

RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT OF ICCAs IN CROATIA

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Case study for:
RECOGNISING AND SUPPORTING
TERRITORIES AND AREAS CONSERVED BY INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES
Global Overview and National Case Studies

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List of acronyms

CAP	EU Common Agricultural Policy
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
EFNCP	European Forum for Nature Protection and Pastoralism
EU	European Union
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
GEF	Global Environment Facility

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HNV	High Nature Value (Farming)
ICCAs	Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LC	Land Community
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PA	Protected Area
PC	Pasturing Community

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Summary

Croatia, a small country with no indigenous people left, shares similar issues concerning community conservation with neighbouring countries presenting similar political and social background – i.d. former socialist countries in the wider region of Balkans/South-Eastern Europe. The literature and expertise on community conservation are virtually non-existent and the few remaining cases resembling ICCAs are at risk of disappearing, due to economic and social pressures. Some ICCAs do still exist – in spite of unfavourable circumstances – but with no future unless some conditions drastically change.

Following the Second World War and the formation of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (including Croatia as one of the 6 federal states), nationalization process took place and all lands from the pre-war communal and common land communities were proclaimed ‘common’ in the sense of ‘the land of general public’. Forests management was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture and Land or to ‘People's Committees’, and other types of lands management to the People's Committees or to ‘Peasants Workers Cooperation’. The nationalization was conducted without any compensation fee, and thousands of acres became state-owned land. The best land was subjected to agricultural intensification, but in some (e.g. flooded) areas this was not possible so the communities continued to exercise their common rights *de facto*.

These areas cover most ICCAs in Croatia today. However, this new classification raises certain questions: what is a ‘community’ in such ICCAs? Is it a local politically elected board of the local municipality, a grassroots CSO set up for community management, or is it a whole village including totally passive, not interested and disconnected from ecosystems individuals?

As a former socialist country, Croatia recognized so-called ‘social ownership’, which was in theory and by definition *common* (owned by society in general), but in fact mostly controlled either by the State or state companies or by socio-political dominant structures. Although envisaged to foster participation, the result of the socialist system was passivity and lack of care and responsibility for the commons.

During certain periods of its history, Croatia was divided between civil and military provinces, and parts of it were under the ruling of the different states and empires (Ottoman, Austrian, Hungarian, French, Italian, etc.). This led to differences still visible in the legal remnants concerning the so-called ‘common property’.

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The most important threats to ICCA in Croatia today are: unclear legal governance regimes of former common grounds and overlapping of jurisdiction (water and forest companies, municipalities, nature protection bodies, direct users); disappearance of the last generation of pastoralists, population decrease and isolation in the rural areas; inefficient institutional support, sporadic funding, legal obstacles and ambiguities; and delicate balance between development pressures and nature protection efforts, particularly regarding land grabbing (golf courses, building sites and tourism).

In the past, sustainable agricultural practices were a way of life, people tried to live in harmony with nature and were aware of its importance for their survival. Being isolated, many rural communities nurtured their heritage and took pride in the tribal/communal identity. With the industrialization and the economic progress, agriculture turned into a profession, and not a competitive nor desirable one. ICCAs in Croatia – and in the region – survived where, for certain reasons (isolation, depopulation, bad land quality), this process did not take place. They somehow managed to stay under the radar, live around the current legislation, enabling them to preserve their uniqueness.

Several laws, programs, local strategies and action plans are currently discussed in Croatia; which could influence profoundly the nature protection and agricultural sectors, both important for ICCAs management. The new Nature Protection Act is currently going through the public hearing procedure, and the Agricultural Land Act will be amended by the end of the year 2012. Unfortunately, it seems (through unofficial announcements) the changes to be made will not favour any of the community conservation modalities.

Those changes are known only by the limited circle of people involved in the revision process; while the wide public and most CSOs having no mechanism to follow such changes or participate in the process, despite the Aarhus convention's provisions². CSOs' biggest contribution is not only about enabling the articulation of the problems through the participatory mechanisms, but the possibility for advocacy and lobbying for the otherwise marginal groups (rural CSOs, PCs, rural municipalities) mostly affected by this new legislation. With laws, strategies and incentives better tailored for the community and their specific problems, the rural population has a chance for the survival and the evolution of traditional ways of nature management.

An effort should be made to find the most suitable way to also include the hard-to-reach and passive parts of what was once a unified community. It is important to assess the capacities of the ICCAs, their motivation to participate in policy debates, their will to be included in networks on a national and international level, their current organizational and administrative skills; and to offer them assistance, know-how exchange and capacity building with other similar ICCAs in the region.

² The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, usually known as the Aarhus Convention, was signed on June 25, 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus. It entered into force on 30 October 2001. As of 23 November 2011, there were 45 Parties to the Convention, (primarily European and Central Asian). The Aarhus Convention grants the public rights regarding access to information, public participation and access to justice, in governmental decision-making processes on matters concerning the local, national and transboundary environment. It focuses on interactions between the public and public authorities.

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Communities living in protected areas whose activities are crucial for the preservation of habitats, species and ecosystems should be included in protected areas management through innovative means of co-management (Cooperation Councils, Cooperatives, consultative meetings, etc.). The most important is to find the balance between economic development – needed for retaining the population in such areas – and nature protection efforts.

