



Policy Consultation on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in the Carpathians

Policy Assessments for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions (SARD-M)

Brief Summary

Based on the National Surveys in Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine, Synthesis of the Above Surveys and Outcomes of the Sub-Regional Workshop

UNEP-Vienna ISCC
April 2006

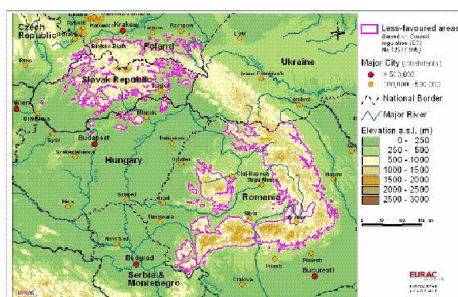


Fig. 39: Less-favored mountainous areas in the Carpathians based on Council regulation (EC) No 1257/1999. No data available for Ukraine and Serbia & Montenegro.

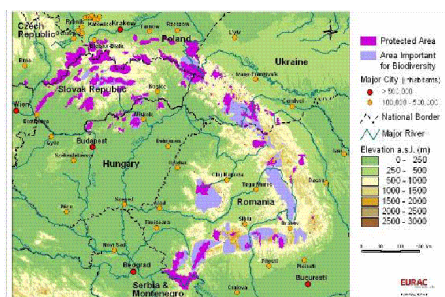


Fig. 28: Protected areas and areas important for biodiversity.

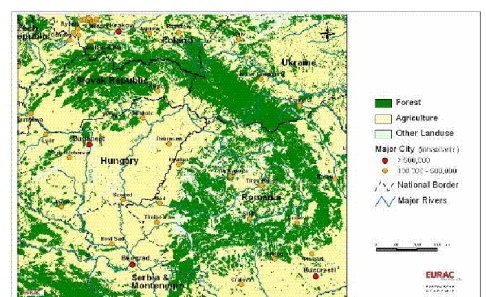


Fig. 29: Distribution of forest in the Carpathians. Almost 70% of the Carpathians (NP) are covered by forest. The Ukrainian Carpathians are especially rich in forests.

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SARD-M Policy Assessments in the Carpathians

The Carpathian mountains, one of Europe's largest mountain ranges, represents one of the most **globally important eco-regions** comprising a very rich biodiversity and cultural heritage, and supporting the lives of close to **18 million of people**.

The Carpathian region contains **Europe's greatest reserve of pristine forest and is a refuge** for brown bears, wolves, bison, lynx, eagles and some 200 unique plant species found nowhere else in the world. The Carpathian Mountains are included in the WWF "Global 200" Ecoregion list, chosen as one of only 238 ecoregions around the world noted for 'exceptional levels of biodiversity, such as high species richness or endemism, or those with unusual ecological or evolutionary phenomena'¹. The Carpathians form a 'bridge' between Europe's northern forests and those in the south and west. As such, they are a vital corridor for the dispersal of plants and animals throughout Europe.

The Carpathian region is **diverse in both natural and human respects**. Seven Carpathian countries (i.e. Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovak Republic and Ukraine) with fairly different cultural and socio-economic characteristics now share an area with a turbulent history of growing and shrinking nations. Like in all mountainous areas in the world, **local identity in the mountain regions** has always been strong and the Carpathians are home to numerous smaller and bigger ethnic groups and national minorities.

The Carpathians are **relatively undisturbed**, like most mountainous areas. During the socialist period, the mountainous areas had low development priority, except as a source for raw materials. The majority of the Carpathians remained fairly rural with a necessarily high level of self-sustenance. Typically, in the higher parts of the Carpathians, agriculture remained small-scale, and state interventions were practically limited to forestry, as forests were considered a high value asset and thus carefully managed by the respective countries. Apart from some regions that were more suitable for agricultural production and the more developed population centres on the lower slopes of the Carpathians, the majority of the area has always been rather isolated from rural development initiatives and markets, which helped to preserve the mountainous way of life.

Problem Statement

The Carpathians are currently **undergoing unprecedented change** due to economic transition and European integration. The situation varies considerably from country to country and from region to region, characterized by dynamic economic development in some parts and ongoing isolation in others. Four of the Carpathian countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) have already joined the European Union (EU), one (Romania) is scheduled to join in the near future and the remaining two (Serbia and Montenegro, and Ukraine) are hoping to join. This increases the possibilities and challenges for sustainable development based on the rich natural, environmental, cultural and human resources of the region.

Following the recent entry into the market economy, **increased exploitation of resources**, exacerbated by current patterns of economic growth that have accompanied EU accession, is particularly evident in the agricultural sector **through habitat conversion and fragmentation**. As most people in the Carpathians still make their living through farming, the intensification of farming is the biggest threat that potentially has far-reaching and wide-ranging negative environmental impacts. Under the policy of collectivization during the communist regime, many of the most natural and undeveloped traditional landscapes in the peripheral but most bio-diverse areas of the Carpathians were left untouched by some of the intense harvesting of natural resources. These areas, particularly the species-rich grasslands and forests are now extremely vulnerable to development.

¹ (http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/ecoregions/about/what_is_the_g200.cfm)

The European Union is a major factor, both positive and negative, for sustainable rural development and biodiversity conservation in the Carpathian Mountains. A number of EU laws and policies that are being prepared and implemented by the new and future EU member states provide potentially powerful tools for sustainable agriculture and rural development, like the Special Assistance Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD), Leader, Natura 2000 agricultural areas, mountain Less Favoured Areas (LFA) approach, etc. The real challenge in the coming years will be to ensure that the opportunities provided by EU legislation and funding are used to the fullest extent, both to minimize potential negative impacts as well as maximize potential benefits for sustainable agriculture and rural development in the Carpathians.

