

NATURAL RESOURCES OF PIATRA CRAIULUI FOR LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES*

RESURSELE NATURALE ALE PIETREI CRAIULUI PENTRU
ÎMBUNĂTĂȚIREA MIJLOACELOR DE TRAI
A COMUNITĂȚILOR LOCALE

KIM DEKKERS¹, RUTGER DE WOLF², IOVU-ADRIAN BIRIS³

¹ M.Sc. in Forest and Nature Conservation, Wageningen University and Research Centre, Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group, P.O. Box 47, 6700 AA, Wageningen, The Netherlands, +31 (0)317 478004

² Student Forest and Nature Conservation, Wageningen University and Research Centre, Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group, P.O. Box 47, 6700 AA, Wageningen, The Netherlands, +31 (0)317 478004

³ Forest Research and Management Institute, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

In the Piatra Craiului National Park an inventory was made on the role natural areas have and can have for local communities, in order to find alternative livelihood strategies which could improve the livelihoods of people without hazarding the natural resources. Through a stakeholder analysis, semi-structured interviews and workshops this information was gathered. Conflicts between several stakeholders seem to exist about the foundation of the National Park, use of natural resources and the presence of wild animals in the park. Although the villagers are mainly dependent on jobs in surrounding cities and retirement pensions for their income, they derive an additional income from their cattle and agricultural products that grow inside the National Park and are mainly used autonomously. However, the people have a low income and because of several dynamics, they have hardly any alternative ideas to improve their situation. A suitable natural resource based strategy might be tourism. Local communities can use the 'Piatra Craiului National Park' to create a tourist product for the village. To achieve this idea, an improvement of communication between stakeholders is needed. In this way, the stakeholders in the area will become professional managers in sustaining the traditional way of living and the natural area.

Keywords: Natural resources, use, Livelihood Strategies, Tourism, Romanian Carpathians, natural protected areas

* These researches were done in the frame of project "Inventory and Strategy for Sustainable Management and Protection of Virgin Forests in Romania" which is carried out by Forest Research and Management Institute (ICAS) in partnership with Royal Dutch Society for Nature Conservation (KNNV), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and independent national and international experts.

Rezumat

Cercetările prezentate în această lucrare se referă la rolul pe care zonele naturale îl au și l-ar putea avea în viitor în viața comunităților locale, în scopul de a găsi strategii alternative de îmbunătățire a bunăstării oamenilor fără a periclita resursele naturale. Metoda de cercetare a constat în analiza grupurilor de interese în zona Piatra Craiului, interviuri semistructurate pentru „evaluarea rurală rapidă” și întâlniri de lucru cu membri ai comunității locale pentru „evaluarea participatorie”. Între unele grupuri de interese în zona Pietrei Craiului există o serie de conflicte de interese; acestea se referă în principal la modul / regimul de utilizare a resurselor naturale, la pagubele produse de către carnivorele mari din zona Piatra Craiului etc. Conform studiului realizat veniturile localnicilor sunt foarte mici, sub media la nivelul țării, și constau în principal din salariile celor care lucrează în orașele din vecinătate și din pensii. În plus, comunitățile locale au puține idei privind alternativele pentru a-și îmbunătăți situația. În aceste condiții turismul ar putea constitui o alternativă viabilă în utilizarea resurselor naturale. Comunitățile locale ar putea utiliza Parcul Național Piatra Craiului pentru a-și crea un produs turistic. Pentru realizarea acestei idei, este absolut necesară o mai bună comunicare a tuturor deținătorilor de interese în zonă. În acest fel, aceștia se vor perfecționa în menținerea unui mod tradițional de viață în zonele naturale.

