

TRADITIONAL AND WILD:

Revitalizing traditions of sustainable wild plant harvesting in Central Europe

Compiled by:

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Traditional and wild



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the wildlife trade monitoring network

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www.traditionalandwild.eu



Project management meeting in the Kozjansko and Dravinjsko area, Slovenia (Credit: Peter Radacsi)

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ACRONYMS

AMAPSEEC	Association for Medicinal and Aromatic Plants of Southeast European Countries
CE	Central Europe
EU	European Union
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FELGA	Felső-Kiskunsági Gazdaságfejlesztő Foundation
GACP	Good and Agricultural Collection Practices
KNP	Kiskunság National Park
MAPs	Medicinal and aromatic plants
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
SMEs	Small and medium enterprises
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Central Europe has been an important region for the sourcing of wild plants for medicinal, aromatic and culinary use since ancient times. Currently, approximately 2000 wild plant species are traded commercially, of which 60-70% are native to Central Europe. Up to 90% of these species are still collected from the wild. From the middle of the 20th century to the present day, traditional knowledge concerning the properties and use of many of these wild plants has been in decline due to urbanization, changes in land ownership, and ever changing lifestyle choices. Nowadays, wild plant collection is sometimes performed in an unsustainable manner, leading to the further decline of wild harvesting as an important source of employment and income for vulnerable groups in the long-term.

This report presents a description of the project '*Traditional and wild: Promoting traditional collection and use of wild plants to reduce social and economic disparities in Central Europe*' implemented by nine organizations from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Poland. The project aimed to protect the cultural heritage of collecting and processing useful wild plants, and to foster the sustainable use of this traditional knowledge and expertise among vulnerable groups; particularly the ethnic Roma populations, the elderly, and women, in rural parts of Central Europe. The project was implemented through the CENTRAL EUROPE (CE) Programme of the European Union (EU) and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

As part of the project, a *transnational model*¹ to support the marginalized groups through involving them in wild collection of plants was developed. This involved helping them to obtain necessary information, and engaging in the collection, processing and marketing of valuable wild plants. The model also involved target groups acquiring the necessary skills to make a living, or at least supplement their finances in the short term from wild plant collection. The model was tested in six pilot areas selected for the project. By implementing this model, the project introduced new management techniques which are essential not only in generating income for vulnerable groups, but also in easing any existing social tensions in the general population in the long-term.

The project demonstrated that a transnational model would be applicable across the Central European region and beyond. The project contributed to building the local capacity among these target groups so that in the long term they may also better contribute to the local and regional economy.

The project contributed to ensuring the sustainable harvesting and use of plants collected from the wild in pilot areas through the implementation of FairWild Standard principles. Moreover, the project helped to protect the cultural heritage of collecting and processing useful wild plants, and to foster the sustainable use of the traditional knowledge and expertise among vulnerable groups in rural parts of CE via a wide range of transnational tools and strategies developed within the project framework.

¹In accordance with the CE Application Manual, the Central Europe Programme 2007-2013 is aimed at transnational *cooperation* between eight Member States (the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia). In the framework of the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme, every project must tackle an issue that cannot be sufficiently dealt with by individual regions or countries alone. In practical terms every project is expected to address *a common issue of interest providing evidence that transnational cooperation* leads to more innovative and efficient solutions.

The Transnational model developed within the framework of the 'Traditional and wild' Project contributed to the overall goal to strengthen territorial cohesion, promote internal integration and enhance the competitiveness of Central Europe. The Transnational model addresses common issues, such as the introduction of new management techniques which are essential not only in generating income for vulnerable groups, but also in easing any existing social tensions in the general population in

INTRODUCTION

This report provides a general overview of the results of a project entitled '*Promoting traditional collection and use of wild plants to reduce social and economic disparities in Central Europe (Traditional and wild)*' implemented through the Central Europe (CE) Programme of the European Union (EU) and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The project was designed to demonstrate that a transnational approach is an effective tool for the protection of the cultural heritage of collecting and processing useful wild plants, and fostering the use of this knowledge and expertise among vulnerable groups in Central Europe.

The Background section of this report provides information about the history and inception of the project. A description of the rationale and methods used precedes the strategic project outcomes, followed by pilot area accounts of project implementation experiences. Overall project findings, including general and country level ones, are further described in the report. Recommendations for further development of similar projects are also made, based on the conclusions following on from the successes and lessons learnt.

This report is provided primarily for the use of environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses reliant on medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs), research, and academic institutions. However, it can also be used by community groups and other local stakeholders at field pilot sites. It is hoped the transnational approach implemented during the project will be a useful contribution to the revival of traditional knowledge about wild plant use, as well as to the improvement of the livelihoods of vulnerable groups in rural parts of Central Europe.

BACKGROUND

Central Europe has been an important region for the sourcing of wild plants for medicinal, aromatic and culinary use since ancient times. In fact, since the late 1800s, the collection of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) has developed into a significant additional source of income which has proven to be particularly important for certain vulnerable and economically marginalized groups, such as women, elderly people, and ethnic minorities. Currently, approximately 2000 wild plant species are traded commercially, of which 60-70% are native to CE. Up to 90% of these species are still collected from the wild².

From the middle of the 20th century to the present day, traditional knowledge concerning the properties and use of many of these wild plants has been in the decline due to urbanization, changes in land ownership, and ever changing lifestyle choices. Nowadays, the wild plant collection that does take place is sometimes performed in an unsustainable manner, leading to the further decline of an important source of employment and income for vulnerable groups.

To address the issues mentioned above, TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary, together with eight other organizations from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Poland, launched the project '*Traditional and wild: Promoting traditional collection and use of wild plants to reduce social and economic disparities in Central Europe*'. The main objectives were to prevent the disappearance of historical knowledge of traditional collection techniques and use of MAPs, as well as to help improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups in rural parts of Central Europe.

² Lange, D. (1998). Europe's Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Their Use, Trade and Conservation. TRAFFIC International, Cambridge, United Kingdom

Partner

- Association for Development and Promotion "PRO CARPATHIA"
- TRAFFIC/WWF Hungary
- Village Local Authority Kunadacs
- South-Transdanubian Regional Resource Centre
- Development Agency Kozjansko
- Institution Foundation BIT Planota
- Mendel University, Brno
- Regional Agrarian Chamber of the South Moravian Region
- Corvinus University of Budapest



The project partnership included academic institutions, local authorities, a chamber of commerce, and NGOs, all of whom brought together a wide array of expertise to implement the project goals successfully.

The project ran from May 2011 to April 2014 and incorporated the following objectives:

- Protection of the cultural heritage of collecting and processing useful wild plants and fostering the sustainable use of this knowledge and expertise among vulnerable groups; particularly the Roma, the elderly, and women, in rural parts of Central Europe.
- Implementation of a pilot model that is socially and culturally acceptable, economically sound and environmentally viable for wild plant collection, processing and use. The model will help to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups while safeguarding precious wild plants.

RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY

The partners engaged in the project all acknowledged the problem of lost traditional knowledge and expertise in their areas, and that the cultural heritage and practice of collecting and using wild plants is vanishing. The project partners were also aware of serious rural unemployment (particularly among already marginalized groups) and the problematic issue of unsustainable harvesting, such as overharvesting and destructive harvesting, of wild plants.

By adopting a transnational approach, the project addressed these issues which extend across borders, and aimed to develop a comprehensive methodology for wild plant collection under diverse ecological and socio-economic conditions in the countries concerned.

TRANSNATIONAL APPROACH

To accomplish the overarching goal of the project, transnational co-operation was vital while developing the project outcomes and conducting activities. The following reasons justified the need for a joint transnational project:

- Similar rural development issues with high rates of urban migration (to centres) and unemployment in each participating country.
- A common need to promote to a younger generation the value of cultural traditions and the protection of natural resources.
- An increase in the number of poorly educated ethnic minorities with limited employment options, and increased risk of rising poverty in rural areas.
- The availability, traditions, current use and trade in wild plant resources are similar in all participating countries.
- The similarities in legal and institutional regulations (and their enforcement) throughout the selected Central European countries.
- A transnational approach enhances the chances of wide replication of positive experiences within the region.
- Solving the problems together strengthens the region as a whole.