1. Country description and context

1.1. Key features of Croatia

The Republic of Croatia is a south-east European country spreading from the Adriatic Sea across the Dinaric Arc to the Pannonian plains. Croatia can be subdivided in various ecoregions because of its climate and geomorphology, making it an extremely rich country in terms of biodiversity. There are four types of biogeographical regions in Croatia: Mediterranean, along the coast and in its immediate hinterland; Alpine, in most of Lika and Gorski Kotar; Pannonian, along Drava and Danube; and Continental, in the remaining areas. One of the most significant are karst habitats, which include submerged karst – such as Zrmanja and Krka canyons and tufa barriers – as well as underground habitats. The karst geology harbours approximately 7,000 caves and pits, some of which are habitat of the only known aquatic cave vertebrate – the olm (*Proteus anguinus*). Forests are also significantly present in the country, as they cover 2,490,000 hectares (6,200,000 acres) representing 44% of Croatian land surface. The other habitat types include wetlands, grasslands, bogs, fens, scrub habitats, coastal and marine habitats (Wikipedia 2011).

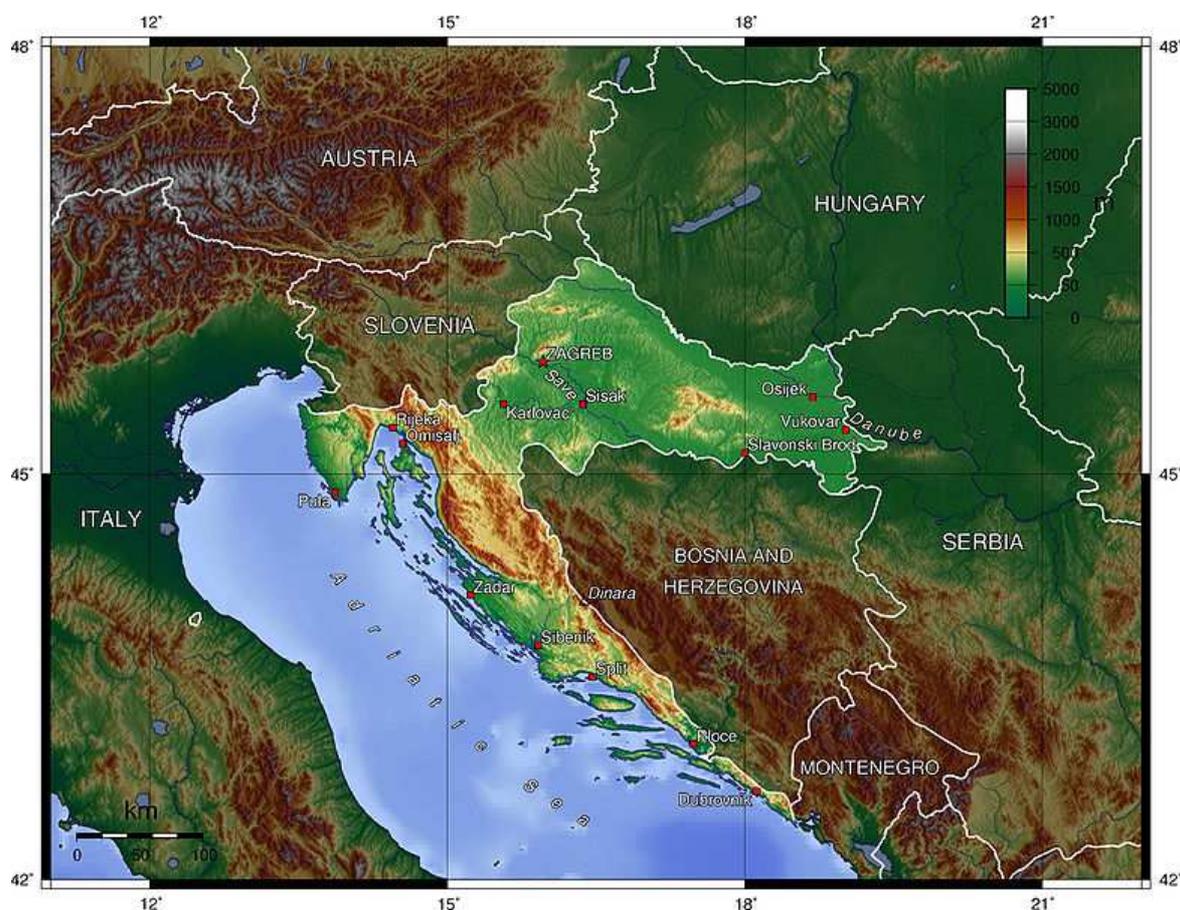


Figure 1: Topographic map: Republic of Croatia and neighbouring countries, 2011
(Source: Wikipedia)

In the early 7th century, the Croats arrived in the area of present-day Croatia. They organised the State into two dukedoms by the 9th century. Tomislav became the first king by 925 AD, elevating Croatia to the status of a kingdom. Croatia entered a personal union with Hungary in 1102. In 1527, faced with Ottoman conquest the Croatian Parliament elected Ferdinand I

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of the House of Habsburg to the Croatian throne and big part of it was under the Austria-Hungary. In 1918, after World War I, Croatia was included in the short-lived State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs that declared independence from Austria-Hungary and co-founded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. A Croatian state briefly existed during World War II as a fascist puppet state. After the WW2, Croatia became a founding member and a federal constituent of the Second Yugoslavia, a socialist state. In June 1991, Croatia declared independence, which came into effect on 8 October of the same year but fought another four years in an Independence war. In certain periods of history Croatia was divided between civil and military provinces and parts of it were under the ruling of different states and empires (Ottoman, Austrian, Hungarian, French, Italian etc). This explains why differences are still visible in the legal remnants concerning the so-called ‘common property’.