Cuvinte cheie: utilizarea resurselor naturale, strategii de subzistență, turism, Carpații României, arii naturale protejate.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Romanian Carpathians are highly estimated for its richness of animals, forests and other natural resources. A strain that threatens the sustainability of these resources seems to be the difference in supply of available natural resources and demand of local communities for these natural resources. In this research an inventory is made on the role natural areas have and can have for local communities, in order to find alternative livelihood strategies, which could improve the livelihoods of people without hazarding the natural resources. As research site a specific local community in Romania is chosen: Magura, which is located inside the Piatra Craiului National Park.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A conceptual model adapted from Carney (1998) in which livelihoods are analysed, is used as a guiding framework for this research. In this model different assets, transforming structures and processes and dynamics, are considered to influence the choice for a certain livelihood strategy. Livelihood strategies are the range and combination of activities and choices that people make or undertake in order to achieve their livelihood goals (DFID 1999; see also Chambers and Conway, 1992). Several authors made livelihood strategy classifications. Here three forms of livelihood strategies are distinguished: non-natural resource based strategies, natural resource based strategies and migration strategies (Carney, 1998). Assets are stocks of different types

of 'capital' that can be used directly or indirectly to generate livelihoods (Woodhouse et al., 2000). Five assets can be distinguished: human capital (skills, knowledge and good health), social capital (all social resources upon which people rely), natural capital (natural resource stocks), physical capital (basic infrastructure and producer goods), and financial capital (financial resources that people use) (DFID, 1999; Carney, 1998). Considering the objective of investigating the role of natural areas, natural assets form a departure point of this research. These assets contain the natural resources of Piatra Craiului National Park, which have to be preserved and sustainably managed. Beside forests, also meadows, pastures and arable lands are part of the natural assets. Although natural assets are the most interesting assets for this research, the other assets cannot be denied and are investigated as well. Access to assets is limited or provided through dynamics that are divided in three different categories. Firstly the category of transforming structures and processes, which are for example present local and regional authorities that develop and implement activities and rules in the Piatra Craiului National Park. This can be both formal and informal legislation (Woodhouse et al., 2000; DFID, 1999; Carney 1998 and Scoones, 1998). Secondly, the post-communist dynamics, because they have a great influence on transformations in livelihoods (Fodor et al., 2002; Ágh, 1999; Stewart, 1998). Thirdly, group dynamics that limit or provide the possibilities in creating livelihood through group processes (Brown, 2000).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

A stakeholder analysis clarified the area of interest groups with stakes in the Piatra Craiului area. Firstly the stakeholders are identified via a snowball sampling approach (Barton et al., 1997). Key-informant interviews are used to define the stakeholders in the area more closely. After this their roles, interests, relative power and capacity to participate are investigated. Then the extent of co-operation or conflict in the relationship between stakeholders is discussed. Finally the findings of the analysis are interpreted and used to show how the different stakeholders can be incorporated into the sustainable development of the Piatra Craiului National Park area (after AusAID, s.a.). A brief literature study investigated the current and future legislation concerning the natural resource management in the area.

The method of rapid rural appraisal (RRA) has proven to be very suitable for gathering complex socio-economic and socio-ecological information (Schönhuth and Kievelitz, 1994). From the RRA methodology the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) was extracted. This method enables local people to analyse their means of life, to share the outcomes and plan their activities. RRA is more focused on obtaining data and analysing instruments for 'outsiders' by 'outsiders' but with the help of 'insiders'. PRA focuses on the reversal of these roles: the people that are affected should take an active role in analysing their life conditions and be able to evaluate the results (Schönhuth and Kievelitz, 1994). This also means that people share the above mentioned outcomes with the 'outsiders'. Several instruments of RRA and PRA are used to investigate the aspects

as described above. In the scope of RRA semi-structured interviews are held. This type of interview does not have a predefined structure. The starting point is a checklist containing key questions. New question complexes arise from the answers given by the respondents (Schönhuth and Kievelitz, 1994). Subjects of the interviews were: household figures, possession of land and forest, cattle and animals, profession, income, use of forest products, attitude towards the National Park, future perspectives and alternative strategy ideas. During the interview also a seasonal calendar is made in which the seasonal activities are reported. For these interviews a sampling is made of the 170 (inhabited) houses of Magura. For a total sample of 100 until 200 households, the suggested sample size is 15% of the total sample (Davis Case, 1990), which meant a number of 26 (\square 25.5) interviews to be held in Magura. Finally 27 interviews are held inside the village.