TRANSNATIONAL MODEL

The partnership developed a *transnational model* to help support the marginalized groups through involving them in the wild collection of plants. This involved helping them to obtain necessary information, and engaging in the collection, processing and marketing of valuable wild plants and their products. It also involved target groups acquiring the necessary skills to make a living, or at least supplement their finances in the short term, from wild plant collection. There were *two steps* undertaken to develop the model, namely:

- 1. Model design** that combined the generation of economic alternatives for marginalized groups and the sustainable collection of valuable wild plants. Model design included the following actions:
 - strategic analysis of the socio-economic and cultural profiles of the target population in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of their condition;
 - development of a capacity building strategy for the target populations;
 - development of manuals and training modules; and
 - data gathering and analysis of the wild plant species, and a survey on cultural traditions concerning collection and processing techniques, and areas of utilization.
- 2. Model application** among marginalized people in the six pilot areas in the four countries concerned included the following actions:
 - identification of markets for products;
 - delivery of training courses;
 - investments into demonstration installations;
 - development of model products; and
 - sustainable sourcing of wild plants.

PILOT AREAS

The transnational model was tested in six pilot areas selected for the project; namely:

- Felső-Kiskunság region, Hungary,
- Ormánság region, Hungary,
- Podkarpackie Voivodeship, Kolbuszow Plateau, Poland,
- Kozjansko and Dravinjsko area, Slovenia,
- Northern Primorska area, Slovenia, and
- South Moravia, Czech Republic.

By implementing this model, the project introduced new management techniques which are essential not only in generating income for vulnerable groups, but also in easing any existing social tensions in the general population in the long-term. The model will remain applicable across the Central European region and beyond after the project end.



*Landscape of Banjsice, Northern Primorska area, Slovenia
(Credit: Polona Pavlin)*

IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABLE SOURCING OF WILD PLANTS

Wild collection of plants has good potential for supporting the livelihoods of local communities, through generation of income as well as providing a source of food, and ingredients for medicines, as well as other uses.

It is important to ensure, however, that where wild collection is carried out it is based on the principles of sustainable harvesting and equitable trade, ensuring the long-term survival of plants and preservation of traditions of wild harvesting through incentives.

As part of the project, TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary promoted the uptake of the principles of the FairWild Standard through the project pilot sites, to ensure sustainability of harvesting and trade in wild plants.

TRAFFIC was amongst the organizations which developed the FairWild Standard, and promotes its use through partnership with the FairWild Foundation.



FAIRWILD STANDARD: UNDERPINNING THE SUSTAINABLE WILD COLLECTION AND EQUITABLE TRADE APPROACH IN 'TRADITIONAL AND WILD'

The FairWild Standard: Version 2.0 applies to wild plant collection operations who wish to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable collection, social responsibility, and fair trade principles.

The purpose of the Standard is to ensure the continued use and long-term survival of wild plant species and populations in their habitats, while respecting the traditions and cultures, and supporting the livelihoods of all stakeholders; in particular collectors and workers.

Use of the FairWild Standard helps to support efforts ensuring sustainable collection and maintenance of wild plant populations, as well as the sustainable social aspects of collection, and fair conditions of labour.

At the beginning of the project implementation, TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary, together with partners, finalized a set of sustainability principles for wild plant collection (drawn from the FairWild Standard). The principles were further translated into national languages and used by partners while training local communities. These principles can be applied in different resource management contexts, and are supported by the detailed list of criteria and indicators included in the FairWild Standard, which are recommended for adherence and implementation in all wild-collection situations.

‘Traditional and wild’ sustainability principles for wild plant collection are listed below:

- maintaining Wild Plant Resources,
- preventing Negative Environmental Impacts,
- complying with Laws, Regulations and Agreements,
- respecting Customary Rights and Benefit-Sharing,
- promoting Fair Contractual Relationships between Operators and Collectors,
- limiting Participation of Children in Wild-Collection Activities,
- ensuring Benefits for Collectors and their Communities,
- ensuring Fair Working Conditions for all Workers of Wild-Collection Operations,
- applying Responsible Management Practices,
- applying Responsible Business Practices, and
- promoting Buyer Commitment.

Strategic project outcomes relating to ensuring the sustainable sourcing of wild plants are described in the following section of this report.

STRATEGIC PROJECT OUTCOMES

Throughout the lifespan of the project partnership a number of key strategic project deliverables were completed which contributed to the general objective of the overall project. These ‘outputs’ were mainly related to developing the various transnational tools and strategies to be used to counter the negative impacts of social and demographic changes within marginalized groups in Central Europe.

DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSNATIONAL TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

During the first year of the implementation of the project, the ‘Traditional and wild’ partnership undertook a comprehensive *socio-economic analysis of the target population in pilot areas*.

The analysis was carried out in six pilot areas and identified the following results:

- demographics show an increase in the average age of the rural population in all pilot areas;
- level of education in pilot areas is lower in comparison to the national average;
- there are differences in motivation of the rural population to be engaged in wild plant collection activities. In areas, where traditions are better preserved, local people are more proactive and enthusiastic about working with wild plants, they tend to be better organized in small groups and communities;
- there is a need for more proactive participation of local authorities and governments in local communities concerning their wild plant collection activities;
- map of ethnic groups in the project sites shows that the largest Roma ethnic minority group was found in the village of Gilvánfa, located in the Ormánság Region (71 % of the total population).



Representative of the Roma ethnic minority group, the Ormánság region (Credit: Rózsa Takács Petrovicsné)

CAPACITY BUILDING STRATEGY

Another principal project output developed by the partnership was the ‘Capacity building strategy’, which assumes that the revival and maintenance of the regional cultural traditions on plant utilization contributes to strengthening local communities and their activities. The strategy was developed based on the results obtained from six project pilot areas that had all experienced the negative effects of social and demographic changes, and loss of historical traditions of wild plant collection. A ‘Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat’ (SWOT) analysis of current wild collection practices was carried out within the capacity building strategy. SWOT analysis produced the following results:

STRENGTHS

- Abundant wild plant resources in the region
- Rich cultural and folkloric heritage
- A large proportion of rural population looking for employment opportunities and income generation
- High potential for environmentally friendly farming
- Recognised local typical products with wild plant ingredients
- Low real estate prices
- Strong network of regional NGOs

WEAKNESSES

- Rural depopulation
- Loss of historical knowledge of traditional wild plant collection and processing activities
- Changes in land ownership
- Demanding physical work (i.e. wild plant collection)
- Low education levels of collectors
- Poorly developed regulations
- Fluctuation of demand on wild plant material
- Lack of entrepreneurship initiatives in rural areas

OPPORTUNITIES

- Relatively low investments needed
- Independent and flexible work schedule
- Interest in keeping traditional knowledge of wild plant activities alive
- High interest in local wild plant products
- Good income possibilities for vulnerable and economically marginalised populations
- Exploitation of renewable natural resources
- Development of market of local products with wild plant ingredients
- Enhancing networking with local producers

THREATS

- Weak motivation for engagement in wild plant collection activities
- Low level of co-operation
- Low payment for wild collection activities
- Complicated procedures for obtaining financial incentives
- Cheaper price for imported products with wild plant ingredients
- Slow state responses on the adaptation of regulation and new incentives
- High competition with other similar markets

TRAINING MATERIALS

Development of training materials was one of the fundamental elements of the transnational model implemented in project pilot areas. In 2012, the partnership developed ‘*Training materials on plant collection and utilization, building entrepreneurial skills, and providing employment opportunities*’.

In general the training aimed to demonstrate the importance of wild plant collection in Central Europe and their utilization by local communities, to help trainees build up requisite entrepreneurial and marketing skills necessary for improving employment opportunities and provide potential additional income.

Included within these materials was a training course on aspects of sustainable wild plant collection based on the FairWild Standard that was prepared by TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary. The course contains an overview of the medicinal plants sector in Central Europe, the main principles of good collection practices (based on Good and Agricultural Collection Practices (GACP)), aspects of sustainable wild plant collection (based on principles of the FairWild Standard), including collection instructions, and the handling of plant material before and after collection. The course includes practical exercises designed to make wild plant collection in participating countries more sustainable.

These training materials were developed with support from national and local experts and are available in four participant countries’ languages, including the Roma language. These training materials can be used widely within the project countries and are available free online, and are also available on CD by request.