The permanent population of Croatia at the 2011 census had reached 4.29 million. Croatia is inhabited mostly by Croats (89.6%), while minorities include Serbs (4.5%), and 21 other ethnicities (less than 1% each). The main religions of Croatia are Roman Catholicism (87.8%), Orthodox Christianity (4.4%) and Islam (1.3%). Average urbanisation rate in Croatia stands at 56%, with augmentation of urban population and reduction of rural population. 1953 census recorded 57% of population that was active in agriculture, while a census performed in 1991 noted only 9.1% of population active in that field (Census 2011).

Croatia is a member of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, NATO, the World Trade Organization, CEFTA and a founding member of the Union for the Mediterranean. Croatia is an acceding State of the European Union, with full membership expected in July 2013. Currently, the Republic of Croatia is administratively subdivided into 21 counties, 123 towns and 424 municipalities. 264 Counties are defined as regional self-government units whereas municipalities and towns constitute units of local self-government.

Privatization and the drive toward a market economy had barely begun under the new Croatian Government when war broke out in 1991. As a result of the war, the economic infrastructure suffered massive damage, particularly the revenue-rich tourism industry. The Croatian State still controls a significant part of the economy. A backlogged judiciary system, combined with inefficient public administration – especially on issues of land ownership and corruption – are particular concerns.

Box 1: Definitions

Indigenous people: There are no indigenous people in Croatia. Under the Constitution the once nomadic – now sedentary – Roma people are one of the 22 equally-treated national minorities. However, due to social, cultural and economical reasons, many Roma people are socially marginalized, living in isolated suburban communities, and lost touch with traditional practices connected to nature and animals.

Transhumance practices: Agricultural practices have been shaping the vegetation and landscape of south-sast Europe for 10,000 years. Fires, grazing, deforestation and cultivation have all contributed to the diversity of vegetation types and associated species. Transhumance did survive and is still practised in Montenegro as well as in Albania, but there are no more such practices in Croatia.

1.2. Brief history of conservation, state- and community-based

Like in number of other States, the first formal initiatives for the nature protection in Croatia appeared in the late 19th century, thanks to ecologically conscious citizens of different occupations: biologists, geographers, foresters, physicians, lawyers and others. First activities were purely educational, but later the attempt for the legal protection of certain natural areas occurred. The first societies with nature conservation agenda were founded in Zagreb around this time: *Croatian Natural History Society* (1885) and *Society for Regulation and Embellishment of Plitvice Lakes and Surroundings* (1893) (Opačić, 2001). The first legal document related to nature protection was adopted in 1893 – The Law on Protection of Birds. This was followed by the Law on Hunting (1893) and Law on Protection of Caves (1900). As it can be seen, the first legal acts were designed to protect certain components of nature or natural rarities, such as lakes areas.

In 1914, the *Society for Regulation and Embellishment of Plitvice Lakes and Surroundings* started the initiative for the protection of the Plitvice Lakes as a National Park. The initiative resulted with the designation of three National Parks by the Financial Law: Plitvice Lakes (currently National Park), Biješe Stijene (currently part of Strict Reserve) and Štirovača (currently part of the Northern Velebit National Park) in 1928/29. Of course, those national parks were not the IUCN category II protected areas, the aims were completely different and designation had a time limit. Protection was not prolonged after the 1-year time limitation expired (Opačić 2001).

The year 1946 is considered to be the beginning of the modern era of nature protection in Croatia. That year the *Institute for Protection of Natural Rarities* was founded. Later the Institute was renamed into *Directorate for Protection of Natural Rarities* and it was functional until 1960, when *Republic Institute for Nature Protection* was founded as an autonomous institution. In 1949 the first modern National Parks were designated – Plitvice Lakes National Park and Paklenica National Park (Opačić 2001).

Another crossroad for nature protection in Croatia was the adoption of the first integrative Law on Nature Protection in 1960. In the last 40 years the Law on Nature Protection was changed several times: in 1965, 1976, 1994 and 2003. The last Nature Protection Law – currently in force – was adopted in 2005 and amended in 2008 and 2011.

Regarding nature protection, the current Croatian Constitution stipulates in Article 3: “*The protection of nature and the human environment belong among others to the highest values of the constitutional rights of the Republic of Croatia and are a foundation for interpreting the constitution*”. Furthermore, it stipulates in Article 52: “*The sea, the coast and islands, waters, airspace, mining resources and other natural treasures, but also land property, woods, plants and animals, other parts of nature, immovable property and items of particular cultural, historic, economic and ecologic significance, which are of interest for the Republic of Croatia according to law, have its particular protection*”.

Since Croatia became a candidate for the European Union (officially in 2004), many efforts have been made towards harmonization with the EU Acquis³. One of the main one to meet

³ The ‘Community acquis’ or *acquis communautaire* sometimes called the ‘EU acquis’, is the accumulated legislation, legal acts, and court decisions which constitute the body of European Union law.

