mr. Hanley, such as the latest Biogeographical Seminars, the proposed Habitats

Directive review, the Natura 2000 Shadow Monitoring Project, marine issues, Natura 2000 complaints procedure and an update on Natura 2000 financing and LIFE+. Furthermore, the latest information regarding Bern Convention, Biodiversity Communication, Green Week, EU Nature Directors meeting were covered, as well as the Natura 2000 management staff changes in DG Environment.

If you need more detailed information on any of the topics, feel free to contact Ildiko Arany at CEEWEB office via arany@ceeweb.org.

For GMO-Free Europe

A number of human mistakes and evidence of reasearch makes it difficult to believe that gene manipulation is a safe game. While the EU lifted the memorandum against GMOs, there are many ways to stop the spread of such organisms.

Human mistakes happen

In the spring of 2005 Sygenta company (headquarters in Switzerland) noticed a mistake of their own. For the last four years the company was growing a type of modified corn Bt10, for which a permission was not issued anywhere in the world. The corn was grown on 15 hectares land in the United States and it was also sold, including a thousand tones of corn brought to Europe. The case gets even more difficult if one takes into the account that Bt10 corn contains some marker genes that cause ampicillin resistance. This antibiotic is widely used as a medicine. Potentially, Bt10 corn may cause resistance to the antibiotic in humans. Due to this reason the use of genes causing resistance to antibiotics is not allowed in the European Union.

In 2000 MONSANTO found out an interesting fact about their genetically modified soja, which the company was selling for already seven years. The company thought that only the gene that regulates the resistance to glyphosate herbicide was modified in the soja. They were indeed surprised to realise that by accident two other gene sections were inserted into the genome of the soja.

Research shows there are dangers to health and nature

The offspring mortality of rats fed with genetically modified soja was eight times higher than in the control group, found out the researchers of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Impacts on health of animals were confirmed by a numerous research done around the world. For example, Italian scientists found out that genetically modified soja causes changes in the metabolism of liver and pancreatic gland of mice; Japanese research showed that such soja slows down the growth of animals.

The research of Skotish Rowett Institute shows that genetically modified potatoes apart of harmful insects kill the useful ones, for example the ladybug that feeds on aphid (plant lice). According to the research done by the Hungarian scientists, the Bt-toxin produced by genetically modified MON810 corn puts into danger the caterpillars of such butterfly species that are protected in Hungary.

Field trials in Denmark of a genetically engineered, herbicide-resistant rape showed that the gene for herbicide resistance had jumped into a closely related plant.

Force-feed Europe with GMOs

The European Union did not approve new GMO varieties since 1998 ('de facto' European moratorium). But the United States in favour of the biotechnology companies tried to force the EU through the World Trade Organisation to lift the moratorium. Due to the pressure from the WTO the European Commission – despite the opinion of the member states – authorized a number of GM products on the European market in 2004. Furthermore, the cultivation of 31 genetically modified maize varieties engineered from the Monsanto MON810 was approved by the EU.

Hungary, Poland, Greece and Austria banned provisionally the cultivation of these varieties (moratorium). Municipalities can refer to Article 19(3) of Directive 2001/18/EC and ask the government exemption from a European approval for cultivation of a certain crop, but this must be requested separately for each crop. This article made it possible that the Hungarian government in January 2005 could make the moratorium for the Mon810 varieties. The sad thing is that from the European Commission, United States and biotechnology companies' side there is considerable pressure towards these countries to lift the provisional moratorium.

What can we do?

More and more people in Europe react to the Commission's decision by declaring their territory as GMO-free zone. By now, more 20 countries, more than 4500 settle-

ments, and 174 regions joined the European network of GMO-free zones. All 16 regions of Poland are GMO-free zones.

Initiate yourself the establishment of GMO-free zones in your area, in your region! Write a letter to the municipality; start to collect signatures from locals who support the idea of GMO-free zones!