A **Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians**, designed to be an innovative instrument to ensure protection and foster sustainable development of the Carpathians, entered into force on 4 January 2006. This **new international treaty** can play a strategic role and tip the balance between negative and positive factors by promoting effective use of all opportunities for supporting sustainable agriculture and rural development and limiting existing negative impacts.

The Carpathian Convention, which provides a framework for cooperation and integrated multi-sectoral policy coordination, serves as a platform for building **joint strategies and policies for sustainable development** and enhances dialogue and permanent communication between all stakeholders involved. It leaves the countries a choice as to the form and methodology of their implementation. The Carpathian Convention seeks to **assure an integrated, holistic and multi-sectoral vision** of the future development of the Carpathian Mountains.

The treaty also aims to **put the globally agreed principles of sustainable development to work at the regional and sub-regional levels** by supporting the effective implementation of multilateral environmental agreements for sectors where they exist (e.g. biodiversity, river basin management) and by integrating, complementing and translating them into inter-sectoral policy objectives and actions specifically adapted to the requirements and needs of the Carpathian region. For other sectors, a joint strategy or future Protocols to be developed under the Framework Convention might well serve as an inspiration for future Pan-European or even global approaches.

Project Description

The Policy Assessment on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in the Carpathians under the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians is a part of the three-year Project (2005-2007) for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions (SARD-M). The Project has been led by the lead of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and aims to support the rural livelihoods of mountain peoples by facilitating the design, review, implementation and evaluation of relevant policy packages and institutional processes promoting SARD in mountain regions at global, regional, national and local levels.

This policy assessment seeks to address the first priority of the SARD-M Project: assess the strengths and weaknesses of mountain policies, including social, economic, institutional and environmental aspects, in relation to Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development principles.

Guided by the present political challenges, the policy assessments conducted in the framework of the SARD-M Project constitutes **a contribution to developing the capacity on policy, institutions and processes for SARD-M** in the Carpathians for decision makers, civil society representatives and local people alike.

This activity **builds on and develops synergies** with the following project or programmes:

- The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathian provides a background for policy coordination, including sustainable agriculture and forestry in the

scope of the Article 7 on Sustainable Agriculture and Forestry. **Article 7 of the Carpathian Convention** has been considered as an entry point for the policy assessment implementation in the region;

- The "Europe" and "SARD" in mountain regions initiatives of the **Mountain Partnership**;
- The multi-sectoral "**Carpathian Environmental Outlook**", currently developed by UNEP/GRID, as well as by the ongoing inter-regional experience exchange within the Alpine-Carpathian cooperation.

The objective is to identify **sub-regional priority areas** that need to be addressed through the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of SARD-M policies, institutions and processes based on the findings produced by three surveys at the national level: in **Slovakia**, a new EU member State, **Romania**, an EU accession country and **Ukraine**, an EU neighbouring country, and to draw up **recommendations and proposals for follow-up activities** at the Carpathian level.

It is important to underline that such a comprehensive study has not been undertaken before in any of the seven countries, however sustainable agriculture and rural development in mountain regions is a crucial policy domain in the Carpathians.

In order to conduct these rapid assessments, national consultants individually gathered general information on specific aspects of agriculture and rural development in the Carpathian Mountains and attempted to evaluate the effects of EU accession and influence of the Carpathian Convention's dimension on the national agri-environmental policies.

The assessments present an extensive survey of the overall and local situations of sustainable agriculture and rural development in the Carpathian Mountains of the three surveyed countries. They specifically focus on crucial aspects that need to be taken into consideration to provide elements for a diagnostic of policies, institutions and processes for SARD-M in the Carpathian region, namely:

(1) land-use, (2) employment in agriculture, (3) agricultural production and forestry, (4) economic performance of agricultural producers, (5) biodiversity value of farmland and forestland, (6) economic, social and cultural aspects of rural development, (7) policies and strategies affecting SARD-M, (8) institutions in charge of designing and implementing the policies for SARD.

The assessments have demonstrated that the mountain regions of Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine, while having their own priorities and needs, are facing similar economic, social and environmental **challenges for sustainable development typical of other rural areas in Europe**, such as:

- **Economic pillar:** significantly lower income than the average population, an ageing working population, greater dependency on the primary sector;
- **Social pillar:** higher unemployment in rural areas, low population density and depopulation, poor access to basic services, social exclusion, and a narrower range of employment options;
- **Environmental pillar:** need to ensure that agriculture and forestry make a positive contribution to the countryside and the wider environment requires a careful balance.

However, the Carpathian Mountains also have their particular political, social and economic circumstances that present challenges for SARD.

- **Political, social and economic marginality, inaccessibility, fragility** with respect to surrounding lowland areas and regional centres of power. Mountain people generally have little or no voice in national affairs, even on issues which directly affect their own resources and communities.
- Mountains commonly occupy **trans-boundary areas** between different nations and are therefore especially sensitive politically. In this regard international cooperation and support are needed to protect fragile mountain environments in trans-boundary areas involving local communities.

The challenge for the Carpathians remains clear: **how to make an advantage and benefit out of mountain disadvantages?**

Based on these assessments an expert workshop titled **Strengthening SARD-M Policies for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians** (October 24 2005 in Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovak Republic) was organized by UNEP Vienna – ISCC together with the SARD-M Project and Euromontana in conjunction with the Euromontana Conference on “Integrated Rural Development in the Mountain Areas of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans” (25-26 October 2005).

It aimed at identifying common policy issues to work on at the regional level in the framework of the Carpathian Convention, including recommendations for a possible future Protocol on sustainable agriculture and rural development in the Carpathians.

