

WELCOME

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Dear Reader

I'd like to warmly greet you in the name of the Pogány-havas Association and the organisers of this conference. It was a great challenge and a real pleasure to organise this event, which hopefully will be a good opportunity for all participants to share knowledge, create new contacts and also for us to learn a lot which will help us to realize the goals of the project, and to help local communities to continue their wonderful work of creating such a high nature value landscape.

Our microregional association, established in 1999, is made up of six village municipalities: Păuleni-Ciuc, Mihăileni, Frumoasa, Lunca de Sus, Lunca de Jos and Ghimeș-Făget. Ghimeș-Făget is located within Bacău county while the rest belong to Harghita county. A municipality may incorporate a number of small villages and/or settlements in the area. There are a total of 33 villages altogether with 23,000 minority Hungarian residents collectively of which 36% are Székely, while 64% of them belong to the Gyimes Csángós. Csíksomlyó is part of the microregion too, which is the sacred centre of Transylvania, as well as the realm of Gyimes which is an extremely exciting place and carries ancient traditions even today. Csíkszépvíz was a major Armenian centre which still retains its architectural and cultural monuments.

The mission of the Pagan Snow Cap Microregional Association is to improve the quality of life of locals by respecting natural values and traditions. With respect to these values the organisation has three main fields of activity: ecotourism; development of local economy, with special attention to agriculture; and nature conservation.

This project began to develop after we launched a cooperation with our friend, Barbara Knowles in 2008. The initial project we started was to help local farmers to comply with EU milk hygiene standards, and by doing this reaching a higher price for their milk. We also met Demeter László, a biologist who has worked in our area for many years, studying the special fauna and flora of our wet meadows. At this point – through a shared interest in nature conservation and extensive agriculture – our activities merged, and the idea of the present project came up. It is a great coincidence, that UNDP GEF supports such integrated conservation and local economy development projects.

Our project has a dual goal: on the one hand to carry out biological research on our mountain hay meadows, on the other hand to help local farmers to carry on traditional small scale agriculture. Since agriculture means mainly animal husbandry in the region, we focus on quality milk production and marketing. This conference is also part of the project, and at the same time an official event of the International Year of Biodiversity.

And last but not least let me personally thank Barbara Knowles with all of my heart that she spent so much time and effort with us during the last two years, and helped create such a high ranked international event here in the Eastern Carpathians. I also would like to thank Demeter László, who became a good friend and the scientific leader of the project, and also

thank all my colleagues: Bíró Robert, who is manager, and main driving force of the project, and Krézsek Kata and Nyírő Gergely for their work and ideas.