In the scope of the PRA methodology two workshops are organised after the period of interviewing. The first workshop was aimed to verify the results of the interviews by giving an oral presentation in front of the villagers. In this workshop the information gaps are filled by asking the participants about missing information. Furthermore a discussion round was implemented in this first workshop to talk about the general opinion on issues and problems, which the inhabitants would like to see improved. During the second workshop, the participants discussed about 'vision' and 'pathway' scenarios. The 'vision' scenario enables people to articulate their hopes for the future (Wollenberg et al., 2000). The participants are asked to write down these hopes together in groups, which are formed in advance. The 'pathway' scenario helps participants to determine how they can get from the present to a desired condition (Wollenberg et al., 2000). The 'pathway' scenario study also included a SWOT analysis, which focuses on the current situation of Magura and let participants investigate their own and their communities' Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in order to be able to structure these features and open them for improvement (Barton et al., 1997; Lancaster and Massingham, 1999). The aim of this workshop was twofold: firstly to investigate if dynamics (age, gender, history, post-dynamics) influence people's perspectives and secondly to evoke the creativity of the people through finding out what the hopes of the workshop participants are and consequently to evoke constructive, structural thinking on their situation.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

The results are split into three different parts: the stakeholder analysis, the present situation in the Piatra Craiului area (legal frameworks of environmental management and current livelihood strategies of local inhabitants) and the future expectations and alternative livelihood strategies of local communities in the Piatra Craiului area.

4.1 Stakeholders

The next stakeholders are distinguished which have various interests in the

area:

- The Piatra Craiului National Park Administration (PCNPA) administers the park which was declared a National Park already in 1990. The National Park encompasses a total area of approximately 15,000 hectares. Conform modern principles of nature conservation the park management has to combine the interests of preserving the biodiversity with the socio-economic development of nearby local communities (PCNPA, forthcoming). The PCNA is afraid that overgrazing in the alpine pastures will lead to a loss of biodiversity (Marusca et al., 2003) and that people will cut the forests illegally.

- Magura is the only village that is totally situated within the Piatra Craiului National Park boundaries. The inhabitants use the alpine pastures in the central zone of the Piatra Craiului National Park to graze their cattle and they use the land around their houses for agricultural activities. A danger mentioned by the people of Magura is the presence of large carnivores, like bears and wolves, which creates a feeling of unsafety among the inhabitants and causes a danger for their cattle.

- The Forest District manages the forests in the National Park but also co-ordinates game control in the National Park. Sometimes there are problems with poachers and illegal cutting, but according to the Forest District illegal cutting is limited to approximately 100 m³ per year.

- The municipality of Moeciu de Jos possesses several areas in the park region: the alpine pastures of Zanoage and Curmatura, situated in Piatra Craiului National Park, belong to Magura, but as Magura forms a part of Moeciu de Jos, they also belong to Moeciu de Jos. The municipality possesses further approximately 600 ha of forests in the Piatra Craiului National Park, mainly around the Zanoage and Curmatura. The Forest District still manages these forests.

- Around 86,000 tourists visit the National Park each year. They are attracted to the park because of the massif and its nature, and the possibility of escaping from town, being alone and being with family. Some visitors are camping and others are watching wild animals. Tourists furthermore like to see the traditional way of living in the villages (Verghelet et al., 2003).

- Also surrounding municipalities have a stake in the area. In the surrounding of the Piatra Craiului National Park, several villages and cities are situated. The most important are Zarnesti, Bran and Brasov. People from these municipalities use both timber and non-timber forest products from the Piatra Craiului National Park, and some of them build holiday houses, houses for permanent use or pensions for tourists.

- The Carpathian Large Carnivore Project (CLCP) tried to achieve the protection of large carnivores with the principle that conservation should go with the local communities and not against them. The project started in 1993, and was scheduled until the end of 2003 (BCP Wildlife consulting, s.a.). One activity carried out in co-operation with ICAS Brasov is the placement of electrical fences in order to protect the livestock from large carnivore attacks (CLCP, 2003).

Because of miscommunication in the past and weak communication at present,

conflicts exist between some of the stakeholders. The Piatra Craiului National Park was founded without consultation with other stakeholders. This has resulted in ignorance and a lack of understanding among several stakeholders.

A second conflict is dealing with overgrazing which threatens the conservation of nature, while local communities need these pastures for cattle breeding. However, already now the number of animals owned by the inhabitants of Magura is decreasing. Two reasons arise to explain this development: old people are using less or no milk and decide to keep fewer cattle and the young generation does not want to have many cattle, they just keep some for their own needs.

