

**NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF POLICIES,
INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES FOR
SARD IN THE CZECH CARPATHIAN
MOUNTAINS**

EXTRACT

from the Report

Author

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1. Executive summary

The rapid assessment of policies, institutions and processes for sustainable agriculture and rural development in mountain regions (SARD-M) in the Czech Republic (CR) summarizes general information on agriculture and rural development, its historical evolution with a focus on specificities of the Czech Carpathians; addresses SARD-M policies as well as SARD associated institutions and processes. The assessment is looking to assess the strengths and weaknesses of policies, institutions and processes for SARD-M.

It also describes economic and social aspects of rural mountain areas to give sufficient background for the assessment of the SARD – M related policies, institutions and processes.

There is no especially designed policy for the Carpathian Region in the Czech Republic, therefore this assessment focuses on the national policies, which also influence processes in the Czech Carpathian Region. As neither SARD policy nor specific mountain policy has been formulated so far, the report concentrates on those policies and strategic documents, which can have impact on the processes in the agricultural and forestry sectors and rural development.

These policies were established on the basis of Common Agriculture Policy of the European Union, so they present a huge step forward in the Czech Agricultural Policy. However, some specificities of the Czech Republic can complicate their implementation.

Situation in CR differs from other EU countries in particular in the size of the agricultural holdings and processing companies. Much bigger size of land parcels is naturally connected with it. The whole system of the Czech agriculture including legislation, economic system, governance, etc. is still being adjusted to these huge corporations more than to small family companies. This situation has a negative influence on the supply side on the market as it hampers supply diversification and complicates development of unique local products. Large size of the land parcels has negative influence on biodiversity, causes erosion and changes the character of the landscape.

The major weak point of the agricultural policy in CR is absence of any SARD or SARD-M policy. The implementation of the EU policy framework seems to increase the bureaucracy, pedant methods of the public service and degrade the farmers from the position of food producers to maintenance workers. On the other side, the financial support is enormous and it helps to stabilize the critical financial situation of people employed in the agricultural sector.

The institutions in CR are generally well functioning and able to implement agricultural and other policies, although several key issues should be mentioned. The long standing tension between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment seems to be serious topic, as it can be seen almost at all levels. Connected with bad communication it creates barrier in good cooperation in the area of SARD-M.

Policy processes have been positively influenced by application of the rules used in EU, still full transparency is missing especially in final processes of formulating policies and preparation of strategic documents. On the other side the involvement of NGOs, public and other stakeholders has improved a lot.

The final chapter of the assessment provides some recommendations for the improvement of policies, institutions and processes for SARD-M in CR.

2. Summary of findings

This assessment focused on evaluating the contents, strengths and weaknesses of policies, institutions and processes for SARD-M in CR. Summarisation of the information found shows, that although there is no clearly formulated SARD – M policy in CR, existing policies contain many elements, which could create good basis for the formulation of such a policy. On the other side the existing policies are not coherent enough to create good conditions for SARD - M and still many areas of activities would need well-considered and long-term support.

Within the identification of the entry point of the report (Chapter 1.4.) four main topics were defined where the attention of a SARD – M policy should be focused.

In the area of agriculture, there is sufficient support for organic farming in CR provided by existing policies, but the support for following processing is missing. Also no effort is taken to promote local products as well as preservation and restoration of traditional methods of management – these activities are promoted only by NGOs.

Existing forestry policies do not provide enough tools to apply the methods requested for sustainable forest management. Existing policy still leads to planting too high number of monoculture in inappropriate localities.

Impacts of the measures taken to support rural development, local culture and countryside life help to preserve and develop some of the unique Carpathian phenomena, but are weak in supporting development and stabilisation of local economy, small local businesses and companies, connected to local farming and forestry.

Nature, landscape and biodiversity conservation is well provided in CR, but more cohesion with agriculture processes is needed.

3. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After 40 years of socialist farming which seriously damaged the landscape in the Czech Carpathian region, political changes and agricultural policy during last 20 years, have increased biodiversity, helped reintroduce missing species, and instituted better rules and conditions for nature conservation, preservation and the reintroducing of traditional breeds and plant varieties • The awareness of the value of the landscape, but also of the input of the traditional ways of farming to the high level of landscape and bio-diversity is increasing among the policymakers as well as among the wide public • High potential for development of the sustainable tourism • Existing experience with implementation of OP Agriculture and HRDP, well developed implementation agency • High percentage of farmers have used EU support (more than 95 %) • Increasing number of organic farmers, more certification agencies for OF, increasing demand for bio-products • Existing structure of contact points for farmers, good knowledge of the local conditions on the regional level • Well-developed consultation process during preparation of strategic documents, experience with involving different types of stakeholders including NGOs • Strong role of NGOs focused on organic farming, rural development and support of local market • White Carpathians has several times served as a model area for implementation of some EU programmes such as SAPARD, conversion of arable land to grassland by a regional seed mixture, which has brought a higher concentration of experienced people, improved knowledge of the EU rules, and better knowledge of the specificities of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No attention is paid to the influences of the macroeconomic policies on rural development • Existing strategies - current agriculture strategy – the RDP, but also other documents, are still insufficiently coherent ; better linkage with the needs of the biodiversity conservation is lacking • The conditions in CR differ from EU countries – larger agriculture holdings, larger final processing companies and all the system in CR is adjusted to it – this makes some of the measures of RDP work controversially • Missing local markets of agricultural products, products of organic farming, existence of only a few local brands and almost no support for their development • Underdeveloped sustainable tourism • The administrative requirements are increasing and can be too difficult especially for small farmers and for small final agricultural processing • The system does not create conditions for support of young farmers, it is very hard for a young family to start a new farm and earn a living by farming • Missing or almost absent monitoring system, providing sufficient feedback for agricultural policy • Poor communication or tension between some institutions (most of all between MoA and MoE, but also at the regional level) complicates cooperation