‘TRADITIONAL AND WILD’ TOOLBOX

A ‘Traditional and wild’ online toolbox, containing a wide range of various resources about wild MAPs, was developed by TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary. The toolbox is an online suite of tools and learning resources designed to be accessible to the general public. It also provides learning resources for scientific and educational institutions, and the wide range of stakeholders working with or interested in wild plant resources. The toolbox contains eight comprehensive sections including:

- a database for 30 commonly used wild plants (e.g. Leopard’s Bane *Arnica montana*, Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Ginseng *Panax ginseng*), including description of the plants, photo gallery, uses, products, and trivia;
- an animation video about the FairWild Standard;
- an overview of global implementation and certification of FairWild projects (e.g. the production of FairWild-certified ingredients such as Common Marshmallow *Althaea officinalis*, Cleavers *Galium aparine*, and Blackberry *Rubus fruticosus* from Hungary);
- a video-based page about ‘Traditional and wild’ project and partners;
- wild plant facts infographics; and
- a resources section, intended for use by environmental NGOs working with plants, companies seeking information about sustainable harvesting and trade, government, and members of the general public looking for a more in-depth understanding.

The ‘Traditional and wild’ toolbox is available at: www.traffic.org/traditionalwild.



Road map of the 'Traditional and wild' toolbox
(Credit: Kristina Rodina)

Selected sections of the toolbox have been translated into the five national languages of the project, namely; Polish, Hungarian, Slovenian, Czech, and Roma. The toolbox could easily be replicated in other regions as the information is appropriate for use in training events and workshops to further enhance knowledge about wild plants.

REGIONAL ETHNOBOTANICAL SURVEY

The ethnobotanical survey on the level of traditional knowledge about wild plant use was conducted in six project pilot areas under the guidance of the Association 'Pro Carpathia', with 282 people being interviewed in total. The overall results showed:

- 50.7% of respondents assessed their plant knowledge as highly insufficient.
- Participation of the older generation in passing knowledge about wild plants to younger people was the highest in the Polish pilot area with a 45% response rate.
- 33% of respondents from the Czech Republic and 30% from Slovenia used books to obtain knowledge about wild plants.
- Due to a lack of sufficient knowledge, general usage of plants in a respondents' daily life was limited although they are willing to use them in principle. The highest regular use of many common wild plants in daily life was found in the Slovenian pilot areas, with 38% of responses.
- All respondents were keen to learn more about the traditional use of wild plants with 86% of responses from the Slovenian pilot areas and 82% from the Polish one.

IMPLEMENTATION OF TRANSNATIONAL MODEL IN PILOT AREAS

Implementation of the transnational model developed by the partnership between 2011 and 2012 combined the following project activities:

- identification of markets for products,
- delivery of training courses,
- investments into demonstration installations,
- development of model products, and
- sustainable sourcing of wild plants.

IDENTIFICATION OF MARKETS FOR PRODUCTS

To analyse the market potential for the traditional products from Central Europe, a market and income generation strategy was prepared by Institution Foundation BiT Planota. The strategy identified the possibilities of marketing the products at local and regional levels and evaluated demand, quality, quantity, and specific requirements.

It also included a survey on market potential for local traditional products in pilot project areas. The survey was designed for three different groups, namely; individuals, producers of raw wild materials and products, and purchasing organizations, with 521 interviewees in total. The overall survey results are presented below:

- 46% of all survey respondents had high-school level education; the second largest group of respondents (31%) held a university degree;
- 84% of all respondents actively bought products with wild plant ingredients;
- the main reasons for buying products with wild plant ingredients were due to health benefits (with 35% of responses), quality (17%), and safety (14%);
- wild fruits and berries were the most frequently bought products among the fresh products (41 % of responses) whereas useful stems and leaves are the most popular to buy in the 'dried product category';
- high price was determined as the main obstacle to purchasing these products for 25% of respondents;

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

- 60% of respondents from the Podkarpacki region in Poland, consider health benefits, and the absence of artificial ingredients as the most motivating factors to purchase products with wild plant ingredients.
- 40% of respondents from the Savinjska and Goriška regions in Slovenia, define the origin of a product as the most important factor.
- 30% of respondents from the Slovenian and Czech pilot areas purchase 'wild plant products', due to their absence of artificial ingredients.

DELIVERY OF TRAINING COURSES

In 2013, the principal project activity was the use of previously developed training materials, including a training course on aspects of sustainable wild plant collection based on the principles of the FairWild Standard, prepared by TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary, to conduct training in project target areas by the partners.

Training courses were delivered to 935 people in six project target areas between April and August 2013. Of these, 82 people were trained in Hungary (Felső-Kiskunság and Ormánság regions), 90 in Poland (Podkarpackie province), 575 in the Czech Republic (South Moravia) and 188 in Slovenia (Kozjansko and Dravinjsko area, and Northern Primorska area). Among the people trained in the pilot areas, 200 were specifically trained in sustainable wild plant collection and processing practices.

The training courses demonstrated the importance of plants collected from the wild in Central Europe and helped trainees to improve sustainable wild plant harvesting and processing techniques. The training also built up their entrepreneurial and marketing skills required for improving their employment opportunities and thus increasing the opportunity for earning potential additional income.



A field training course in Kemes, the Ormánság region (Credit: Rózsa Takács Petrovicsné)

A GOOD POST-TRAINING EXAMPLE

As a result of the training undertaken in South Moravia (Poland) in 2013, a business woman from the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands is interested in establishing her own wild plant purchasing centre, including fruits, and medicinal plants. Her objective is to provide work to the most financially disadvantaged people in the community as well as selling raw materials to processing companies.

She already has some of her own financial resources, and is seeking suitable premises for the centre. She has made a contract with two elementary schools in the region and disseminated the information among the inhabitants of local villages. She is also in contact with Mendel University with a view to developing her business plan further, of which the main focus is on the right quantity of collected species required to make the business viable. Follow-up support may include some help with the contract agreement between her business and the elementary schools concerning the plant species, their quantity and quality.

INVESTMENTS INTO DEMONSTRATION INSTALLATIONS

Demonstration installations designed for training and educational purposes, as well as for promotion of the project, were made in four pilot areas of the 'Traditional and wild' project, and included:

- the construction of a folklore house and installation of an exhibition room in the centre of the village of Kunadacs (Hungary);
- the installation of an exhibition room at the Open Air Folk Museum in Kolbuszowa (Poland), covering religious and superstitious aspects of wild plants;
- the creation of herbal gardens and pilot scale laboratory in Northern Primorska region (Slovenia); and
- the purchase and installation of a small scale drying machine used in the preparation of high quality medicinal plants in Lednice (the Czech Republic).

The benefit of all these installations is that they will be owned by local inhabitants, among them traditional collectors of wild plants, who will be able to receive practical training in specific plant use skills, beyond the project lifetime. They will also be utilized for educational purposes for schoolchildren and university students as well as for tourists and visitors. An additional project-wide benefit is the overall development and refining of the existing socio-economic model for change in marginalized rural areas of Central Europe.

DEVELOPMENT OF MODEL PRODUCTS

To highlight the original and unique values of traditional, locally-sourced products the project partners developed model products using wild plant ingredients from each pilot area with exclusive packaging. The project partners encouraged local rural communities to engage further in wild plant activities through promoting the model products as an example of good practice, and to generate additional income streams.

A detailed description of each model product and installations is presented in the 'Pilot areas' section of this report.

SUSTAINABLE SOURCING OF WILD PLANTS

The first activity towards securing the sustainable sourcing of wild plants was to develop a list of priority plant species with the potential for product development and certification. The list contains very common, but at the same time, valuable traditionally-utilized wild plants that are used by target groups, which include the Roma population, unemployed people, the elderly, and women in the four participating countries. These priority plant species were: Common Juniper *Juniperus communis*, Goldenrod *Solidago canadensis*, Black Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Silver Birch *Betula pendula*, European Blueberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, Common Horsetail *Equisetum arvense*, Common Walnut *Juglans regia*, Raspberry *Rubus idaeus*, Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, and Rose hip *Rosa canina*.

During 2012, TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary contributed to the finalisation of the *priority species situation analysis reports*. The situation analysis for each species included an examination of wild collection and conservation requirements, including determination of their conservation status, knowledge-based collection practices, collection intensity and species regeneration, based on guidance included with implementation of the FairWild Standard. These results were shared at the transnational workshop on resource assessment and management planning meeting in Lokve, Slovenia in September 2012 and provided the basis for the development of specific training materials for collectors, as well as a background for further implementation of the principles of sustainable wild harvesting.