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EU standards was the establishment of the Croatian National Ecological Network in 2007, prescribed by the Nature Protection Act. This network includes 1,550 sites important at the national and European level to conserve species and habitats. This includes around 1000 potential Natura 2000 sites⁴ covering over 250 species and 70 habitat types that occur in Croatia and are considered to be of EU importance. According to the Register, within the Republic of Croatia 461 nature sites are protected in different categories, of which 12 are under preventive protection. The protected areas cover 8.51% of the total surface out of which 11.32% belong to the continental territory and 3.38% to the Croatian maritime area. The largest part of the protected surface are the Nature Parks (3.71% of the total state territory).

The Nature Protection Act provides for nine categories of protected areas. The national categories largely correspond to the internationally recognised IUCN protected area categories.

Table 1: Protected Areas categories in Croatia

<i>Protection category</i>	<i>Intent</i>	<i>Management level</i>	<i>Proclaiming body</i>
STRICT RESERVE	Conserve intact nature, monitor the state of nature and education	County	Government of the Republic of Croatia
NATIONAL PARK	Conserve intact natural values, scientific, cultural, education and recreation intent	National	Croatian Parliament
SPECIAL RESERVE	Conservation due to its uniqueness, rarity or representativeness, and of particular scientific significance	County	Government of the Republic of Croatia
NATURE PARK	Protection of biological and landscape diversity, education, cultural, historical, tourism, recreation intent	National	Croatian Parliament
REGIONAL PARK	Protection of landscape diversity, sustainable development and tourism	County	County Assembly of City Assembly (City of Zagreb)
NATURE MONUMENT	Ecological, scientific, aesthetic or educational intent	County	County Assembly of City Assembly (City of Zagreb)
SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPE	Conservation of landscape values and biological diversity, or cultural and historical values or landscape of preserve unique characteristics, and for rest and recreation	County	County Assembly of City Assembly (City of Zagreb)

⁴ In May 1992, European Union governments adopted legislation designed to protect the most seriously threatened habitats and species across Europe. This legislation is called the Habitats Directive and complements the Birds Directive adopted in 1979. At the heart of both these Directives is the creation of a network of sites called Natura 2000. The Birds Directive requires the establishment of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds. The Habitats Directive similarly requires Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to be designated for other species, and for habitats. Together, SPAs and SACs make up the Natura 2000 series. All 26 EU Member States contribute to the network of sites in a Europe-wide partnership.

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PARK FOREST	Conservation of natural or planted forests of greater landscape value, rest and recreation	County	County Assembly of City Assembly (City of Zagreb)
PARK ARCHITECTURE MONUMENT	Conservation of artificially developed areas or trees having aesthetic, stylistic, artistic, cultural, historic, ecological or scientific values	County	County Assembly of City Assembly (City of Zagreb)