nature in the region.	
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing number of young people, who want to move out of the town and live in the countryside, making farming at least part of their income. These people are usually also well aware of their influence on the environment and are willing to decrease their negative impact on it. Only part of them stay in the countryside for their entire life, but still they present an opportunity for the agricultural community • Increasing demand for the bio-products, local products, for soft forms of tourism • Available financial sources to be used after implementing EU agricultural policy • The capacities of state administrations and NGOs have increased; they can offer more counselling and help in the area of organic farming, better flow of information, shared experiences from practise in CR and abroad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The traditional knowledge and relationship to the landscape will die when the present generation of farmers is gone • The local population is aging, and the trend to leave the rural areas continues • Future steps of the EU CAP – on the European level this system does not seem to be sustainable • Increasing bureaucracy • The development in marginal areas of Bohemia – huge companies, settled in centres (Prague) buy or rent thousands of hectares of grassland, take subsidies for LFA, use them for a different purpose and transform local people to the role of farmhand earning a minimal income and having no relationship to the land • The tendency to liquidate agriculture agencies would lead to more complicated information flow to the farmers and loss of knowledge of local conditions

4. Lessons learned, recommendations and proposals for follow-up activities

Lessons learned:

- The agricultural policy in CR made a huge step forward thanks to joining the EU and adopting EU agriculture and environmental policy. This step brought positive influences beginning with significant financial support for agriculture and its environmental aspects, and ending by increasing the ability of farmers to become stabilised economically. Also the condition of the landscape has been improving in most of the areas (increasing biodiversity, reintroduction of missing species, less usage of fertilizers, and increase in grassland areas), firstly due to changes in the economy (notably lack of the support for some environmentally non-friendly methods which were supported during socialism), later due to adopting and implementing strategies supporting also the environmental aspects of farming (agro-environmental programmes, LFA).
- There is no specific attitude in CR towards agriculture and rural development in mountain areas, no strategic document except NBS focuses on them, and no institution of any kind or NGO is oriented on this topic. Also, no institution in CR is involved and cooperates on the international level with FAO on SARD topics.
- The involvement of different stakeholders in the preparation processes of strategic documents in agriculture and forestry and intersectoral communication has improved, but still could be better. The position of NGOs has changed and they are usually accepted as equal partners, cooperate on preparation of the strategic documents, and have human capacities, well educated experts and a deep knowledge of the topics. The role of NGOs is very often to act as pioneers, bringing new ideas, methods and attitudes, which are later adopted by a wider range of stakeholders and public institutions.
- The social and economic characteristics in the countryside in the Czech Carpathian Region look generally positive and better than in the rest of the country, but it should be noted that these are based on too large territorial units which are not able to capture local specificities. So data on the unemployment, age structure, data on migration and so forth express positive trends, but fail to express that in some villages the situation can be critical – with high unemployment, an aging population, and 70 % of local inhabitants abandoning the community during past 30 years.

Recommendations:

- Attention should be paid to the influence of macro-economic policies on rural development, agriculture and landscape, especially in sensitive areas like mountain areas, protected areas, Natura 200 localities. CR is in the process of preparation of the tax reform. This is a unique chance to take the specificities of rural areas and mountains areas into account.
- More attention should be paid to the improvement/development of monitoring and evaluation system of all the existing strategies and use the feedback in their actualisation or preparation of the new ones.
- It is necessary to create conditions to formulate proper SARD – M policy for the Czech Republic, coherent with the existing sectoral policies, to create a basis for the sustainable development of rural mountain areas, stabilisation of the agriculture and development of the market with local products in the mountain areas. It would be also useful to get involved and take active role in the activities of FAO, oriented on SARD – M.
- The specifics of the Czech Carpathian Region should be incorporated into operational programmes and other documents, providing funding from the EU sources. In the implementation of the RDP, there should be more space for respecting the local specifics, for increasing the diversity of activities as it also means the increasing of biodiversity. For instance, softening the necessity of a 5-year commitment to planning agricultural activities, formulate and add missing measures to support biodiversity, implementing some type of a transition period with softer rules, and changing the system of controls and penalties. A better balance between the needs of nature protection and the needs of farmers and farming is necessary.
- A system of well educated counsellors available for all the farmers and helping them to prepare the 5-year management plans of their farm, considering both / the environmental and the economical aspects, should be developed.
- More attention has to be paid to development of a sustainable forestry policy. Within the RDP new measures supporting bigger and faster changes in the species composition of the forests and other enviromentaly friendly methods should be adopted.

Strong support is needed for the development of the local market and local products, regional brands and diversification of the production. Although the market with the products of organic

farming is developing well and the demand currently exceeds the supply, better development of the market is still needed, especially creating the conditions for development of the market with bio-meat, vegetables, dairy products as well as the possibility of selling goods directly on the farms. The conditions for small final agricultural processing (slaughterhouses, cheese producers) should be changed to be friendlier to small producers.

- General audit of public administration would be helpful for a better use of human capacities.
- Communication between the ministries is also an area which should be improved, most of all between MoE and MoA, but also other intersectoral communication is important. This must be based on a real will to communicate important topics and to cooperate.
- A long-term goal should be the permanent increasing of the awareness of sustainable development, giving this still bit theoretical declaration more concrete outlines, and filling out the rhetorical phrases with real steps, activities and results.