Also the preservation of wild animals, which threatens cattle and crops, raises incomprehension among the local communities. However, in the summer of 2002, only an average of 2.5 killed sheep per camp (0.8% of all sheep per camp) was recorded in comparison with an average of 6 killed sheep per camp (1.6% of all sheep per camp) in the previous years (CLCP, 2003). The declining number of successful attacks by wild animals is attributed to the installation of electrical fences by the CLCP and ICAS Brasov. Although the electrical fences stop many attacks, still little support of inhabitants of Magura exists to maintain the relative high population of bears and wolves.

4.2 Present situation

The forests and the natural resources of the Piatra Craiului are managed and protected within several legislation: the Forest Code (Government of Romania, 1996) and the Emergency Ordinance on National Parks (Government of Romania, 2000). These regulations proved to be well maintained and do not show many differences in comparison with the actual management practise. In future more regulations will be installed. In 2004, the regulations of the PCNPA and a new national order considering grazing management will be implemented. These will mainly restrict people in expanding their agricultural activities and building new houses.

During the interviews it proved that people in Magura depend on a large scale on their cattle. They own an average of 2 cows, 7 sheep, 1.5 pig and many fowl, with few differences between households. Cows, sheep, pigs and fowl are kept for their milk, meat, fur, wool or eggs, whereas horses, donkeys and oxen, are mainly used as means of transport, although just a few villagers have horses and oxen. They do not own more cattle for two reasons: they do not need more cattle and if they wanted to keep more, this would be impossible because the relatively scarce amount of grass on their pastures (which is also a result of poor soils). Cattle are just a source of additional income for them. The majority of the respondents (80%) keep the number of cows, which graze on the pastures, lower than two animals per hectare. Sheep on the other hand vary in number per hectare, but 90 % of the respondents keep less than nine animals per hectare. People only use cattle as they need and can afford it, considering the carrying capacity of their land.

The system of cattle breeding in the mountains exists already for a long period. Cows stay in the stable in average until the beginning of June and return from the

mountains at the end of September. Sheep are sent into the mountains from the end of May till the end of September (see also figure 1). Sheep and cows that go into the mountains are grazing mainly on the Curmatura and Zanoage pastures where shepherds are looking after them. Of the 27 interviewed households, 19 households are sending their cattle to alpine pastures in the Piatra Craiului National Park (mainly Curmatura and Zanoage), 7 households are sending their cattle to other areas outside the Piatra Craiului National Park (e.g. Fagaras, Bucegi, Brasov and Codlea). Besides, 8 households are keeping some cows or sheep at home; these are for example cows with calves or sheep with lambs. Just 2 of these 8 households keep all their cattle at home because they have almost no cattle or have enough land to graze their cattle around their home and mow the other parts as food supply for the rest of the year.

Interviewed households have in average an arable land surface of 1.85 ha. Forestland is only present on 30% of the interviewed households' arable land. These forests consist mainly of bushes of trees, almost nobody owns a piece of forest larger than 0.5 hectares. People use an average of 8.2 m³ fuel wood for heating and cooking, which they mainly buy at the Forest District. Only few people use construction timber. All products derived from the arable land are used autonomously.

The primary income from people of Magura comes out of the labour force and retirement pensions they receive. However, the unemployment rate (19% of all people) is relatively high, in comparison with the national figures that show an average unemployment rate of 8.1% (CIA, 2003). In case people have a liquid income, the salary earned is below a national level. From all interviewed households, 19 of the 27 households have one or more persons in the household, who join the labour force. The net salary per person is on a national level 4,881,658 ROL per month (CIA, 2003). In Magura this average income per employed person is only 2,516,000 ROL per month. People have an (additional) monthly pension in 18 of the 27 households. The average income derived from these pensions is 1,437,000 ROL. In total, an average household has a liquid income of 4,158,000 ROL per month. The average income per individual varies between 500,000 and 1,500,000 ROL. In the small households however it seems that people earn relatively more per individual than in larger families.