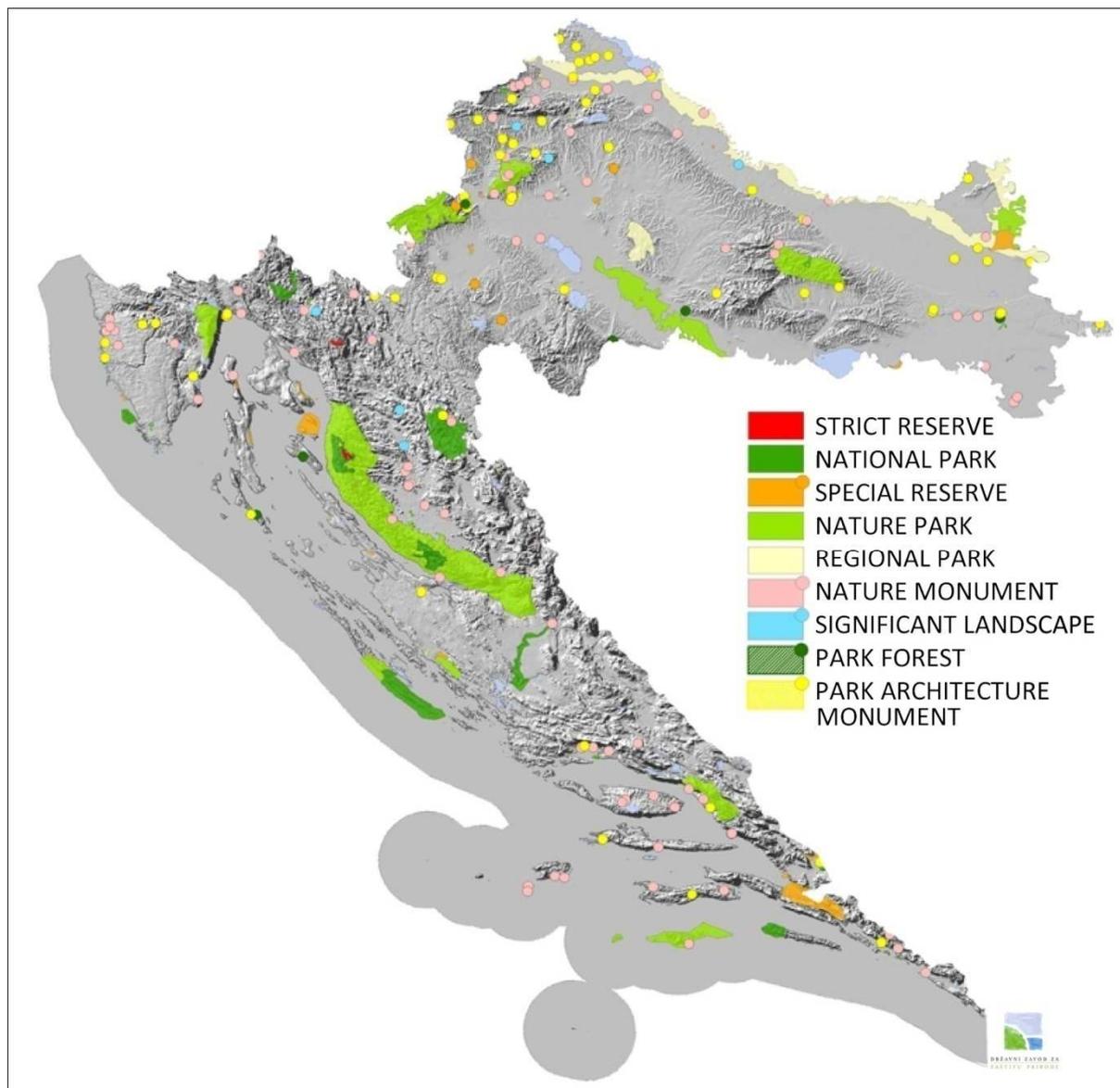


Figure 2: Protected Areas in Croatia, 2011

(Source: http://www.dzpz.hr/dokumenti_upload/20100421/dzpz201004211335060.pdf)

According to the Fourth National Report Of The Republic Of Croatia To The Convention On Biological Diversity, from 2009 loss and degradation of habitats are one of the major reasons of endangerment of biological diversity. Habitats in Croatia are affected primarily by anthropogenic influence. Among these anthropogenic activities the following should be mentioned: construction of hydroelectric power plants and creation of accumulation lakes,

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construction of drainage channels for irrigation of agricultural land, draining of marshes and other wetland habitats, and various forms of pollution. In particular, the construction of tourism infrastructure severely impacts rare coastal habitat types. It should be noted that loss of habitats is not necessarily caused by anthropogenic influences; natural vegetative succession also leads to changes in the environment and the disappearance of many species.

Today's grasslands in Croatia originated almost exclusively under the influence of people, who have in this way contributed to an increase in biodiversity. Without grazing, mowing and similar activities, pastures and meadows gradually give way to shrubs and finally forests. The IUCN defines ICCAs as “*natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities through customary laws or other effective means.*” By this definition there are still some *de facto* ICCAs in Croatia but with no existing legal framework to support them. Current ICCAs in Croatia come from the pre-WW2 communal and common land that for some reason managed to escape the intense state control and continued to exercise their common rights *de facto*.

Box 2: Land Communities – ICCAs from the past?

There is still a debate going to determine whether the institution of ‘Land Communities’ should be considered as public or private ownership in its core.

After the abolishment of the bondservant relations of the feudal times (in Croatia from the Middle Ages to the end 18th century), parts of the nobility's territories that were used as common grounds were segregated and organized as property or ‘Land Communities’ – LCs. Depending on their historical background, not all LCs were organized or named in the same way⁵. Most of them functioned as a voluntary community with individuals or families who could exercise certain rights on the common land (the right to graze on pastures, take wood for heating and construction, acorn grazing in woods, etc.). LCs had assemblies and management boards, paid certain fees and participated in common works, etc. All individuals involved had ‘participation rights’ and commitments that were mostly transferred by inheritance. In the later stage, participation rights could be bought by the outsiders but at high and discouraging fares.

Following the WW2 and the formation of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (including Croatia as one of the 6 federal states), a nationalization process took place and all land from former LCs was proclaimed ‘common’ in the sense of ‘land of general public’. Forests management was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture and Land or to ‘People's Committees’ (political and territorial organizational units from 1946 to 1951); and other types of land management to the People's Committees or ‘Peasants Workers Cooperations’ (cooperatives in which many peasants were forced into by economical, social and political pressures). The nationalisation was conducted without any compensation fee, and thousands of acres became state-owned land. The most fertile land was subjected to agricultural intensification; but in certain cases – such as in flooded areas – that was not possible, so the community continued to exercise their common rights *de facto*⁶.

As other former socialist countries, Croatia had ‘social ownership’ institutions, which were

⁵ local community/municipality, urban community, land community, compossessorat, etc. – for the sake of this study we will use the term 'land community'.

⁶ Act on proclamation of land and similar communities and property communities' common property, 1953

by definition *common* (owned by society in general), but in fact mostly controlled by the State, state companies or socio-political dominant structures. This concept was formally introduced by the 1963 Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia⁷.

Turning into a capitalist society, Croatia omitted the social ownership in its 1990 Constitution; and passed a property restitution law in 1990, subsequently amended in 1991 and 1993 and through the 1996 'Law on Restitution/Compensation of Property Taken During the Time of the Yugoslav Communist Government'. However, property restitution was not applied to Land Communities in most cases, since – to simplify it – the State claimed they lacked unbroken continuity, just transferring in many cases the social ownership of the land to state ownership.