A workshop on sustainable sourcing practices in Central Europe was organized by TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary in October 2013. The workshop brought together 19 participants, including project partners, government representatives (Hungarian Ministry of Rural Development), and international organizations (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) and the Association for Medicinal and Aromatic Plants of Southeast European Countries (AMAPSEEC)), to discuss the links between traditional wild plant collection activities and resource security in Central Europe.



A workshop on sustainable sourcing practices in Central Europe, Budapest 2013 (Credit: Peter Radacsi)

The workshop summarized project work on the establishment of pilot initiatives for the sustainable management of wild-collected plants and capacity-building of local inhabitants in Central Europe. Participants concluded that while the ecological sustainability of wild plant collection in the region is an important consideration, currently the main concern is the social and economic sustainability of wild collection practices and how it impacts on the livelihoods of collectors.

Addressing this issue is a challenging one, requiring collaboration between various government departments, and includes training of collectors, provision of employment opportunities, and the simultaneous monitoring of the ecological sustainability of wild-harvesting. In this regard, updates on wild plant collection activities from pilot areas of the Traditional and wild project in Central Europe were considered useful for sharing both in the region and beyond.

FAIRWILD CERTIFICATION

Although FairWild certification was not included within the project outcomes, there are several companies in the region who implement it for trade with foreign partners. As such, FairWild certification can provide an additional value-adding option for producers in Central Europe, considering that the demand for FairWild certified products is growing.

RUNO sp. z o.o. is an operator in Poland dealing with processing herbs and raw herbal material that holds FairWild certification for four wild plant species (Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Black Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, and Small-Leaved Linden *Tilia cordata*). The wild herbs are collected through their network of purchase centres in landscapes surrounding Białowieża forest, one of the last and largest remaining parts of the primeval forest that once stretched across the European Plain. Collectors are benefiting from fair prices paid for their produce and through participation with the FairWild Premium Fund (for community development priorities). Final products using Polish ingredients are manufactured in the USA, and are on sale in the USA, Canada, Japan and elsewhere. For more details on FW certification, see: www.fairwild.org.

PROJECT RESULTS

PILOT AREA 1: FELSŐ-KISKUNSÁG REGION, HUNGARY

BACKGROUND

The setting for this case study was Kunadacs, a traditional Hungarian agricultural village situated in the Great Hungarian Plain. It is located in the Felső-Kiskunság region of Bács-Kiskun County. The economy of the village is mainly based on agriculture. There were two partners in this pilot area, namely:

- **The Village Local Authority of Kunadacs:** the Municipality of the village which was involved in the implementation of the project.
- **The Department of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, Corvinus University of Budapest:** the lead partner of the 'Traditional and wild' project who also contributed to the activities in this pilot area. The Department is a leading scientific unit in medicinal plant science in Central Europe. Their competences include the assessment of wild plant populations, the elaboration of cultivation methods for growing wild plants and the development of primary processing methods. The Department has widespread and strong connections with herbal and pharmaceutical producers and associations, as well as public authorities in Hungary.

The target plant species chosen for this pilot area include:

- Black Elder *Sambucus nigra*,
- Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, and
- Common Juniper *Juniperus communis*.

These species were selected by representatives of the Municipality of Kunadacs following a discussion with experts from the nearby Kiskunság National Park (KNP). The species are abundant in the region, and can easily be primary processed after collection.

Wild plant collecting activities were more common in the Felső-Kiskunság region in the 1980s. Nowadays there are few collectors left, and those that are still operative mainly collect for personal use. In recent years herb cultivation has started to prevail in the area as opposed to wild plant collection. However, despite this trend there is an interest in developing this form of natural harvesting and locals confirmed that they still enjoy working with wild plants.

The main challenge for local collectors is finding purchase centres to sell their raw materials to. There are currently no purchasing centres in Felső-Kiskunság.

OUTCOMES

TRAINING

Four training courses were organized with 29 people trained in total. These courses were held in the village of Kunadacs, and the village of Vanyarc. The general topics covered were:

- general knowledge and aspects of the use of wild plants; and
- sustainable wild plant collection.

During these workshops participants became acquainted with some essential oils and had the opportunity to make simple food produced from wild plant ingredients. An important outcome of these workshops was that it was clear there is a rich verbal heritage of knowledge about wild plants in the area that is still being passed from generation to generation.



Black Elder berries (Credit: Traditional and wild Partnership)

CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST AND KISKUNSAĞ NATIONAL PARK COLLABORATION

Corvinus was interested in assessing the density of various wild plants in Kiskunság National Park and one of the Park's experts was assigned the duty of investigating the density of Common Nettle, Common Marshmallow *Althaea officinalis* and some other common species.

Another research topic that the Department completed within the framework of the project was to examine the Common Juniper population in Kunadacs and the harvesting method. The research included examination of the various harvesting methods used to collect Juniper berries and how these can influence product quality and quantity as well as the sustainability of wild plant populations.

INVESTMENT

During the project the main investment was the construction of a 'folklore house' and installation of an exhibition room in the centre of the village of Kunadacs.

The concept for the folklore house was to promote the traditional uses of wild plants and help preserve the cultural traditions of the Felső-Kiskunság region. It will be used for educational purposes and to demonstrate wild plant collection traditions to the local population, schoolchildren, students and visitors.

The house includes an exhibition room and training rooms and some of the exhibits include dried wild plants, traditional tools, and pictures and posters illustrating the wild plants of the region. The training room is devoted to the traditional uses and processing of wild harvested plants.

The house is located close to KNP, where collection of wild plants is regulated to allow for the protection of wild plant resources and managed wild-harvesting can take place within the Park buffer zone.

The Village Local Authority of Kunadacs has offered ongoing support for the organization of future events and workshops in the folklore house, which will remain free and open to the general public.

The events will assist with the promotion of the traditional collection of wild plants.

In addition, a pilot herbal garden was installed in the grounds of Corvinus University of Budapest in 2012 to grow common spices such as Sage *Salvia officinalis*, and Common thyme *Thymus vulgaris*. The garden will be maintained by the Department of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants and be open for public visits.

MODEL PRODUCT AND PRE-CERTIFICATION GUIDELINES

Marmalades and jams are popular in Felső-Kiskunság and many local families have their own special recipes; elderberry marmalade is a particular favourite. Use of Common Nettle is also widespread.

Model products for this pilot area were:

- Elderberry Marmalade, and
- Dried Nettle Leaf Tea.



Traditional uses of wild plants feature in a 'folklore house' in Kunadacs (Credit: Kristina Rodina)



Elderberry marmalade and dried nettle leaf tea (Credit: József Szántai)

These products were developed by two families in the region and further development may help provide local employment opportunities. As a result of the development, and with support from the Felső-Kiskunsági Gazdaságfejlesztő Foundation, the two products were granted a local commodity 'KISKUN Védjegy' (KISKUN Trademark). They can now be used as a benchmark by others wishing to develop similar wild plant products.



In 2012 Felső-Kiskunsági Gazdaságfejlesztő Foundation (FELGA), located in the village of Kunadacs, launched a project on 'Developing the market for local producers from the Kiskunság region'. The project intended to strengthen local markets and to establish a new local KISKUN trademark in the region for local produce such as meat, fruits and vegetables, herbal tea, honey, and many other products with wild plant ingredients. Currently, 16 products are being developed under the KISKUN trademark. By June 2014, there will be 45 products launched at local markets.

PILOT AREA 2: ORMÁNSÁG REGION, HUNGARY

BACKGROUND

The area of Ormánság is situated in the south western region of Hungary in Baranya County. Somogy County can be found to the west while the river Drava marking the border with Croatia lies to the south. The 11 settlements selected for this pilot area, which constitute an integral part of Ormánság were; Adorjás, Bogdása, Drávafok, Drávakeresztúr, Drávasztára, Drávaiványi, Felsőszentmárton, Kemse, Kémes, Markóc and Sósvertike.

The activities in this pilot area were managed by the South-Transdanubian Regional Resource Centre Services Non-Profit Ltd, one of the Regional Management Units of the Ministry of Social and Labour Affairs. The target plant species chosen for was Black Elder *Sambucus nigra*. It has a broad range of uses from medicinal, flavouring, colouring, and cuisine. Traditionally it has been an important medicinal plant used in folklore; in fact it was once referred to as 'the poor man's pharmacy'.