It is possible to block the cultivation of GM crops in Hungary in the vicinity of protected areas. According to the Act on Nature Conservation the municipality must establish buffer zones with a local regulation in which there is a list of banned activities. Cultivating GM plants of course can be on the list. Similar legislation may exist in other countries.

Besides legislation there are other options as well. For example, a municipality can express its commitment for the public e.g. in local newspapers and advice the local farmers not to saw GM crops. None of the institutions maintained by the municipality (e.g. hospitals or schools) should use GMO food or ingredients. The municipality can cooperate with other municipalities in order to establish a GMO-free zone or region.

Another opportunity is to establish a network of GM-free households, and farms. Anyone who has a garden, field, office or restaurant can declare the property GM-free zone. Even school classes can initiate that the classroom should become a GMO-free zone. In Ireland more than a thousand GMO-free zones were established by this kind of voluntary initiatives.

Further information:
www.gmofree-europe.org

Sustainable Tourism Opportunities in the Carpathians

CEEWEB plans to develop sustainable tourism strategy for the Carpathians in the framework of two year-long Carpathian Project.

Tourism development in such a picturesque, valuable but at the same time vulnerable region as the Carpathian Mountains can have both negative and positive impacts. The impacts will depend on how tourism will be developed – in sustainable way, or not. Mountains can get crowded with huge hotels and ski lifts build with foreign investments and then get tramped by mass tourism in a decade. The uniqueness of the Carpathians can also be preserved by local communities with the establishment of sustainable tourism businesses and assuring that the well-preserved nature and culture continue attracting tourists for centuries.

The legislation fostered through the still very young Carpathian Convention can be a decisive factor for assuring the developments of such tourism that is "good" both for local people and for nature.

The 1st Conference of Parties of the Carpathian Convention is planned to take place in the beginning of October either in Romania or in Ukraine. The background document on opportunities for sustainable tourism in

the Carpathians will be presented at this conference. The document is developed by members of CEEWEB and other experts from the Carpathian countries. If well accepted by the Parties, the document will become the first step into the development of the sustainable tourism strategy and protocol under the Carpathian Convention.

CEEWEB is one of many partners in the Carpathian Project whose full name is Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians in a Transnational Framework. Apart of tourism related activities, the project partners aim at improving the informational base about the Carpathians, prepare informal Strategic Environmental Assessments for the key socio-economic sectors, etc. The project is led by the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention at the UNEP-Vienna, implemented by 19 partners, and co-financed by the EU CADSES Programme.

Product Development



CEEWEB
Sustainable **Tourism**
Working Group

Yet another training and meeting of the Sustainable Tourism Working Group took place in Poland in June

The meeting took place at the foothills of the "Queen of Beskidy" – Babia Gora mountain in Poland on June 7-8, 2006. The Academic Section of the Polish Tourists and Country-Lover's Society helped in organising the meeting. According to the information provided by them, the Babia Góra Mountain is the highest point (1725 metres) of the Beskidy Mountains in Poland. Protected as a National Park and Biosphere Reserve, it contains some of the last fragments of the ancient Carpathian Primeval Forest, which once extended across the entire range. The mountain itself has an extraordinary magnetism for local people, uniting communities on either side of the Polish-Slovak border.

The meeting of the STWG was the second from the four planned for this year. Therefore it was mainly devoted to discussion on the ongoing work. For example, it included reporting about the progress with the development of the country reports on the sustainable tourism situation and discussion on how the collection of information can be streamlined. The planning of the publications on sustainable tourism, and of the country actions was advanced.

Bernadetta Zawilinska of the Academic Section of the Polish Tourists and Country-Lover's Society was elected as a co-chair of the working group.

The training was focused on sustainable tourism product development. A presentation on VIABONO criteria was included. Study visit served for analysing three product examples (handicrafts, accommodation and a nature trail). The SWOT of the products visited was discussed afterwards. The participants also learned about Pan Parks and ECAET.

The next meeting of the STWG will take place during the CEEWEB Annual Meeting at the end of September.