In the 1990s, there were several initiatives for the restoration of the Land Communities, resulting in the foundation of the Association of Land Communities of Croatia and other local organizations. The people considering themselves as the holders of 'participation rights' in the common lands have been fighting – through the Association and some other channels – for the restitution of the Land Communities from 1991 to this day. There are some associations currently organized on the model of former Land Communities, but they are not linked to territory and not oriented towards preservation of ecosystems, and hence cannot be seen as ICCAs.

2. Features of ICCAs

2.1. Range, diversity, and extent of ICCAs

In the past, sustainable agricultural practices were a way of life, because people depending on nature tried to live in a harmony with it, aware of its importance for their survival. Being isolated, many rural communities nurtured their heritage and took pride in the tribal/communal identity. With the industrialization and the economic progress, agriculture turned into a profession, and not a concurrent or desirable one. ICCAs in Croatia, and in the region, are still alive in places where for certain reasons (isolation, depopulation, bad land quality) this process did not take place. They somehow managed to stay under the radar, live around the current legislation, enabling them to keep their uniqueness. This study is giving two possible types, one independent protected area and one within the greater protected area. There is also a possibility of ICCAs still existing outside the formal protected system but to identify those a more extensive field research should be conducted.

(i) Gajna: a PA protected at the local level, de facto governed by members of a local community since 19th century, co-managed by a local grass root CSO from 1989, co-managed by the County Institution for Management of Protected Natural Values from 2007.

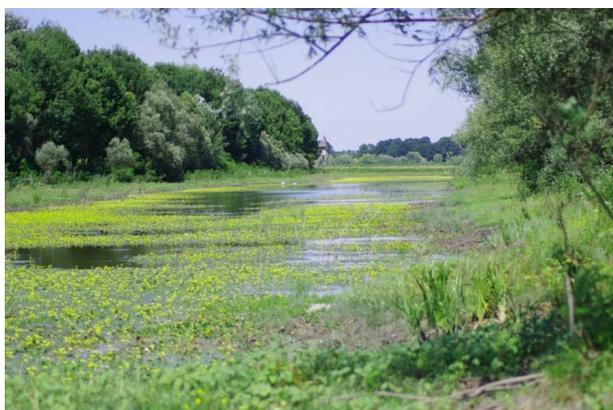
Gajna is an area protected as Significant Landscape under the Croatian Nature Protection Law from 1989, but also a grazing area protected at the local (county) level and directly dependant on the activities and management by the local community. The community has had

⁷ The Constitution of 1963 of the Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) states in its Introduction that "nobody has the ownership right over social production means – nobody meaning neither social-political communities, associated labour organisations nor single workers - and nobody can under any legal ownership title claim the product of the "social work", nor operate, nor dispose of social production forces, nor arbitrarily determine the conditions of distribution."

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different forms of managing grazing through different social systems but it has always been some sort of communal system.

Gajna (380 hectares) is a flooded grassland enriched by marsh flora and fauna and an important fish spawning and birds feeding and nesting place. In the category of strictly protected and protected species there are 12 mammal species, 37 bird species, 11 amphibian and reptile species, 24 fish species and 39 plant species, out of many more valuable ones but not yet in protected categories. As a landscape made by anthropogenic influence it is directly dependant on activities by the local community for its preservation. The area is important for biodiversity due to the large wet grasslands, old oxbows and wetland vegetation as well as numerous alluvial depressions in which in spring and autumn floods water is retained. Dykes against the floods, responsible for creating such areas, were built in three periods, in years 1722, 1880 and finally in 1953. In this fertile part of the country, all the land of poor quality has been left for grazing cattle at the beginning of century.



Gajna summer 2011: vegetation present in depressions in spite of a draught
© BED



Floods are always unpredictable, spring flood in 2011
© BED

Gajna was partly formed from ‘authority rights’: every household had to allocate part of their private land in order to have the right to freely graze the cattle on the communal grassland. By decision of the Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia in 1953, all such areas have been turned into state or state companies owned land. Gajna was also affected by this decision, given to the State Forestry Department. Since it is alluvial, the State forestry never

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conducted the usual management measures and the local population remained users of the area and continued to graze their cattle.



Gajna from air: pasturing, the only way of keeping invasive species under control
© BED

Unfortunately, abandonment of extensive grazing practice is also present in Gajna, leading to a tendency of overgrowth by the invasive species, which is a common problem in the Sava and Danube River flooded areas. A local ecological CSO (Ecological Society of Brod – BED) has been actively taking care of the Gajna area over the last two decades by engaging and stimulating the local community to stick to the traditional grazing, ensuring a favourable water regime, destroying the invasive species and preserving the biodiversity throughout series of projects.

After 1990 and the different social systems took place, the land was formally listed as property of the State of Croatia. Unfortunately, due to the ambiguities in the current law and the overlapping of the jurisdiction, the Croatian Waters, local Municipality of Oprisavci, Croatian Forest Company and the County's Public Institution for Protected Nature Values all have certain management rights over the area and the local population is accordingly unable to claim subsidies for their traditional grazing activities.

(ii) Nature Park Lonjsko Polje: community conserved areas within a state-protected PA

The Lonjsko Polje Nature Park is situated in the alluvial plain of the Sava River in the central Sava River basin region, between the cities of Sisak and Stara Gradiška and represents a unique landscape and ecological systems of flooded river plain of the Danubian basin. With a total surface of 50,650 ha, the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park is one of the largest wetland areas in the entire Danubian basin. The most significant ecological element in the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park is flooding, which can appear any time of the year, because of the extraordinary constellation of the Sava River and its tributaries. Water waves on Sava River are often very high and Lonjsko Polje Nature Park has a very important role as a flood control system.