The workshop was attended by 35 experts (i.e. representatives of government and civil society) from countries involved in the Carpathian Convention and from other European countries or institutions. The participants demonstrated a high level of interest in the findings of country and regional assessments, validated them and contributed to reviewing and enriching the SARD-M assessments recommendations, and identifying possible follow-up activities in the Carpathians.

Results and findings are not considered to be the final. They should be regularly discussed with diverse stakeholders in the Carpathians at the national and decentralised levels, in order to be utilized, incorporated into actions on the ground, used for further projects, supplemented and improved in a participatory manner.

Policy Consultation on SARD-M in the Carpathians: 22 Recommendations

At the global level

1. **To use EU policy development and accession process** in order to create important opportunities for biodiversity conservation through the various EU programmes including the Special Assistance Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD)/Rural Development Plan (RDP) and its funding and promotion of agri-environmental schemes.
2. Strongly recommended is **international co-ordination regarding border regions in the framework of the Carpathian Convention**, including cross-border protected areas, in order to assure sustainable development.
3. Development of the **Protocol of the Carpathian Convention on sustainable rural development, including agriculture and forestry**.
4. Designing of **National Development Plans (NDP)** should be followed by including **specific mountain issues** in accordance with the principles of the Carpathian Convention. Stakeholders should monitor and control the development and implementation of the NDP's in the Carpathians according to the Carpathian Convention and its future Protocols.
5. Promote integrated **cross-sectoral rural planning and implementation of plans**.
6. Strengthen the importance of **coordination between ministries** at national and decentralized levels.
7. **Capacity building of Carpathian institutions and stakeholders** should be promoted and developed. It should include inventory of national institutions, which specialize in mountain issues to increase regional networking and information sharing.

8. **Public participation** should be a prerequisite for many such planning processes and this offers (and indeed often demands) the proper involvement of stakeholders.
9. **Awareness-raising** on policy and decision-making processes **for civil society** should be promoted and realized.
10. **Divergences in development (EU versus non-EU countries)** have **to be solved through appropriate international framework** – Carpathian Convention, Agenda 21, Bern Convention etc.
11. Promote and maintain **Carpathian cultural identity and diversity**.

Biodiversity conservation

12. The **Natura 2000 process** and integrated river basin planning (Water Framework Directive) should provide the framework for **a truly cross-sectoral rural land use planning and management** in order to improve biodiversity conservation, water management and water quality.
13. **Payment for environmental services** should be developed and implemented (when they exist). Improve financing biodiversity conservation through rural development.
14. **Restitution holdings** (farmland and woodland) should provide an opportunity. Privatization is often seen as a threat but, in connection with woodlands, it could create a basis for greater community interest in woodland biodiversity conservation if owners can be rewarded financially for following good management practices.
15. Include **conservation of traditional breeds and species** into rural development plans.
16. Prevent introduction of **GMO's** into the Carpathians.

Sustainable land-use

17. Challenge is to **integrate the different processes and instruments** now determining land-use in the region. This means ensuring that the adoption and especially implementation of policies such as Natura 2000, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Water Framework Directive, forestry policies and social policies proceed in a way that they reinforce rather than contradict each other.

Income generation and diversification of rural activities

18. Include opportunities for greater and more flexible support to local projects along **the lines of the LEADER programmes** of the EU, including promotion of provision of information and rural networks.
19. **Rural policies** should aim at sustainable farming, food security, biomass utilization, expansion of sustainable tourism and small business; sustainable initiatives in energy often with special programmes for high unemployment.
20. The Carpathian Convention and integrated sustainable development policies should **stimulate rural diversification activities** aimed at providing realistic marketing relating to provision of rural services such as eco-tourism, traditional products in order to **produce "quality more than quantity"**.
21. **Small business development** is often linked with rural tourism which offers a route to ecofarming and conservation because a high quality environment is a precondition for successful development of quality products businesses.

22. Greater emphasis needs to be placed upon **supporting small farmers** and removing the current favouritism towards large-scale, commercial interests by securing matching funding from other domestic or international sources of finance.

Workshop Proposals for Follow-up Activities

1. **Contribute officially to the first Conference of the Parties** of the Carpathian Convention to be held in the second half of 2006 through the outputs of the SARD-M policy assessments.
2. **Promote the outputs** of the workshop:
 - at the national level
 - at the Regional FAO conference in June 2006
 - at the European Commission level.
3. **Expand the policy assessment** to the rest of the Carpathian countries.
4. Support the **exchange of experience** and **dissemination** of information in various forums at regional, global and cross-border levels; set up information networks for consolidating the regional data and knowledge.
5. Conduct a **needs assessment of the local institutions** in the Carpathian region.
6. Design Technical Cooperation projects providing Technical Assistance for **strengthening the cooperation between decision makers** at international, national and local levels in the Carpathian region.
7. Support **regional thematic task forces** to develop cooperation in alternative economic activities in the Carpathian region – organic farming, geographic labelling, etc.
8. Support **capacity building** through the training of stakeholders at **local, community and regional levels**.

Some proposals will be implemented through the comprehensive **Interreg IIIb CADSES Carpathian Project**, specifically its Work package 3 regarding the promotion of SARD in the Carpathian mountain regions. In April 2006 the European Commission (i.e. DG Regio) approved the "Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians in the Transnational Framework" Project, which builds on the existing structure of the Carpathian Convention, providing a transnational framework for the application of European Union policies throughout the Carpathian region. The Project constitutes a partnership of 19 institutions from the 11 countries under the lead of UNEP Vienna-ISCC.