Some respondents have a job in the agricultural sector. The main profession in this sector is shepherd. All respondents however undertake agricultural activities on their own land (i.e. crop cultivation, mowing, taking care of the animals in winter; see also the seasonal calendar in figure 1). Many employed interviewed inhabitants of Magura are working in the industry. The main factories in the surrounding are the Mechanic factory in Tohanu and the Cellulose (paper) factory in Zarnesti. However, due to the recession after 1989, many employees were fired and nowadays just small parts of the factories are running and even after discharges these factories are vulnerable to go bankrupt. Several persons are employed in the service sector and work in shops, as drivers or as a guard. Some villagers started a small shop in the village. Just a few villagers studied for other occupations (teacher, carpenter, nurse or seller) and are or were working in these sectors. As comes forward from these figures, people seem to combine the natural resource based strategies with the non-natural resource based strategy,

though the natural resource based livelihood strategies are merely for additional income. In response on the poor economic situation, some respondents are undertaking migration activities: seasonal (abroad) or permanent migration (abroad as well as to surrounding cities).

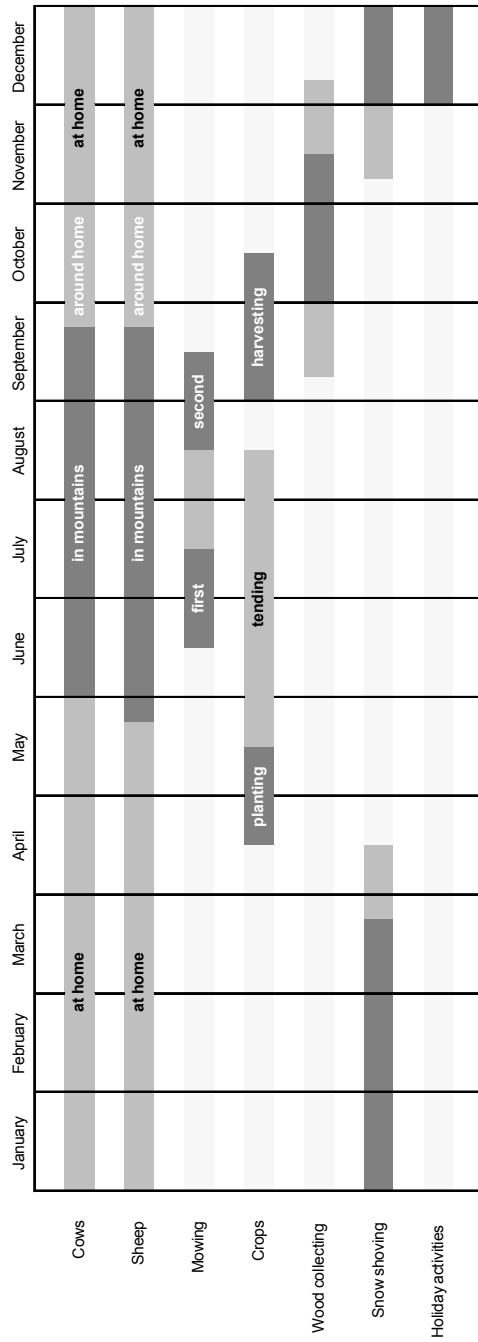


Figure 1 Seasonal calendar of cattle residence and household activities in general. When most households undertake this activity, a dark staff is used, When some households undertake this activity, italic lines are used. Light staffs represent other activities (they are mentioned) or less active undertaking this activity.

rounding cities).

4.3 Future expectations

The interviews and workshops showed that in general the people of Magura are not directed to the future. Due to the economic recession they have to focus on the problems of today and tomorrow. It does not make sense for them to be busy with their future if they hardly can survive in present times. That is why many respondents do not ever think of alternative jobs or ways of income; often they say that they have no money to change their livelihood activities. In case people are thinking about future and their way of living in future, it is obvious to see that old people more often have the vision of a highly accessible and developed agricultural area with more jobs for especially the youth to work in factories and services in surrounding places. Young people more often have a vision of a rural area, in which tourist facilities are developed. Post-communist dynamics seem to strengthen the passiveness of people and the dislike of co-operation in organisations. Population dynamics that influence livelihood strategies are ageing (20% of the villagers is retired) and migration. Improvement of infrastructure, transport and labour as many other dynamics are seen by the local communities as essential to create new livelihood strategies.