In the area of the Park, approximately 12,000 ha are used by all inhabitants to graze their livestock. Most of these pastures are formally under state ownership but *de facto* managed by the local community through the customary rules of common grazing. They are the last examples of a cultural landscape that once extended throughout Central Europe all the way up to the end of the 19th century. With the highest concentration of indigenous breeds (horses,

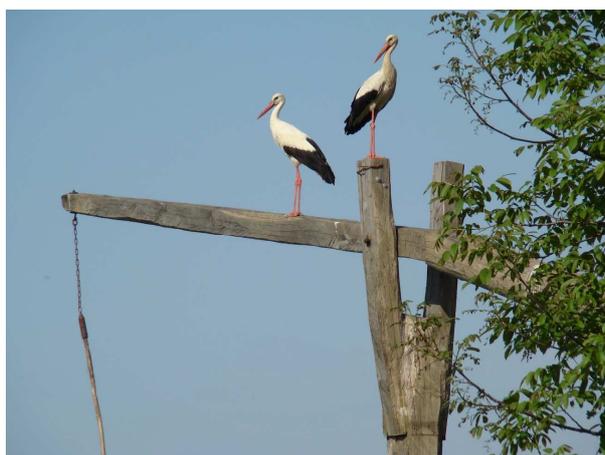
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pigs, cattle) in Croatia, they represent a unique way of managing pasturelands and are, at the same time, one of the most important habitats for a large number of rare and endangered plant and animal species.



Podolian cattle, an indigenous and critically endangered breed

© BED



Storks on a traditional well (djeram)

© BED



Posavina horse, a Croatian indigenous breed

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Due to its natural values and cultural heritage, this area has been protected as a Nature Park since 1990 – under the Law on the Nature Protection – and has been included since 1993 in the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar site). The cultural values of the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park should be viewed as the result of the centuries long harmonious cohabitation of the human population with nature, in which a dominant role is played by the river with its natural flooding cycles. The characteristics of the cultural landscape and cultural identity are linked to traditional rural settlements. Traditional values of the area have been preserved in the organization of space, specific ambiances and traditional wooden architecture but also in the broader ethnological and anthropological sense, in the lifestyles, cultivation of land, skills and intangible cultural heritage.

The traditional land use is illustrated by the distribution and type of arable land and meadows-pastures. The cultivated plots, in their functions and forms, represent a link between the protected nature and the rural settlement areas. The specific characteristics of the area are connected to traditional crafts and use of waterways for navigation, fishing, and other needs of rural households. The state of nature preservation – endangered and rare plant and animal species – as well as the cultural identity of this area – the traditional way of life and work of its population – constitute an heterogeneous area of protected natural and cultural heritage.

There are no organized ICCAs in Lonjsko Polje in terms of formal management bodies but every village – or a few villages sharing the same common grazing grounds – uses the customary rules of the past.

The management of the wider area was regulated by an ordinance of the Government of the Republic of Croatia concerning the foundation of the Public Institution Lonjsko Polje Nature Park in 1996. In 2004, the management board of the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park initiated the formation of a Stakeholder committee, the *Lonjsko Polje Nature Park Council*, aiming to involve all land users and local people living and working in the park in its management. The Lonjsko Polje stakeholder committee coordinates its activities with the stakeholder committee established at the regional level of the Central Posavina region. It is an attempt to reconcile traditional sustainable practices and nature protection demands on the one hand with the increasing pressures from various stakeholders (forestry, intensive agriculture, tourism, hunting and fishing, etc.) on the other hand. The Stakeholder committee is formally functioning but further field analysis is needed to identify the real influence and strength the community is having in decision-making on controversial issues.

2.2. Key ecological, cultural, socio-economic and political values of ICCAs

From a broader ethnological and anthropological perspective, traditional values are preserved through lifestyles, agriculture, skills and intangible cultural heritage. Specific features of the land have been shaped by traditional craft skills and uses of the watercourses for communication, navigation, fishing, milling and the needs of the village households. Preservation of cultural identity in Lonjsko Polje is illustrated by the arrangement, distribution and spatial organisation of the settlements, the traditional wooden building practice, the traditional ways of cultivating the land, breeding the autochthonous breeds, making the traditional objects and handicrafts, keeping the traditional skills and crafts or trades, and preserving the songs, dances, customs and legends.

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Settlements were located on the natural elevations called *grede* (ridges) above the floodplain of the Sava River, and its oxbows and tributaries. All the settlements follow the line of the watercourse, they are elongated, and as a whole have no developed network of streets. They fit well into the lowland landscape and only the occasional church tower reveals their position.

Natural heritage is an important part of culture that encompasses rural and natural environment with associated flora and fauna. Protecting biodiversity also implies the recording and preservation of native varieties of cultivated plants and breeds of domesticated animals. They represent an important national and cultural heritage, as their breeding shows amount of effort and knowledge of many generations, combined with the living conditions and climate.

Unfortunately, most community conserved areas in Croatia are already relicts of the past. The ones who survived in spite of the very unfavourable political regimes and the economic pressures carry the memory of the broken linkage between natural and cultural heritage. Such areas not only preserve the landscape, but also represent some sort of 'theme parks' of our identity. If we manage to preserve it, we will be able to show our children the shapes, smells and tastes their ancestors knew. By preserving it, we keep heritage and memories of times when our society lived in greater harmony with nature.