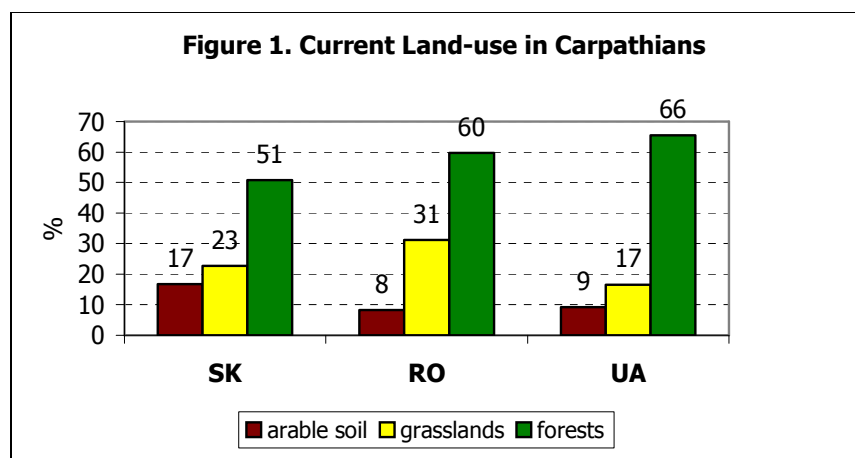
The Project's Working Group on sustainable rural development, agriculture and forestry will carry a deepened analysis of these sectors in order to **prepare appropriate policy instruments** based on the generated comprehensive information and strategies to be agreed upon by the intergovernmental platform **in a participatory process** through continuous interaction with local and regional stakeholders.

Synthesis of the National Assessments in Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine

Land-use in the Carpathians

Agriculture – as well as forestry – is the dominant form of land-use in the Carpathian Mountains. However, the situation varies considerably from country to country, and from region to region.

Differences in land-use show that the Slovak part of the Carpathians has twice a higher proportion of arable land and less forest compared to the other two countries studied. Interestingly, there are a very high proportion of grasslands in Romania, which is a result of extensive farming activities in the mountain areas.



Agriculture

Agricultural land use in the Carpathian Mountains is considered to be contributing to the maintenance of the area's biodiversity, as long as **agricultural management is small-scale, diverse and respects the carrying capacity and the suitability of the local conditions**. The foothills' arable lands, the valleys' hay lands and meadows and the higher mountain meadows are generally properly used by the local people.

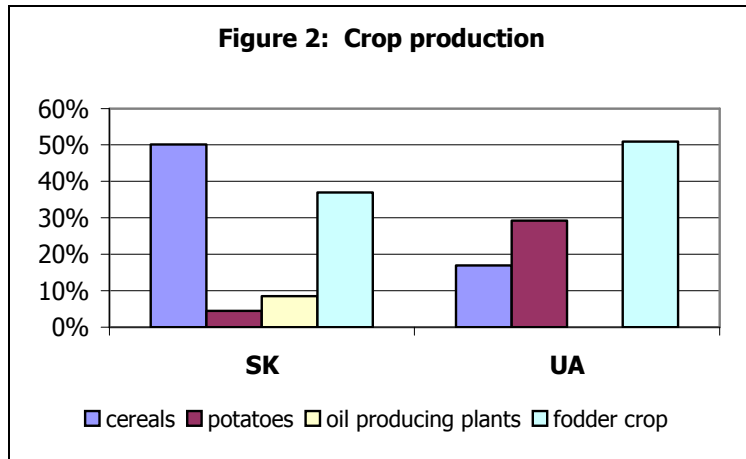
A main threat to the Carpathian biodiversity, though, relates to the conflicts that have more or less always existed between agriculture and nature. In particular, large predators are still regarded as being incompatible with cattle breeding and herding by many local people. Another problem that often occurs in natural areas is overgrazing, as well as the opposite problem, low numbers of grazing animals reverting valuable meadows to shrubs.

Only the lower parts of basins in the Slovak Carpathians were subject to the development of intensive agriculture with typical negative features like conversion of the mosaic of arable fields, grasslands, wetlands and shrubby terraces into large blocks of arable grass fields without biodiversity.

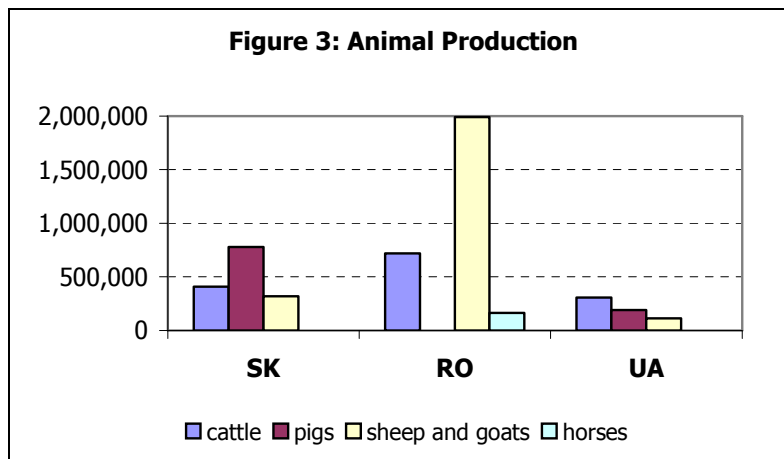
Changes in the economic transition period are anticipated that will very likely disturb the equilibrium that has existed so far. Firstly, in Slovakia and Romania, the structure of the agricultural sector is being reformed rapidly. Even in the traditionally marginal agricultural areas such as the mountainous Carpathians, the rationalisation of agricultural production brings major shifts in land use. Land ownership changes, changes in agricultural structures, formation of new agricultural units and other reforms have an impact on the marginal, mountainous areas of the Carpathians as well. In the process, old land use patterns become disrupted, valuable semi-natural agricultural lands are being

intensified or abandoned, and inappropriate management practices lead to erosion and ecological disturbance.