4.4 Alternative livelihood strategies

The chances on labour in the industry around Magura are likely to decrease in future, which could even lead to a higher unemployment rate than now. As many people's first source of income comes from industry, they have to look for alternative strategies. Migration of the villagers is likely to increase, as seasonal establishment from outsiders in Magura is likely to increase. The traditional lifestyles will disappear with the absence of native people from Magura. Therefore, a strategy has to be found that keeps people within Magura and let them maintain their traditional lifestyle. Considering the restrictions imposed by regulations on pasture and forest use (which cannot be increased now) and the poor quality of the soil, an intensification of agriculture is hardly possible. An alternative strategy like this seems to be found in tourism, especially in the pro-poor tourism approach (Ashley et al., 2001), in which local people participate actively.

There are according to Holland et al. (2003) three main reasons why it is important to develop tourism in rural areas. Firstly the development of tourism will increase participation of the local people in the development of tourism; one key-opportunity of involving more of the local people in tourism is to develop tourism enterprises where they live. Secondly it will bring wider benefits to rural areas; rural areas generally are characterised by lower levels of non-farm economic activity, infrastructure development and access to essential services. These areas may also suffer from depopulation of the able-bodied and the lack of political influence. The development of tourism can help in accessing several of these problems through: economic growth, creation of working places, reduced out-migration, maintenance and improvement of public services, infrastructure movements, revitalising crafts, customs and cultural identities, increasing opportunities for social contact and exchange, protection and improvement of both the natural and built environment, increasing recognition of rural priorities and potential by

policy-makers and economic planners. A third reason why it is important to create tourism in rural areas is that it is one option among few. Rural areas have - in comparison with urban areas with good transport links, infrastructure and commercial skills - few sources of comparative advantage for attracting economic activity other than agriculture or industries based on harvesting natural resources. The inhabitants of Magura can use the natural resource 'Piatra Craiului National Park' to create a tourist product in co-operation with other stakeholders and NGO's. Within the current legal framework, the sustainability of the rural area will then be assured.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Because of the current sustainable legal framework, in which the natural resources are managed, there is no evidence that in future these natural areas will be threatened by the local community of Magura. Especially while industry is not doing well and agriculture is not suitable on the land, new strategies have to be found to prevent mass emigration of people from Magura. An alternative livelihood strategy is needed in which inhabitants of Magura play an active role. Tourism is, for a beautiful rural area like Magura, one of the few possibilities. A tourism strategy where also the inhabitants of Magura can participate, is the pro-poor tourism approach. However, this approach requires an intensive communication and co-operation between all participating stakeholders. Considering the existing conflict between Magura and the PCNPA an active co-operation is difficult. The most suitable way to reduce prejudice and hostility is to bring especially these parties in contact with each other. In this way, the stakeholders in the area will become professional managers in sustaining the traditional way of living and the natural area.

Acknowledgements

This project is carried out under commission of the KNNV (Royal Dutch Society for Nature Conservation) and ICAS Bucharest (Forest Research and Management Institute). We would like to thank the following persons through whom we were able to carry out this research: Charlotte Benneker, Iovu Biriş, Liviu Blendea, Niculae Cliniciu, Lucian Colţea, Bogdan Costescu, Vasile Deac, Marian Drăgoi, Violeta Dragu, Ionuţ Duicu, Josef Fanta, Murielle Ghestem, Horaţiu Hanganu, Marjanke Hoogstra, Jim van Laar, Dragoş Lipan, Teodor Maruşca, Gabriela Mirea, Vasile Mocanu, Ana Maria Pană, Adrian Patrulescu, Marius Petrila, Oliviu Pop, Christof Prommberger, Josif Razec, Raluca Sălăgean, Mihai Simeonescu, Erika Stanciu, Harm Steenwoerd, Ioan Şteţca, Florin Ursu, Peter Veen, Mircea Vergheleş, Max Zevenbergen, Mihai Zotta, Mihai Zup, Anja and Daniel and the manager of Forest District Zărneşti. Last but certainly not least, we cordially like to thank all the people from Măgura who contributed to this research with valuable information and active participation.

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