

Arguments for empowering Southern Carpathians communities in sustainable forestry management based on a perception approach in selected areas

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Abstract: In Romania, the changes of the land fund occurring over the last decades due to land restitutions have led to some difficulties in the management of the marked forests and to excessive harvesting in all geographical areas, but especially in the Carpathian Mountains. Although these topics have been intensely publicized, the general reaction of the population and, implicitly, of the local communities, towards these signals has been weak and isolated. Consequently, the study aims at examining the perception of local Carpathian communities, as actors involved in sustainable development, which are required to assume an active participation in the sustainable management (SFM) of the forests lying in the vicinity of residential areas. In order to accomplish this, an interview was applied in eight pilot areas from the Southern Carpathians. The results reveal that, regardless of education level, the respondents have a deep environmental knowledge about forest ecosystems, a perception in which the interest goes primarily to forest maintenance and only then to economic harvesting. The perception regarding the forests' condition, the activity of the administrators and the specific legislation is predominantly negative. In order to overcome the dysfunctions the members of local communities support legislation improvement, the increase of environmental awareness by education, being willing to get involved in a wide range of activities to enhance SFM. The study may be a useful tool for policy makers and for improving the activities by involving local population, which is the main target of SFM.

Key words: *forest knowledge, involvement, local communities, perception, SFM*

Introduction

The extremely complex issue of forest dynamics due to anthropogenic and natural causes, the increasing reconsideration of its ecosystemic, economic and social services in the context of climate change have led in recent decades to an intensification of scientific research (Badea et al., 2012), on the one hand, and to a correlation of management policies in consensus with the paradigm of sustainable development in the EU and many other countries of the world, on the other hand. Romania, as an EU member state, must align with these trends, but changes in forest ownership after 1990 have led to the management dysfunctions that still pose major problems, especially in the more vulnerable Carpathian area, through forest expansion and land fragmentation. Besides, as in other states of the former communist bloc, which have shifted from a centralized to a market economy, this mountain space is affected by labor migration to other

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