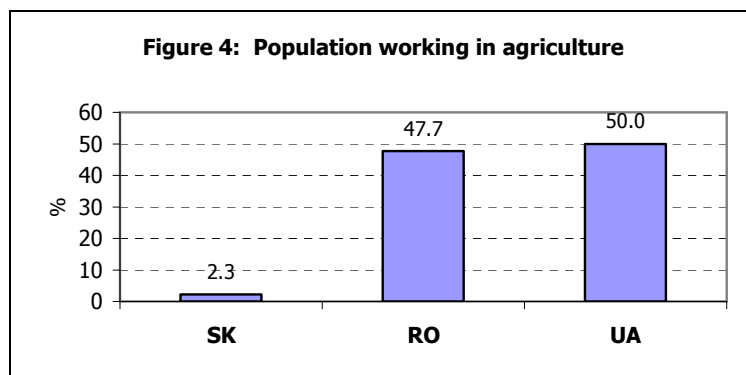
The picture of crop production is not complete (missing data from Romania). Very high rate of cereals in Slovakia underlines the fact that the lower parts of Carpathian basins are frequently used for their production. A typical crop of middle altitudes are potatoes, which are also dominant in Romania.



Romania plays dominant role in animal production (i.e. case sheep, goats and horses).



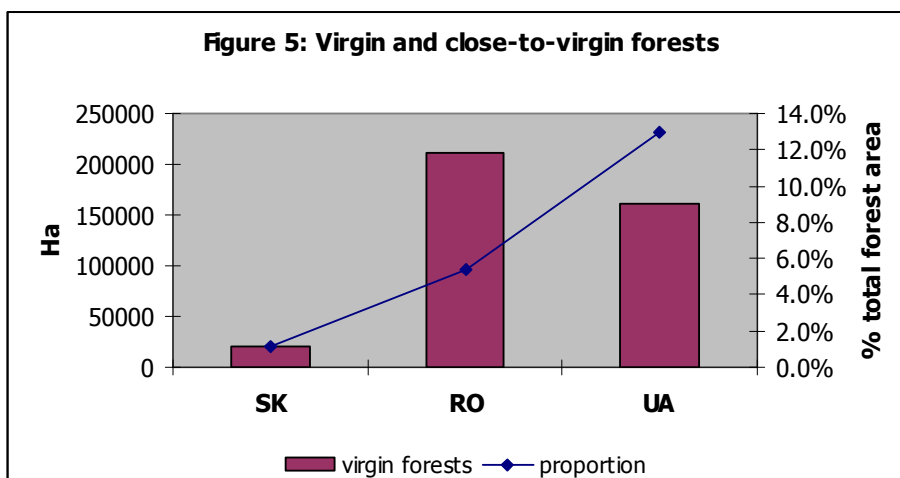
A big difference can be seen in the population working in agriculture in Slovakia compared to the situation in other two countries. The number of small farmers in Slovakia is very low and agriculture production is concentrated in large cooperatives and enterprises.



In the Carpathian countries, 'environmentally friendly' farming (i.e. integrated, ecological, and organic) is still limited to a few percent of the agricultural area. However, the low-intensity practice of many private and co-operative farms is actually quite **compatible with particular forms of integrated and ecological farming**.

Forestry

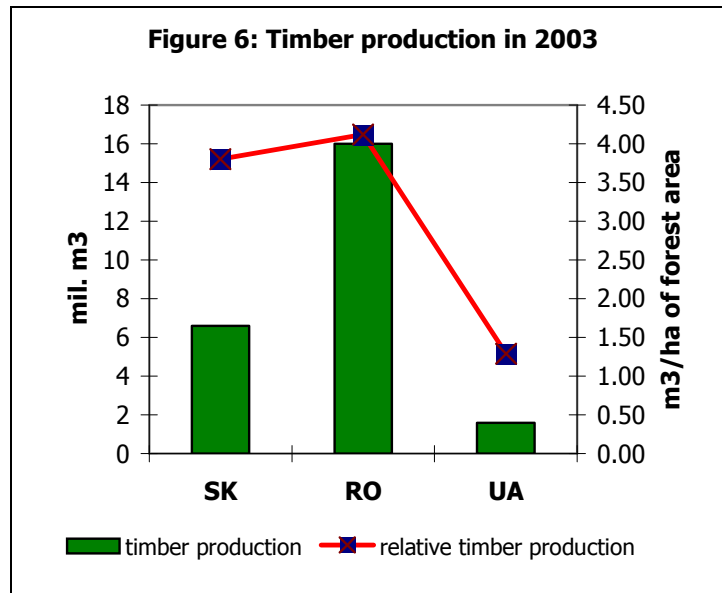
There are still several virgin forested parts in the Carpathians, both protected and not protected. In many cases, even the non-virgin forests show a species- and age-composition that closely resembles the natural state. Ukraine keeps the highest proportion of virgin and close-to-virgin forests to the total woodland area.



On the other hand, the Carpathian forests are subject to **continuous threats**. The **restitution process** that started in the former socialist countries has not yet been concluded in many of them; in the countries where the ownership issue has been secured by the existing legal framework, forest **management** is also often problematic. Throughout the Carpathians, the legal framework and the sector itself are still too focussed on wood production, while the responsibilities for managing forest ecosystems are only sparsely introduced in practice. In all countries, there are records of unsustainable felling methods, clear-cutting and plantation of alien species or no replanting at all.

Most countries have a planning, management and control system in place, which at least protects forests and forestry as a type of land-use that can not be easily converted for other land-uses. For example, in Slovakia, forests are considered to be a stock of national significance, protecting forested areas against development and other land use forms. However, in Ukraine, there are examples of forestland being converted to agricultural use.