The Impact Assessment and Impact Management will be the topics of the third training that is planned to take place in a biosphere reserve on an island near Naples (Italy) at the end of October.

The materials of the training and the minutes of the meeting are available online at www.ceeweb.org/workinggroups/sustainabletourism.

At the meeting ideas for the logo of the working group were brainstormed, the final result is above.

Learning about Biodiversity Policies on a Tiny Island in the Baltic Sea

Conservation experts from Central and Eastern Europe met to follow-up on the Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity on the Isle of Vilm in Germany.

The political and scientific consultations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have produced a large body of information, guidance, obligations and requests directed at a broad range of stakeholders at the national and international level. However, many actors in conservation are insufficiently aware of the relevance of the CBD to their work and the opportunities offered.

In order to promote use of the available expertise, to find effective ways for implementing provisions under national conditions, and to allow for feedback from the field of practical conservation, the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation organised a workshop for conservation experts from Central and Eastern Europe. The workshop took place on 4-9 July, on the Isle of Vilm, Germany. CEEWEB was pleased to help with its humble means in the preparation of the event, and contribute to the professional discussions.

The apropos of the event was the 8th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the CBD, held in March this year. The various presentations delivered by national CBD

Focal Points, governmental and NGO experts, private sector representatives and scientists focused on specific topics based on the previously sent requests of the participants.

First, in order to give a general overview, CBD and its functioning was presented, along with the financing possibilities from the Global Environment Facility. As the framework for implementation of the Convention, the ecosystem approach was introduced, followed by a case study on using the approach in Biosphere Reserves in Germany. From the point of view of a CBD Focal Point, a summary of the COP-8 outcomes offered a glimpse to the participants, how the Convention develops from conference to conference.

Speakers also described work on specific CBD issues, like protected areas, access and benefit sharing, impact assessments, forest biodiversity, tourism, monitoring and indicators, communication, education and public awareness, including examples of national implementation. As stakeholder involvement and public participation is an important strength of the CBD, an NGO representative

talked about the involvement of indigenous peoples in the CBD process.

Further case studies showed practical examples from implementation, such as through strengthening the network of training centers for protected area management in Russia and involving the private sector in sustainable tourism development in Ukraine. Speeches on the international cooperation on EU level to halt biodiversity loss, as well as on Pan-European level within the framework of a possibly restructured PEBLDS were given, just as on the Carpathian Conven-

tion, which only came into force early this year. The presented opportunities of an interesting project 'issue-based modules for coherent implementation of biodiversity conventions' will hopefully help and simplify the work with the various biodiversity conventions.

The report of the meeting, including the abstracts of the presentations will be available at the end of summer in hard copy and digital forms. If you are interested in the Power Point presentations, please contact Klára Hajdu at <hajdu@ceeweb.org>.



Conservation experts from Central and Eastern Europe on the Isle of Vilm. Photo by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation

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What will happen at the CEEWEB Annual Meeting?

This year the CEEWEB Annual Meeting will be held in Budapest, Hungary on 30 September 2006.

The Annual Meeting is a unique and important opportunity for all members to share ideas, strengthen and build the cohesion among members through the personal meeting, social activities, the common thinking and planning in thematic areas.

The Annual Meeting will be preceded by various events, such as the international seminar on lobbying "Making change by talking?" on 27 September, the one-day Working Group meeting on 28 September and the one-day discussion on the CEEWEB Work Program 2007 on 29 September at the same venue.

In addition, to make the stay of participants even more interesting and useful, there will be the traditional intercultural evening and optional excursion on 1 October organised.

The agendas for the Annual Meeting and the seminar on lobbying are available on the CEEWEB website at www.ceeweb.org/AM2006.htm.

This event is important for all CEEWEB members, as the Annual Meeting is the main decision-making and planning instrument of the CEEWEB Network.

For all general inquiries regarding Annual Meeting week, please contact Dalma Földes (dalma@ceeweb.org) or tel: +36 1 398 0135.