Sustainable wild plant collection and regulation

Wild plant collection in Hungary is regulated by the Nature Conservation Act which prohibits the collection of protected plants. Furthermore, wild plant collection in protected areas is only possible with permission from specific designated authorities such as the Environmental, Natural and Water Management Inspectorate, and the Directorate of the Danube-Drava National Park. In accordance with the Forest Act, collecting wild plants in non-protected areas is allowed, however the collection of plants in state-owned forests cannot exceed the amount needed for personal use and must not damage the forest's biodiversity. Collectors need to pay tax if more than a certain amount of plants are harvested.



The South-Transdanubian Regional Resource Centre Services Non-Profit Ltd provides expertise to local government in respect of the implementation of subsidized social programmes in rural areas. It has experience of successfully implementing a wide range of training and employment opportunities for local marginalized groups, including those involved in wild plant collection activities.

Although Black Elder is an unprotected plant in Hungary, when collecting any wild plants or herbs, the relevant nature protection and forest laws must always be observed. Furthermore, collection for commercial use requires a license.

Collectors from Ormánság supply a range of raw materials under a trading licence to a commercial buyer that produces FairWild certified ingredients in the region. The bulk of the raw plant material is sold and exported to Western Europe. In future, with a viable medicinal wild plants (MAPs) sectoral strategy and investments, there are expectations to move more of this value-addition to Hungary.

Based on the survey conducted in this pilot area, 28 local collectors from three villages, namely, Adorjás, Drávaiványi, and Kemse engaged in wild plant collection activities for Schmidt and CO. Kft., a company which produces FairWild certified ingredients (such as Common Marshmallow *Althaea officinalis*, Cleavers *Galium aparine*, Rose hip *Rosa canina*, Blackberry *Rubus fruticosus*, Common Nettle *Urtica dioica* and others).



Schmidt and CO. Kft, Baksa, Hungary (Credit: Kristina Rodina)

OUTCOMES

TRAINING

Four training events were held during the project period and took place in Kémes and Vajszló, with 53 attendees in total. The general topics covered were:

- The sustainable collection and use of wild medicinal plants and herbs; which covered basic knowledge of plants and aspects of plant collection. Product development, marketing and entrepreneurial options were also discussed.
- The importance and principles of the sustainable collection of wild plants; which covered the practical application of the theoretical knowledge.

Participants obtained a basic knowledge about medicinal herbs and spices and received information about their uses. Many of the participants were considering family usage, while others were considering applying the knowledge for entrepreneurial purposes.



Training course in Vajszló (Credit: Rózsa Takács Petrovicsné)

MODEL PRODUCT AND PRE-CERTIFICATION GUIDELINES

Black elder is one of the most recognized and widely used wild medicinal plants in this region. For this reason, a traditional wooden box which contains product samples from the Black Elder was developed. The box included dried flowers, herbal tea, elderberry honey syrup, and a tincture. The box also contained a wild plant collection calendar along with various recipes.



A traditional wooden box with product samples from Black Elder (Credit: Rózsa Takács Petrovicsné)

Furthermore, a pre-certification methodological study was developed which described the process of obtaining BIO certification for products made from medicinal and aromatic plants (including the model products).

Also included in the study was important practical information for farmers and enterprises interested in setting up new herbal businesses. It is intended that this will encourage more herbal collectors, processors and distributors, who work with natural materials, to adopt a more ecological approach and enable them to qualify as certified organic producers.

PILOT AREA 3: PODKARPACIE PROVINCE, POLAND

BACKGROUND

The backdrop for this case study was the picturesque hills and forests of the Kolbuszowa Plateau located in the Podkarpackie Province of south-eastern Poland. Ten localities identified as important wild plant collection areas were selected namely: Widełka, Styków, Przewrotne, Hucisko, Pogwizdów Stary, Ranizów, Lipnica, Dzikowiec, Werynia, and Kłapówka.

The activities in this pilot area were conducted and supported locally by the Association for Development and Promotion of Podkarpacie 'Pro Carpathia', located in Rzeszow. The Association has a solid expertise in developing many programmes to enhance rural livelihoods and overcome the income disparities between local populations.

The target plant species chosen for this pilot area included:

- Silver birch *Betula Pendula*,
- Common Horsetail *Equisetum arvense*, and
- European Blueberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*.

These species were selected following scientific research and discussion by botanists at the University of Rzeszów coupled with the fact that manufactured products based on these species are already sourced and produced locally. Furthermore, although some commercial buyers are active in the region, (e.g. collectors sell wild harvested blueberries to local processing companies), there are no collector cooperatives operating locally or any legal entities which regulate or sustainably control the harvest of wild plants. Nor are there any written records regarding the practice of sustainable collection of wild plants. Consequently, in the collection of blueberries, the tools used to harvest the berries (combs) can be harmful to the shrubs.



Silver Birch (Credit: 'Traditional and wild' partnership)

OUTCOMES

TRAINING

Overall, three separate training courses were organized with 90 people being trained in total. The first two events were held at Kolbuszowa, and the third in the village of Rabe in the Bieszczady Mountains. Classes were conducted by members of the teaching staff at the University of Rzeszów and an employee of the Bieszczady National Park.

The general topics covered were:

- The identification and sustainable collection and processing of wild plants along with the possibility of selling harvested raw materials on the Podkarpackie market.
- Sustainable sourcing of raw material during the 'dead' seasons of autumn, winter, and early spring. Attendees had a chance to get to learn how to recognize species of post season plants, and how to collect them properly in line with the concepts of good practice and principles of sustainable sourcing of raw material.

An important outcome of this training is that both the technical knowledge gained and the good practices and principles learnt will be put into action going forward for both personal and commercial application.



A training course in Kolbuszowa, the Podkarpackie Province (Credit: Malgorzata Draganik)

INVESTMENT

During the period of this project the main investment was the installation of an exhibition room at the Open Air Folk Museum in Kolbuszowa covering the religious and superstitious aspect of wild plants; this included the purchase of a dryer for wild plants along with furniture for the exhibition room itself.

One of the key objectives of the exhibition is to help maintain and promote the written and spoken heritage regarding the collection and use of local wild plants in the region. It is the intention that this will assist with the promotion of the traditional collection of wild plants and help disseminate knowledge and information, as well as providing practical training in cultivation techniques and the use of correct processing equipment.

The exhibition room has already been visited by many classes from nearby educational establishments (mostly primary schools) as well as tourists. The creation of the exhibition room was made possible thanks to the co-operation of the Open Air Folk Museum with whom a signed agreement was established. This agreement will remain in effect until at least the end of April 2019.

MODEL PRODUCT AND PRE-CERTIFICATION GUIDELINES

The blueberry plant is abundant in this region and as a result there are many products derived from it which are produced and sourced locally. For this reason the model products for this project were:

- Blueberry jam, and
- Dried blueberry berries.

These were developed by AWB Alina Becla, a local company who have experience of developing products from wild plants.



Consequently, pre-certification guidelines for the model products as well as other products with wild plant ingredients were developed. These guidelines include information on obtaining certification for schemes such as BIO, Certified Organic Farming, and FairWild, all of which can be obtained for the model products.

Going forward, this model can be adopted by other companies developing products obtained from wild plants. The document is available on the project website and will also be sent to relevant companies who already operate in the province (e.g. Bomex, Cmol-frut, and AWB) who are recognized as likely potential candidates for this type of certification.

PILOT AREA 4: KOZJANSKO AND DRAVINJSKO AREA, SLOVENIA

BACKGROUND

The pilot area for this case study was the hilly and mountainous region of southeast Slovenia covering the areas of Kozjansko and Dravinjsko. This region, which has a large dispersion of settlements and a sizable population, includes the municipalities of Dobje, Šentjur, Slovenske Konjice, Vitanje, Dobrna, Zreče and Oplotnica.

The project partner was the Development Agency Kozjansko. It oversees the development of eight municipalities in Slovenia and is responsible for local and regional development plans, sustainable development of the rural sector, and eco-tourism.

The target plant species chosen for this pilot area were:

- Black Elder *Sambucus nigra*, and
- Common Walnut *Juglans regia*.