Although in Slovakia the forestry inspectorate is considered to be pretty strong, the new private owners often escape the duty to comply because of the small size of their forested area. Legally or illegally, many private owned forests are still the victim of **clear-cutting** as a way of earning a quick profit for the owner. In State forests, forest management is often licensed to companies, which in the case of Ukraine provides no guarantee of proper management. In this country, the practical absence of a replanting obligation threatens the continuity of the larger forested area as a whole. Furthermore, the management practices of dragging trunks by tractors (on the sensitive slopes) and the lack of a forest road network do much damage. Finally, in the Carpathian countries State as well as private forest stands are damaged through **stealing** and the **collection of firewood** from either State or private forests.



Biodiversity value of farmland and forestland

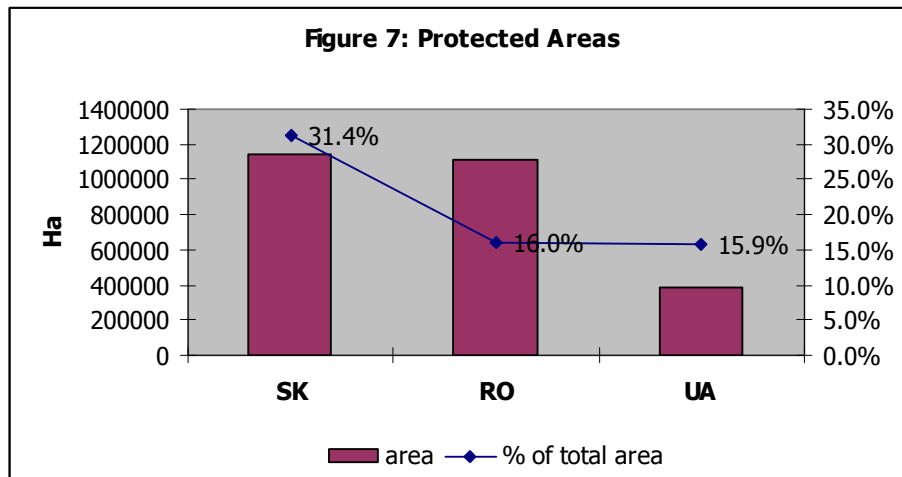
It is estimated that nearly **300 000 hectares** of truly **natural forest** exist in the Carpathians – including the largest tracts of virgin forests in Europe. From low mountain oak forests, beech - oak mixtures to beech, beech - conifer mixtures to conifer woodland, the forests show an incredible natural diversity, sheltering a large number of plant and animal species. The elusive lynx, a wolf and bear population that is unsurpassed in Europe, an untold number of insect species as well as more than 40 species of shrubs and trees are just a few of the species harboured there.

One-third of the Carpathians are covered by **open and semi-natural habitats**, predominantly grassland. Though they cover a smaller area than the forests, these habitats show a massive diversity. Of the **133** habitat types identified, 76% are open habitats, many created by the activities of man over the centuries. Open habitats include the calcareous grasslands, fens maintained by traditional farming methods and the valuable and rare 'poloniny' meadows. Poloniny meadows support a wide diversity of species. Occurring naturally at high altitudes, this unique grassland was also partly formed by human activity, where grazing cattle have destroyed the dwarf pine vegetation and forests.

Natural open habitats above the tree line are very limited, the sub-alpine and alpine zones showing a typical 'stepping stone' pattern through the high altitude parts of the region. They are, however, very important, supporting an unusually high number of endemic species.

Specific threats to the biodiversity arise through agriculture (mainly grazing pressure on the high ground but also cropping on unstable hill slopes); commercial forestry (including small landowners irresponsibly cutting restituted woodlands without permission of the silvicultural authorities); tourism and poaching of game (with irresponsible behaviour - including a lack of respect for protected areas and species) often attributed to 'voluntarism' following the communist era combined with inadequate wandering; water management and pollution.

Protected area network is very well developed in Slovakia, which covers more than 30 % of total area of the Carpathians. Almost the same share of protected areas is developed in Romania and Ukraine – approximately 16 %.



Decisions taken in regional development² influence rural life considerably, as often regional development measures are considered to be the incentives for specific development of a region. Subsequently, the impact of regional development policy on biodiversity can be considerable, both positive and negative.

SARD-M Related Policies in Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine

Already during the past socialist period it became clear that changes in the policies of agricultural, forestry and industrial sector had substantial effects on biodiversity. Rapid privatization of land and other production factors tends to stimulate opportunistic behaviour aiming at short-term gain. Governments and citizens across the entire Carpathian area are now in a rather hectic stage of consolidating the privatization process, preparing and adapting their membership in the European Union, restructuring the economy by attracting investments, etc. Against the backdrop of a generally not too promising economic situation, it is all too easy to forget about those values that cannot be created immediately, such as natural beauty and species richness.

The situation varies considerably from country to country and from region to region, characterized by dynamic economic development in some parts and ongoing isolation in others. Four of the Carpathian countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) already joined the EU, one (Romania) is scheduled to join in the near future and the remaining two (Serbia and Montenegro, and Ukraine) are hoping to join. This increases the possibilities for sustainable development based on the rich natural, environmental, cultural and human resources of the region.

The European Union is a major factor, both positive and negative, for sustainable rural development and biodiversity conservation in the Carpathian Mountains. A number of EU laws and policies that are being prepared and implemented by Slovakia and Romania provide potentially powerful tools for sustainable agriculture and rural development, through instruments such as the EU Special Accession Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD), Leader, Natura 2000, Mountain Less Favoured Areas (LFA) approach etc.

The real challenge in the next years will be to ensure that the opportunities provided by EU legislation and structural funding are used to the fullest extent, both to minimize potential negative impacts as well as maximize potential benefits for sustainable agriculture and rural development in the Carpathians.

