

VEGETATION, AND TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE IN GYIMES (GHIMEȘ)

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We studied the traditional ecological knowledge in Gyimesközéplak, Hidegségpataka. The goal of our ethno botanical studies was to increase our knowledge of local plant names and folk taxonomy, the recognition of wild plant species, the structure of this knowledge at the individual and community scale, and local traditional knowledge about the habitats and site preferences of wild plant species. Participatory field work and semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2005-2009, interviewing ca. 50 members of the community.

Plant knowledge is very detailed and accurate in Gyimes. We collected 235 plant names, determined 172 ethnotaxa (these cover 280 wild plant species out of the occurring 450 species (62 %). An „average” Gyimes person recognizes 75-80 % of these ethnotaxa (people with the highest knowledge recognize 90 %, children under 12, only ca. half of it). Species with higher frequency and higher cover are better known than rare species. People in Gyimes can name ca. 80-95 % of the „biomass” in different vegetation types.

Similarity of the local plant names with the neighboring areas is 40-72 % (10-15 km), with areas farther away (70-200 km) only 17-30 %. Folk taxonomy of grasses, sedges, Salix species, Urtica/Lamium species, ferns, Gentiana and Trifolium species etc. were analyzed in detail.

Habitat and site preference knowledge is also very detailed and accurate. Though we argue that part of this knowledge is non-verbal, and was first verbalized to answer our questions. At least 131 habitat types are distinguished (with many synonyms). The classification does not focus on species composition, it refers to site conditions in the case of edaphic habitat types (wetlands and stony habitats), and dominant species or land-use in the case of habitat types with deeper soils (beech woodlands, meadows). 24 % of the habitat names are quite often used in everyday conversations with the relevant meaning of the habitats themselves (like spruce woodlands, pasture, Nardus grasslands), 55 % very rarely. Classification of fen and rock habitats are coarser than the scientific. People in Gyimes never refer to naturalness.

We argue that there are no plant community names in Gyimes. People refer to areas where a species has higher cover, but under a habitat name they do not understand a species composition: if we ask the list of typical species of a habitat, the answers contain 2.0 species in average; if we ask for woodland types, 86 % of the answers contain only plant names (instead of habitat names). We found that previous, geographical name based analysis of vegetation knowledge of Hungarians is misleading, since many habitat names never form geographical names.

We hope that this diverse and detailed botanical knowledge can serve the long-term sustainability of this community.