These two plants were selected because they both have a long tradition in Slovenian culture and also have good marketing potential. There are currently no established sales channels for either plant in the area.

Black Elder and Common Walnut grow freely in the pilot area and there is no special legislation regarding collection, unless they form part of the vegetation on a farm. In such cases they belong to the landowner and are generally collected by them and form part of the supplementary activity on the farm. This can be witnessed by the sale of walnuts which are offered by many farms as their own produce on the market or for direct sale. Walnuts form part of many traditional culinary products such as cakes, pastries, and breads. In addition, as the compression of walnut oil and its sale becomes more economically important, more farms are pressing oil from walnut kernels as a complementary activity, to market and sell.

Likewise, Black Elder is used in many local traditional herbal products such as elderberry syrup, tea, juices, and jams. There is considerable interest shown in these types of product at organic markets.

Although currently there are no commercial wild plant collectors operating in the pilot area, all sellers and producers of plant products still need to be registered with local governments. Also, despite the fact that there are no large producers of herbs, there are some entrepreneurs developing businesses on a small scale.



*Common Walnut
(Credit:
'Traditional and
wild' Partnership)*

OUTCOMES

TRAINING

Four training workshops were organized with 96 people trained in total. The workshops were held in Oplotnica, Dobrina, Vitanje, and Dobje. The general topics covered were herb use and the principles of sustainable wild herb collection. The workshops covered various ways of using herbs including their culinary use. Participants learned about the principles of sustainable wild herb collection and also how 'weed' and daisy blossom are edible.

Two further workshops were organized in Primary School Slivnica and Primary School Loka pri Žusmu and were conducted by the Etno-Eko association. The workshops were entitled 'From Grain to Bread' and children were taught the importance of herbs in food preparation. They also made various traditional Slovene bread products from flour. These workshops were attended by 27 participants made up of children and teachers from the Kozjansko area.



Workshop in a primary school Slivnica (Credit: Elena Zupanc)

An important outcome of this training was the presentation to women and young people in the countryside on the practice of herb collection as a business and as a career opportunity.

MODEL PRODUCT AND PRE-CERTIFICATION GUIDELINES

Due to the increasing level of awareness among people of the benefits of health products such as walnut oil, the model product chosen for this pilot area was a 100% walnut oil in a 250ml dark bottle.

The oil was produced by Ms Romanca Rečnik, as a supplementary activity, on a local farm in the pilot area.

Fifty bottles of the oil were produced to participate in the promotion of the product and raise the profile of the project in Slovenia. In future the producer will be given the opportunity to present the product for free at fairs and markets and in the promotional materials of the Green Sheaf trademark. The vitamin and mineral rich oil is used locally to lower blood pressure and cholesterol, as well as to help improve overall health. Walnut oil also finds wider applications in cosmetic and culinary use.

Pre-certification guidelines for the model product, as well as other products with wild plant ingredients, were developed by external experts engaged in certification schemes in Slovenia and are available at the Development Agency Kozjansko website. The guidelines are intended for anyone wishing to start with ecological farming and obtaining BIO certification of products. The guidelines also explain the description required on various labels of Slovenian ecological products.



Walnut oil (Credit: Malgorzata Draganik)

In 2011, the Development Agency Kozjansko signed the 'Declaration on the sustainable development of the Savinjska Region', which includes the respective pilot area together with seven other municipalities located in the areas of Kozjansko and Dravinjsko. The 'Traditional and wild' project is mentioned in the Declaration brochure under the heading 'Sustainable activities in the Savinjska region'. It is listed as one of the positive contributions to rural development by the Development Agency Kozjansko. Key results and lessons learnt in the Kozjansko and Dravinjsko pilot area will continue to be used for further sustainable rural development in the region.

PILOT AREA 5: NORTHERN PRIMORSKA AREA, SLOVENIA

BACKGROUND

The pilot area for this case study was the unspoilt forests and valleys of the Banjšice and Trnovo Plateau which can be found in the south western part of Northern Primorska, a region of Slovenia.

Activities in this pilot area were conducted and supported locally by Institution Foundation BiT Planota. The Foundation has considerable experience in developing countryside programmes and social rural development, and has already contributed to the promotion of the wild plant sector by participating in similar European projects in the past.

The target plant species chosen for this pilot area included:

- Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, and
- Raspberry *Rubus idaeus*.

These species were chosen because they are common to the area and there is a local demand for products made from the ingredients. Raspberry is generally used in beverages and food products whilst Common Nettle is used for both culinary and medicinal purposes.

There are no special laws, regulations, or administrative requirements in place with regard to the wild collection of these species in the area, therefore collection is permitted. In fact, the 'Law on Forests of the Republic of Slovenia', expressly states that land owners must allow the picking of forest fruit or herbs unless the landowner collects them as part of a registered commercial activity.

In the last ten years there has been a proliferation of complementary activities in rural areas, particularly in relation to farm tourism. This supplementary activity represents an opportunity for economic growth. Currently, there are no collector cooperatives operating in the region, and the collection of wild plants is generally undertaken by individuals for personal culinary or therapeutic purposes.



Common Nettle
(Credit:
'Traditional and
wild' Partnership)

OUTCOMES

TRAINING

Overall, nine separate training courses were organized in Kobarid, Deskie, Grgarske Ravne, and Nova Gorica with 121 people being trained in total. Participants were all from the pilot area region or the nearby surrounding area.

The general topics covered were:

- The preparation of beverages from wild plants, along with good practices of planting and harvesting wild plants. The objective of these workshops was to provide participants with basic information about growing, processing, and different uses of wild plants.
- The preparation of natural products, including the preparation of soaps, ointments, and distillation of essential oils. The aim of these workshops was to provide participants with knowledge and skills for the preparation of products from wild plants.

An important outcome of this training was that considerable interest was raised in respect of the growing and applications of wild plants, there were also requests for additional workshops covering the practical skills and knowledge required for creating products from wild plants. Following on from this training 12 people are now using their newly acquired skills for developing new (local) products from wild plants which will enable participants to generate additional family income.

INVESTMENT

A key investment of this project was the creation of seven exposition herbal gardens which will be used for training and educational purposes. The biggest exposition garden will be maintained by the Institution Foundation BiT Planota, two by local schools, and four by local NGOs and the Inter-Municipal Association of Blind and Visually Impaired of Nova Gorica.

In addition to this, specialized equipment was also purchased for the processing and quality control of wild herbs. It is now installed in the Herbal Centre 'Zeliščni Center' at Grgarske Ravne in Grgar. The aim of the exposition gardens is to:

- increase the interest in wild plants for school children, students, local inhabitants, and tourists;
- to provide basic information on local herbs and other wild plants;
- to provide target groups with the opportunity to work in the gardens to learn practical competencies connected with traditional activities; and
- to preserve folkloric traditions connected with plants.

Equipment for processing and quality control will be publicly available to project beneficiaries for:

- education and training,
- quality control of local wild plant ingredients, and
- processing of wild plants for local inhabitants who lack their own equipment.

It is intended that equipment at the Herbal Centre will allow local people to process wild plants; in this way it will facilitate their access to the market and thus generate additional family income. The Foundation BIT Planota will maintain the equipment after the termination of the project.

An example of good practice and teamwork was witnessed in the collaboration between group members and the Inter-Municipal Association of Blind and Visually Impaired of Nova Gorica. Members shared the knowledge acquired from their training with the association which resulted in blind and visually impaired people in the region helping with the preparation and maintenance of herb gardens established during the project. They also assist with preparation of products obtained from wild plants (i.e. drying of wild plants, preparation of tea blends, distillation of essential oils etc.). In return for their help the association is rewarded with a proportional quantity of the prepared produce.

MODEL PRODUCT AND PRE-CERTIFICATION GUIDELINES

In the pilot area a public invitation was prepared for product development, the criteria being that the product had to be made from wild plant ingredients and should be novel to the regional market.

Two model products were developed:

- A **'dream catcher' scented pillow**, containing a mixture of fragrant herbs growing in the pilot area. The herbs include Lavender *Lavandula angustifolia*, Common Thyme *Thymus vulgaris*, Lemon Balm *Melissa officinalis*, Peppermint *Mentha x piperita*, and Chamomile *Matricaria chamomilla*. The pillow is aimed at helping users get a good night's sleep through easing sleep disorders.
- A **herbal tea**. The tea contains extracts from wild plants including Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Black Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Large-leaved Linden *Tilia platyphyllos*, Caraway *Carum carvi* and Spruce *Picea abies*.