² In this report, regional development consists of various kinds of policies, initiatives and programmes aiming at maintaining or improving the standard of living in social, economical, cultural, health or other fields.

In regards to existing legislation for SARD in the Carpathians, the assessments found that the **general legislative and institutional framework for the SARD-M related policies** in Slovakia and Romania was mainly a result of the harmonization with and adoption of the EU legislation. Ukraine, on the other hand, has less experience in this regard.

For example:

- **Romania** developed the National Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development for the period 2000-2006 under the EU Special Accession Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD).

Romania succeeded in the adoption of the Law of the Mountain Region and the Sustainable Development Strategy of the Mountain Region, which provides principles, objectives and measures of sustainable development in mountain areas and contains elements of SARD-M. This country has recently established a National Agency of Mountain Areas under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development in order to implement government policies related to mountain regions, and the Inter-Ministerial Committees and the County Committees for the mountain regions with an objective to coordinate and supervise the policies, projects and strategies for environmental protection and sustainable development of the mountain regions at the national and local levels. But those structures are not mature enough to successfully operate and utilize the existing legislative bases. They often lack appropriate coordination and clear vision of the strategy and goals.

In Romania and Slovakia, the majority of the Carpathian regions enjoy the status of "less favoured areas" that makes regions open to special regional development programmes supporting use of agricultural land and promoting sustainable farming.

- **Slovakia** prepared a National Plan for Regional Development and a Rural Development Plan 2004-2006, which included *inter alia* objectives for less-favoured areas, agri-environmental support, land consolidation, farm advisory, semi-subsistence farms, community standards, producer groups, anti-flooding measures, complements to direct payments. Slovakia has recently established an Agricultural Paying Agency in order to support agriculture, food processing, forestry and rural development, providing funds from the national bodies.

Slovakia elaborated thematic concepts and plans, which indirectly influence sustainable rural development: a Concept of Sheep Breeding, Action Plan of Organic Farming by 2010; other sustainable development relevant documents: National Programme of Tourism Development, which supports the development of rural tourism and agro-tourism, summer recreation in mountains.

- At the same time, we see an absence of conceptual documents, laws and strategies at the national level for mountain regions in **Ukraine**. It constitutes a wide "integration gap" between Ukraine and other two countries in focus. SARD-M related policies and strategies could be found only in regional programmes of economic, social and environmental development.
- Those strategic conceptual documents respect national specificities including mountain related issues and are designed in line with the EU policy.

Of course, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine see the perspectives of regional and cross-border cooperation covering SARD-M in the framework of the Carpathian Convention.

It is obvious that the policies and laws developed in Slovakia and Romania aim at, *inter alia*, the integration of SARD-M concerns into the development strategies and programmes. There are also financial support of environmentally friendly measures and effective controlling systems in some mountain areas (case from Slovakia).

There are **some examples of positive steps that have been made to develop the legislative base and restructure institutions to better suit** mountain needs:

- A good sample of **bottom-up policy-making** and a **trend towards decentralisation** could already be observed in Slovakia and Romania where government related structures have a

distinguished bottom-up character with representation from the municipality up to national and regional development organs.

Unfortunately, the notion of bottom-up policy making is not very well established in Ukraine, leaving the local governments with an almost powerless apparatus compared to the regional decision making structures, in which representatives of the central government dominate.

At the same time the assessments show that the existing policies and strategies related to SARD have rather resulted from external requirements and the need to harmonise and cohere with EU policies under the framework of Common Agriculture Policy (CAP).

- The **sustainable development strategies and goals** for the mountain regions often stipulate only general measures to be taken into consideration **without concrete actions** in place and clear budgetary priorities identified and are often developed without adequate cooperation and interconnections.
- This weakness is complicated by the **absence of a strong political commitment** and insufficient understanding of the top leadership as well as of local authorities in Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania **to follow-up on legislation** that has been passed to ensure that they are "working on the ground" as well as by the **insufficient monitoring** system of effectiveness of adopted measures, time-consuming administration and approval of submitted projects in Romania and Slovakia.
- Another weakness is that the **private sector and civil society are not properly engaged in the political process**, which constitutes a missing effective multi-stakeholder interaction, absence of good communication and information mechanisms according to the principles of transparency and accountability.
- All these negative aspects are accompanied by an **insufficient professional potential of farmers, non-understanding of fundraising, insufficient training activities and advisory system.**

SWOT Analysis for SARD-M in Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine

Since the findings of the assessments are encompassing a wide range of mountain related issues, the following **SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis table** is considered to be a useful tool enabling to grasp and highlight some of the major elements of the discussion.

Sustainability diagnosis in Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine

Strengths	<p>Environmental pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good condition of the natural environment, low ecological footprint, tradition of working with rather than against nature in many places • Mountains are vital water reservoirs and account for a big share of water supply • Protected virgin and close-to-virgin forests (highest proportion in Ukraine) • Low use of chemical inputs in agricultural production • Well-preserved biodiversity • Well-advanced network of protected areas <p>Economic pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High tourist potential, extraordinary possibilities for recreation: rich cultural traditions, local crafts produce tourists' motivation to visit mountains • The mountain food products are considered to be of high quality and bio-products <p>Social pillar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing social activity • Trend towards higher public awareness of environmental issues
Weaknesses	<p>Economic Pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low profitability and income of agriculture in mountain areas • Lack of know-how (products, markets) • Unviable farms • Negative impact of collective/cooperative farming • Considerable limitations in land use possibilities; the existence of certain difficult climatic conditions determined by higher altitudes, the effect of which is the shortening of growing season • Low-level of technical and physical infrastructure • Financial deficiency • Insufficient external capital inflow • Unfamiliarity with networking for development (e.g. joint marketing, local government-business cooperation) • Ageing working population • Dependency on primary sector • Limited job market in rural areas • Low level of support of small and medium enterprises • Local enterprises marginalized by stronger external enterprise <p>Social pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low level of education of the rural population; education system still needs to be adapted to mountain specificities and economy • Mountain communities often lack basic services and opportunities for entertainment • Low population density and depopulation of the rural areas • Low number of small farmers (case in Slovakia) • Narrower range of employment options • Social exclusion • Traditional activities such as handicraft production sometimes discontinued because of the lack of young successors interested in traditional handicraft • Low public participation and influence in the designing of strategies, exchanging of information, decision-making, implementation of strategies

