

# MARTOR



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**Dániel Babai, Ábel Molnár and Zsolt Molnár,  
“Ahogy gondozza, úgy veszi hasznát”.  
Hagyományos ökológiai tudás és gazdálkodás Gyimesben.  
Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Land Use in Gyimes  
(Eastern Carpathians). Budapest, Vácrátót, 2014**

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Where management is still extensive, traditional ecological knowledge systems embedded in culture continue to play a decisive role in creating and maintaining the exceptionally high level of biodiversity of semi-natural habitats from Central and Eastern Europe. Several species and about one third of the habitats of conservation interest requiring protection, listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC), are dependent on extensive farming practices, with semi-natural, temperate grasslands harbouring global species records of vascular plants. In the regions where traditional practices are still ongoing, the inhabitants are bearers of invaluable traditional ecological knowledge regarding land-use dynamics and finely-tuned practices adapted to the landscape. Recognizing the immense value of these landscapes, the traditional ecological knowledge which has led to their development and secures their maintenance is increasingly gaining importance in the view of scientists, conservation practitioners and policy makers. The need for a common

approach of natural and cultural values is reflected also by the initiative of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) to create a separate Task Force on Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK).

The book “*Ahogy gondozza, úgy veszi hasznát*” [“*As He Tends It, so He Makes Use of It*”] *Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Land Use in Gyimes (Eastern Carpathians)* meets in this sense the increasing expectation of studying traditional ecological knowledge, by documenting the local, deep knowledge of the Hungarian-speaking *Csángó* [Tsango] ethnics (*ceangăi* in Romanian), comparing it to Western science, and thus bringing further substantial proof of how traditional ecological knowledge can complement and help deepen scientific findings.

The book, authored by three Hungarian researchers, brings us to *Gyimes* (*Ghimeş* in Romanian), an ethnographically well-defined area from the Eastern Carpathians, Romania. Though the area was an extensively used border zone of the former Hungarian Kingdom from the eleventh

century and until it became part of Romania (in 1920), the first settlers arrived in Gyimes only in the mid-eighteenth century. As the population gradually increased (numbering roughly 15 thousand persons today), the extent of the native coniferous forests was rapidly reduced. The more-or-less stable mosaic of forests and newly created grasslands, pastures, hay meadows and arable land reached quasi-equilibrium by the mid-nineteenth century. A significant part of the area is included in the Natura 2000 network of protected areas; the flora is rich, especially due to the mountain hay meadows. The area, though well-known and valued among ethnographers for keeping alive its cultural heritage was less-studied from a biodiversity perspective. For this reason the book, together with the other studies by the authors, brings important scientific data also in this sense, revealing yet another aspect of the great values of this area.

Beautifully illustrated, with suggestive photographs of artistic quality and hundreds of quotes from the locals, honouring also in this way the values of this unique landscape and the immense knowledge held by its inhabitants, the book has 174 pages in total, including introduction and references. It is organised into four major sections: *Introduction*; *Habitat Categories in Gyimes*; *Extensive Farming of Grasslands and Forests*; *Summary and Further Thoughts*, followed by *Annexes* and *Cited and Recommended References*.

The book is introduced by the recommendations of Hungarian ethnographer and folk musician Gergely Agócs (*Unraveling the Depth of Gyimes*) and local biologist and farmer, promoter of the international recognition and protection of the area, László Demeter (*Old Knowledge – With New Message*).

The *Introduction* presents shortly the concept of traditional ecological knowledge, the methodology of research and documentation, requiring a complex approach covering both cultural

anthropology and the natural sciences and reviews the previous ethnobotanical and ethnoecological studies from Transylvania and around the world. This is followed by personal accounts of the authors on how they found Gyimes and started their research, the description and the history of the studied landscape as reflected in the literature and as perceived by the locals.

The chapter *Habitat Categories in Gyimes* is structured into ten sections, presenting the characteristic flora and vegetation of the different habitat categories: the nearby and the distant hay meadows; pastures; marshes and spring fens; spruce and beech forests; the succession stages of secondary vegetation in clearcuts; arable land including potato fields, the most important crop; the shifting gravel bar habitats of streams; the edge communities along the fences; rocky grassland and rupicolous habitats.

The chapter *Extensive Farming of Grasslands and Forests* presents the differences between the nearby (inner) and the distant (outer) hay meadows, the calendar of the different practices and the major characteristics of the pastures, forests and arable fields. The authors present in detail the main practices like manuring; cleaning of pastures and meadows; the spreading of “hayseed” – a mixture of viable seeds, dust and plant debris used for vegetation improvement; removal of unwanted species; early spring grazing of inner hay meadows and aftermath grazing of outer hay meadows; storage of hay; burning and corralling for suppressing the unpalatable *Nardus stricta*; forest management; gathering of fruits and mushrooms; forest grazing; sowing; pulling (weeding and earthing up) and harvesting potatoes. The imminent threat of practices not present in traditional land-use management and unsuitable from a biodiversity conservation perspective, such as the spread of intensive practices like harrowing, application of artificial fertilizers, over-seeding and mechanical mowing with heavy equipment is also mentioned.



The final chapter *Summary and Further Thoughts* includes the authors' concluding remarks regarding the traditional ecological knowledge from Gyimes, including the informal social institutions' relevance for nature conservation and the possibilities of its application in conservation management. The authors even recommend a subsidy system adapted to the local conditions and supporting the management system which created and maintained the local landscape and biodiversity values. "This knowledge is helping them to make responsible decisions regarding the use of the natural resources (e.g. hay meadows, pastures, wild and medicinal plants, timber). They know half of the flora encountered in this landscape, most of the vertebrate fauna and are able to differentiate a larger number of habitats and vegetation types than any other studied local community in the world [...] they hold a great amount of experience and data regarding the population dynamics of the species they know, about habitat changes and management effects." The extensive management which is still active here is predominantly lost in most European regions, representing therefore a unique opportunity to study the basis of the immense biodiversity we aim to protect and maintain, and to find solutions for a landscape governance system that ensures conservation despite the unfavourable social-economical driving forces.

The book ends with two annexes, one regarding the *Plant Names in Gyimes*, including the Latin and local folk names of folk plant taxa, and a second one on the *Habitat Names in Gyimes*, categorised according to land-use, dominant species, vegetation structure, stages of secondary succession following forest clearing and following disturbance, secondary habitats (built environment), soil and bedrock, aquatic habitats and according to geomorphology.

Throughout its pages, the book aims to present some of the astonishingly rich traditional ecological knowledge

experienced by the authors. They conclude that the richness of the ecological knowledge held by the *Csángó* ethnics is comparable to that of the much-studied and widely known communities of the tropical or Northern American regions.

I warmly recommend this book for ethnographic and nature conservation researchers and practitioners alike, as it brings a major contribution to our understanding of the worldview, the management system and practices of traditional communities. It represents thus a handhold in our pursuit of a responsible way of living, respecting future generations and ensuring the proper use of natural resources.

Though the book is published in Hungarian, English summaries are available for all major ideas and chapters, with several references to the authors' own publications and other cited and recommended literature data in English language. In this way the book is bilingual, relevant and useful for the wide international scientific community.

The book is open access, being available on-line at the following address:

[http://www.dki.okologia.mta.hu/sites/default/files/2014\\_Gyimes-TEK\\_Babai-Molnar-Molnar\\_konyv-book\\_2014\\_kicsi\(1\).pdf](http://www.dki.okologia.mta.hu/sites/default/files/2014_Gyimes-TEK_Babai-Molnar-Molnar_konyv-book_2014_kicsi(1).pdf)