The model products were created by a private company which is registered as a local social enterprise. As a result, pre-certification guidelines have been prepared on how to obtain certification for organic status of products in Slovenia. The guidelines integrate information about certification for products collected from the wild and certification from bio-dynamic cultivation. Going forward, this model can be adopted by farmers and producers developing products obtained from both wild and cultivated plants.

A 'dream catcher' scented pillow
(Credit: Malgorzata Draganik)

PILOT AREA 6: SOUTH MORAVIA, THE CZECH REPUBLIC

BACKGROUND

The pilot area for this study comprises four peripheral micro-regions in the South Moravia Region, an attractive area of natural beauty which lies in the southeast corner of the Czech Republic. These are the micro regions of Velké Opatovice, Nedvědice, Vranov (which borders Austria), and Hornácko (which borders Slovakia).

There were two partners involved in the implementation of this case study:

- **Mendel University in Brno.** The University has solid expertise in agricultural development and the introduction of new related technologies. It has a good relationship with local authorities and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and has a strong track record of supporting and promoting rural tourism and agrotourism for the improvement of rural incomes in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.
- **Regional Agrarian Chamber of the South Moravian Region.** The Chamber has its own network of Regional Information Centres connected with the tourist information centres in the South Moravian Region. The Chamber provides input into the development of close links with public authorities and other organizations to ensure the sustainability of this project.

The target plant species chosen for this pilot area included:

- Rose hip *Rosa canina*,
- Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, and
- Black Elder *Sambucus nigra*.

These species were selected because they were representative of the region as well as being the main species that are collected in the Czech Republic generally. Furthermore, many of the ingredients are used in local products such as herbal teas, and are produced in large quantities by food and pharmaceutical companies which are in turn distributed into the food chain, via local markets and pharmacies.

Wild plant collection is allowed in the area and there is no special management system in place to oversee sustainable practices. In addition, plant collection is not officially defined as a profession. The activity generates an addition to a collector's main income; it is not a full time job. In the main those involved are pensioners, women on maternity leave, and school age children.



Rose hip fruits
(Credit:
'Traditional and
wild' Partnership)

As long as the wild plants are not on private or protected land, wild collection of plants is legal. Collectors are required to take care when foraging in forests and advised to avoid areas where special projects such as timber logging are taking place. Such areas are announced to the public in advance by local authorities.

OUTCOMES

TRAINING

Overall, seven training courses were organized with 575 people being trained in total. These events mainly took place in Brno, Strážnice, and Letovice.

The main topics covered included:

- Knowledge about the target species – training covered botany, sustainable collection methods, processing and storage.
- Food industry legislation with regards to the purchase and sale of herbal products – this included rules and standards from current legislation in the Czech Republic and Europe.
- Cosmetic industry legislation covering Silver Birch *Betula pendula* and St. John's Wort *Hypericum perforatum* – including current legislative requirements for placing cosmetic products on the market.
- Environment protection and law. Plant species Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* and Mullein *Verbascum* spp. – including current regulations in the area of landscape owning and protection of the environment.
- Sustainable principles of wild plant collection based on the training course by WWF Hungary/TRAFFIC.

In addition to these courses, training on wild plants and sustainable collection practices were also delivered in 11 other locations.

The partners involved in this project made a commendable effort to educate people via various training seminars along with the dissemination of information on sustainable practices which were developed within the framework of the 'Traditional and wild' project.

TRAINING COURSE HIGHLIGHTS

Successful and numerous training courses were possible in this pilot area due to the prior active work of the project partners and involvement of all interested stakeholders on the ground. The following actions helped to train a large amount of people in this pilot area, namely:

- Compilation of a database by the partner from the Mendel University prior to conducting training courses in the pilot area.
- Combination of this database with the database prepared by the Regional Agrarian Chamber.
- Sending out invitations about forthcoming training courses to all people from the combined database. Invitations were also uploaded to both the official website of the project (Czech language) and the website of the Regional Agrarian Chamber.
- Invitations were also sent to various local NGOs, associations, and groups in the region who were interested in supporting the project. These NGOs provided all the necessary support to prepare training courses in the different locations of the pilot area. This strong networking connection resulted in a high number of people receiving training.

Approximately 60% of attendees completed all seminars and obtained a certificate. Feedback received suggested that attendees were interested in the project although there were concerns about how best to proceed based on financial feasibility and social viability issues.

Another positive achievement brought about by this training programme was the number of people inspired by the project. Some individuals and at least one group indicated that they would like to start their own businesses.



A training course in Straznice (Credit: Eva Chromeckova)



A training course in Uhřetitz (Credit: Eva Chromeckova)

INVESTMENT

During the period of this project the main investment was the purchase of a small scale drying machine used in the preparation of high quality medicinal plants.

The dryer is located at University School Farm Žabčice, in the town of Lednice, and the equipment was rented by the owner (MENDELU) to the municipality of Lednice, who arranged for a trained professional to maintain and service the equipment properly.

The dryer has been in operation since June 2013, and a transnational promotional workshop was held in Lednice in September 2012 which involved participants from all the project team countries.

The dryer is used for demonstration and training purposes and will help promote the traditional collection and use of local wild plants in the region. It will also help disseminate knowledge and provide practical training on the correct use of this type of processing equipment. People will also be able to access the dryer freely to dry plants for personal consumption after the project end.

MODEL PRODUCT AND PRE-CERTIFICATION GUIDELINES

The model products resulting from this pilot area were four kinds of herbal soaps: Sage & Wild Thyme, St. John's Wort oil, Arnica, and Chamomile.

These products were chosen following a business plan, which was put into place by a representative of the Head (Anežka, Otrokovice) of the Asylum Charity House SAMARITAN, a social service for homeless people; this organization was also very active in the training seminars. Accordingly it was Head (Anežka, Otrokovice) of the Asylum Charity House SAMARITAN who developed the model products.

As a result, guidelines for the model products were developed. This guide covers the methodology, rules and standards required to produce cosmetic products to enable them to be marketed in the EU. Going forward this model can be adopted by other companies developing cosmetic products obtained from wild plants who wish to sell them in the EU. This guide will be disseminated via the project website and project partners.

Asylum House SAMARITAN, a social service for homeless people came up with their own idea and business plan on how to collect wild plants and process them into herbal cosmetic products (soaps, bath salts, and bath oils). They were very active and attended many project training seminars and ended up developing the model products for the project. The members of Asylum House collected the plants, dried them, and macerated them. This activity is part of a wide social working therapy which helps re-introduce disadvantaged people back into normal productive life.

The project partner provided the advisory and technical expertise (cosmetology legislation, technology, raw materials), and assisted with the plant species chosen and their quality. Furthermore, the partner promoted their products at farmers markets and exhibitions etc. The activity generated a lot of interest and the Charity has their own distribution channels such as e-shops, direct orders from clients, and health food shops. Furthermore, some socially conscientious companies purchase the soaps and use them as small souvenirs to reflect their important 'additional social value'.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

The project's main objectives were met in each of the project countries. These were as follows:

- Protection of the cultural heritage of collecting and processing useful wild plants and fostering the sustainable use of this knowledge and expertise among vulnerable groups; particularly the Roma, the elderly, and women, in rural parts of Central Europe.
- Implementation of a pilot model that is socially and culturally acceptable, economically sound and environmentally viable for wild plant collection, processing and use. The model will help to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups while safeguarding precious wild plants.

The transnational model was applied in the six pilot areas in the four countries concerned included the following actions:

- identification of markets for products,
- delivery of training courses,
- investments into demonstration installations,
- development of model products, and
- sustainable sourcing of wild plants.

The project contributed to ensuring the sustainable harvesting and use of plants collected from the wild in the pilot areas through implementation of FairWild Standard principles. Moreover, the project helped foster the sustainable use of traditional knowledge and expertise among vulnerable groups in rural parts of Central Europe via a wide range of transnational tools and strategies developed within the project framework.

The economic and social dimensions of sustainability were reached by developing and implementing a replicable model which helped to improve involvement of rural communities into wild plant activities and contributing to improvement in the livelihoods of marginalized communities in Central Europe. The project demonstrated that a transnational model can be used in regions with diverse environmental and economic conditions, which will increase competitiveness, by providing new employment opportunities and income generation. The project contributed to building the local capacity among marginalized target groups so that in the long term, they may also better contribute to the local and regional economy. Furthermore, the project developed a network of regions that collect and use wild plants for future co-operation.