Opportunities	<p>Economic Pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing popularity of rural tourism, agri-tourism, eco-tourism and cultural tourism • Development of new forms of non-agricultural activity • Bio-, organic-farming for the growing ecological food and organic products market • Promotion of production technologies to assure the health of population, of ecosystems • Better use of mountain resources by increasing the quality and value added through improvement of processing, development of small business activities, of services and traditional crafts using local raw materials • New possibilities to use EU structural funds in the near period 2007-2013 <p>Environmental pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of "environmentally friendly" farming • Use of "environmentally friendly" energy resources (renewable energy) that will reduce the negative effects on mountain biodiversity and landscapes <p>Social pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational training programmes, applied scientific research for the mountain rural areas, adequate training facilities for farmers • Support for improving access to information and communication technologies • Spreading knowledge on the environmentally friendly farming practices and land management
Threats	<p>Economic Pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land abandonment • Land fragmentation, distance from main markets <p>Environmental pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat conversion and fragmentation • Overgrazing • Soil erosion and landslides • Cropping on unstable hill slopes • Illegal logging of forests, commercial forestry (including small landowners irresponsibly cutting restituted woodlands without permission of the silvicultural authorities) • Possible risk of contamination with GMOs (example from Romania) • Inappropriate management of wildlife and game species (example from Romania) • Development of intensive agriculture with typical negative effects like conversion of the mosaic of arable fields, grasslands, wetlands and shrubby terraces into large blocks of arable grass fields without biodiversity (case from lower parts of basins in the Slovak Carpathians) <p>Social pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large-scale migration to urban areas/ unviable rural societies • Demographic ageing of rural inhabitants

Institutions	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of specialized agencies like National Agency for Mountain Area in Romania, establishment of Agricultural Paying Agency with its offices in Slovakia dealing with SARD-M related policies • Creation of the basis for inter-governmental co-operation • Decentralisation process and growing responsibilities of local government. Local government of the EU member states (Slovakia, Romania) has more responsibilities and administrative power which encourages a closer cooperation among actors/stakeholders • High potential of qualified experts involved into the policy designing process in some of the Carpathian countries (Slovakia) • High potential of the rural population for partnership building
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited degree of inter-sectoral policy integration with characteristically poor linkages between agricultural and environmental ministries and their respective agencies • Very weak actual level of cooperation between relevant institutions (horizontal linkage and integration) which complicates decision-making, creates overlapping of responsibilities • Lack of cooperation between central and local institutions (vertical linkage and integration) • Lack of capacity, staffing and ability to fulfil new tasks of local government • Missing cooperation within the Carpathian region countries as well as among the countries of other mountain regions

Legislative framework	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The general legislative framework for the SARD-M related policies in Slovakia and Romania has been developed which resulted mainly from the harmonization with and adoption of the EU legislation • Law of the Mountain Region and the Sustainable Development Strategy of the Mountain Region in Romania • Strategic conceptual documents respecting national peculiarities including mountain related issues and designed in line with the EU policy (case in Slovakia and Romania)
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of conceptual documents, laws and strategies at the national level for mountain regions constitute a wide "integration gap" between Ukraine as a non-EU country and the EU member states. SARD-M related policies and strategies could be found only in regional programmes of economic, social and environmental development

Political Process/Participatory process

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trend towards decentralisation – bottom-up policymaking in Slovakia and Romania where government related structures have a distinguished bottom-up character with representation from municipality up to national and regional development organs • In Slovakia and Romania, a majority of the Carpathian regions with the status of “less favoured areas” that makes regions open to special regional development programmes supporting use of agricultural land and promoting sustainable farming • Sensible, integrative rural development policies in place in Slovakia and Romania – notably elements of the SAPARD programme (Rural Development Plan in EU members) • Non-governmental bodies promoting mountain rural development policies (ROMONTANA in Romania) • Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine involved into various Multilateral Environmental Agreements (e.g. Carpathian Convention) • Perspectives of regional and cross-border cooperation covering SARD-M in the framework of the Carpathian Convention
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing policies and strategies (Romania and Slovakia) rather resulting from external requirements and need to harmonise and cohere with EU policies • Absence of a strong political commitment and insufficient understanding of the top leadership as well as of local authorities (Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia) to follow-up on legislation that have been passed to ensure the “working on the ground” • The sustainable development strategies and goals for the mountain regions often stipulating only general measures to be taken into consideration without concrete actions in place and clear budgetary priorities identified and are often developed without adequate cooperation and interconnections • The notion of bottom-up policy making not very well established in Ukraine, leaving the local governments with an almost powerless apparatus as opposed to the region decision making structures, in which representatives of the central government dominate • Lack of policy coordination between the ministries at the national level and local authorities in Romania • Lack of political support and good management practices for an effective strategy for sustainable development in Ukraine. • Insufficient monitoring system of effectiveness of adopted measures. • Private sector and civil society not properly engaged into the political process. Missing effective multi-stakeholder process, absence of good communication and information mechanisms according to the principles of transparency and accountability • Inadequate capacity building process in Slovakia.