The project demonstrated the importance of local conditions being analysed case by case, and the implementation of a transnational model, due to the fact that there is often a need to involve stakeholders from several constituencies, and this requires considerable time, networking and funding.

In demonstrating a wide range of promising outcomes from the pilot areas, the 'Traditional and wild' project has taken necessary and useful steps in fostering sustainable use of cultural and natural resources and heritage, as well as enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the Central European region.

GENERAL LESSONS LEARNT

- For solving complex issues like ensuring the survival of the traditional wild plant collection practices of Central European (CE) communities, the application of a transnational approach and engagement of all stakeholders could be a good solution. This could lead to the enhanced attractiveness and economic competitiveness of the CE region as a whole.
- The wild plant harvesting and trade sector has a strong economic potential in the CE region. However, any development strategies should be based on principles of sustainable harvesting and equitable trade to ensure survival of plants, and provide incentives for traditional collection practices.
- The project used the principles of the FairWild Standard, the internationally recognized best practice, as the baseline for sustainable wild collection. There are a growing number of companies in the CE region which implement the FairWild Standard and the certification and demand for FairWild certified products is increasing. This tool has the potential to increase the competitiveness of wild collected products from the region, increase value for collectors, and ensure that collection is sustainable.
- The transnational model, including the tools, training materials and strategies developed within the project can be adapted and replicated at a larger scale, across more countries and regions.
- In addition to the governments' intentions, subsidies integrated into operative EU programmes are needed, along with significant co-operation initiatives, and public awareness programmes at every level.
- A joint marketing strategy within the CE region could make wild plant trade more competitive both internally and externally.
- Familiarity of project partners with current local development programmes and wild plant strategies in the region is a prerequisite for successful implementation of the project and ongoing results.
- There is the need for an increase in the number of private companies on the market (including purchase centres) as well as competitive market conditions, to sustain wild plant harvesting commercial practices in the CE region.
- There is a lack of private sector companies operating in the CE region to purchase raw wild plant material. In order to improve this, it is necessary to provide ongoing support (e.g. governmental) to SMEs in the region.
- Investments into technologies and educational facilities (i.e. a folklore house, training rooms, herbal gardens, equipment for processing and quality control) were considered as the best practical solutions to approaching the preservation of cultural heritage of wild plant collection and use in project pilot areas.
- Project designed communication products and educational tools (i.e. publications, films, training materials, seminars, database, and an online toolbox) were recognized as the best approach in spreading and preserving knowledge about valuable wild plant resources to all relevant stakeholders. These products will remain available and will be actively disseminated to spread the approach in other CE countries and beyond.
- Government regulations regarding wild plant harvesting and trade vary significantly between project countries, and each requires a tailored approach to increase their effectiveness. The project collected good management practices, including FairWild Standard principles, which will be available as a resource for future actions.

LESSONS LEARNT FROM PROJECT COUNTRIES

THE CZECH REPUBLIC

- It was found that many local communities are aware of the traditional use of wild plants and their valuable medicinal properties although they do not harvest wild plant resources in a sustainable manner.
- Lack of reliable business links does not allow local communities to sell plants as a supplementary activity in the region.
- Training courses and seminars encouraged several local entrepreneurs to set up new herbal businesses, including the organization of collector groups, setting up purchase centres, and identifying potential trade links with large manufacturers.
- Producing the model products (herbal soaps) through the local herbal association encourages other local producers to strengthen their position on the market and to be actively engaged in wild plant production.
- From the initial stage of the project implementation, it was vital to create an extensive network, including institutions, associations, clubs, and NGOs, which would be interested in co-operating with and supporting the project.

HUNGARY

- One of findings in selected pilot areas was that only a certain proportion of the local inhabitants are interested in wild plant collection activities. However, they have very little knowledge on wild plants, and the majority do not have sufficient knowledge to recognize the difference between wild and cultivated plants.
- Organization of educational events and workshops proved to be less effective in the Hungarian pilot areas than in other participating countries; however this might vary from region to region. In different regions of the country, the partners received several requests to organize training. Incorporating the training with other similar topics seems to enhance the general interest.
- Strong motivation of representatives of local villages is a determining factor in encouraging local communities to be engaged in work with wild plants.
- Model equipment and sample products developed in the project, demonstrated a high interest in local communities being actively involved in new activities.
- It was found that the revival of wild plant collection for personal use will result in significant benefits to collectors' livelihoods.
- It is expected that the project outcomes and experiences will contribute to the strategy on the revival of the medicinal plants sector in Hungary, which is currently under discussion among the main stakeholders in Hungary;

POLAND

- Identification of stakeholders (including the herbal industry) in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship at the initial stage of the project implementation was a prerequisite for long-term successful development in the region.
- Local authorities greatly helped to better identify the challenges facing local collectors in wild plant activities, including harvesting, processing and regulatory aspects. Close work between the project team and representatives of the local authorities further contributed to higher possibilities of generating an additional source of income for rural communities.
- A diverse range of activities, including activities for children, were undertaken in the pilot area which stimulated the idea of reviving the traditional use of wild plants to a larger extent.
- Promotional activities provided for a better uptake of knowledge about wild plants, but, at the same time, they did not bring about tangible results in improving the financial situation of rural communities. It was sometimes felt that there was a need for a thorough monitoring of the main harvesting purposes (own family use OR additional income generation) after training courses were conducted in the framework of the project.
- A large number of promotional activities (i.e. publications, a film, training materials, and seminars) were recognized as the best approach in spreading and preserving knowledge about valuable wild plant resources to all relevant stakeholders.

SLOVENIA

- The training courses demonstrated attendees' interest in registering for wild plant collection/production as a supplementary activity. The interest existed but required more hands-on involvement through organizing educational events.
- The importance of networking and public relations was a particular aspect, resulting in a specific and positive outcome. Several local producers in the region have highlighted the possibilities for self-employment in the wild plant field.
- More representatives of the target groups could be reached if project partners, who work with stakeholders in the countryside, focused more on product marketing and promotion.
- Demonstration installations (herbal gardens) and model products both designed for training, educational and promotional purposes, contributed to strengthening the relationship with local municipalities, including their increased interest in further investments.
- The implementation of the project demonstrated the potential for a National Professional Qualification to be set up for growers and collectors of herbs as part of the supplemental activity on a farm.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below stem from the experiences of the project and are offered here to provide a basis for building on its success and to provide an awareness of the obstacles encountered. The recommendations are useful for the successful implementation of future similar projects in Central Europe and beyond.

POLICY

Effective government regulations and policies can create an enabling environment for the sustainable use and trade in wild plants in Central Europe. **Tools like FairWild Standard can be applied to improve existing wild harvesting management practices and provide a framework for better policies;**

PARTNERSHIP

Local community participation in wild plant collection activities and training courses is important for building sustainable collection practices. **Associations establishing projects for sustainable wild plant collection and trade should engage local stakeholders, for example; herbal businesses, local collectors, and local organizations with experience in the field, in partnership. This should include the identification of clear and realistic market openings for harvested products.**

CAPACITY BUILDING

Stakeholder analysis should be carried out prior to the execution of a project. Detailed identification of potential project stakeholders (including local communities, the business sector, and other relevant bodies) is a significant prerequisite for the long-term success of the project;

MARKET LINKS

Partnership for similar projects should definitely include partners with strong marketing and business experience. Such partners can be represented by private local companies or other companies.

TRAINING

Projects on sustainable wild plant collection and trade should factor in sufficient time and funds for capacity building and training of local collectors in the importance of sustainable collection, harvesting methods, protection of their traditional knowledge and marketing possibilities. **To secure sustainable wild plant management in project pilot areas, provision of the training should also be carried out by other relevant stakeholders after termination of a project.**

CO-ORDINATION

Project co-ordination and implementation of the pilot activities should be actively overseen on the ground; **local partners should take full responsibility for supervision of respective local actions with transparent reporting to lead partner.**

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, is the leading non-governmental organization working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

TRAFFIC is a strategic alliance between WWF and IUCN, leading the delivery of key components of their missions and programmes through a unique partnership that combines the considerable strengths of each of these two major global conservation organizations.

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