Common pastures are also examples of how to preserve domestic and wild species through stimulation of grazing without endangering the existence of local community. Unfortunately, traditional extensive grazing on the flooded common pastures near Sava River is at a critical point of its survival (the number of cattle rapidly falling down in the last decade) and, without proper recognition and support for the local population, will be a matter of the past.

2.3. Main threats to ICCAs

The most important threats to the ICCAs in Croatia are:

(i) Unclear legal regimes in governance of former common grounds and overlapping of jurisdiction (water and forest companies, municipalities, nature protection bodies, local population)

Due to the ambiguities in several current laws and the overlapping of the jurisdiction over the land – in the formal ownership of the State but in fact common grounds -, the Croatian Water Company, local municipalities, Croatian Forest Company and the County Public Institutions for Protected Nature Values all have certain management rights over the common grazing grounds. As a consequence, the local population is unable to receive subsidies for their traditional grazing activities or regulate their management rights. Although some formal steps have been made in the right direction, it is still unclear how this major problem could be solved in favour of the local communities.

(ii) Disappearance of the last generation of pastoralists, population decrease and isolation in the rural areas

Economic and social conditions in areas where ICCAs still exist are very unfavourable, most of them being in 'Areas of Special State Concern'. The Republic of Croatia has defined Areas of Special State Concern as those that are underdeveloped as a result of the 1990s Homeland

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War or by reference to economic, demographic and certain other additional criteria. These areas have in most cases experienced depopulation over the last two decades. The traditional knowledge on extensive grazing regimes and conditions and on – today critically endangered – autochthonous domestic breeds will disappear, since there is no transfer of knowledge to the younger generations.

(iii) Inefficient institutional support, sporadic funding, legal obstacles and ambiguities

The issues ICCAs are facing today are not visible in the discourse of Croatia's political elite nor mentioned in the documents of the national, regional and local governments (strategies, action plans). Accordingly, there are no bodies or forums in which these issues could be presented as a whole, rather, particular problems have to be fought in different ministries, agencies and offices. There are no provisions in the Croatian Nature Protection laws and regulations that would provide legal grounds for the classical ICCA, or would soften the strict regulations tailored by the intensive and profit-based use of the land and animals disregarding the traditional practices (veterinarian, sanitary, etc.). People living in such areas are in need of legal, organizational and financial aid; and sporadic CSOs engagement can only provide temporary relief in some of the burning issues.

(iv) Economic pressures – intensive agriculture, unsustainable tourism, land purchase

Croatia is also affected by the new type of economy favouring the interests of capital and big corporations. Some of the ICCAs have already experienced land grabbing attempts (for golf courses, building sites and tourism). Ironically, the land is overused in the highly populated areas, while there is a big problem of land abandonment in less populated and remote areas, endangering the existent landscape. A balance should be sought between economic development – needed for retaining the population in such areas – and nature protection efforts.

3. Governance and management of ICCAs

The Gajna Protected Landscape offers a good example on how historic and social changes influenced former common grounds and their management.

A Land Community was present in this area but abolished by the end of WW2 and replaced by a 'Socialist Cooperative'. Cooperatives were mandatory, the members had very little saying in distribution of profits or in management issues, and they were orchestrated with political influence. These were replaced in 1956 by 'General Agricultural Cooperatives', which were more flexible. Some villages, in spite of strong protests, have lost their grazing grounds in the 1950s and 1960s due to forced reforestation by the State. Luckily, Gajna – being a flooded area – was left untouched.

There were always customary rules of usage of Gajna as the common pasture: every household had the obligation to provide temporary shepherds, depending on the percentage the household had in the joint herd. Families who did not have suitable members would pay for the keeping (that practice became more common also in wealthier families).

Village Oprisavci – situated in the vicinity of the Gajna pasture – had three major herds (*Čorde*), divided geographically, depending on a possible cattle path from the village to the pasture.

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Pressures for occupation by outsiders did not exist, since almost every village had its common grounds. Even the poorer families had at least one cow and there was no need for strict rule of pasture usage; everybody could participate and the agreements were informal and led by prominent people in the village. The majority of pasture was used for cows but there were also horses and pigs present in smaller numbers.

Due to the changes in agriculture and social and economic conditions, these practices started to diminish by the 1980s and today many of the former common grounds are abandoned or leased by the municipality to big agricultural companies or private producers. In the 1990s, the new Croatian State gave the municipalities the right to decide on the lease of the formerly common – and now State-owned – land.

Gajna is one of the rare commons with unbroken grazing practice and with preserved biodiversity. With the decrease of cattle (from 500 to 150 in a decade, and still declining), there was a serious threat of losing the habitat to an invasive specie called *Amorpha fruticosa*, or false indigo. Therefore, in the late 1980s, descendants of the village people from the nearby town (Slavonski Brod) organized jointly with nature conservationists in a civil initiative, and lobbied for the formal protection of Gajna as a ‘Significant Landscape’; which happened in 1990.

The CSO Brodsko Ekološko Društvo (BED) – with 80 % of membership coming from the two surrounding villages – has been taking active care of Gajna ever since 1989, through voluntary work engaging local population in projects of traditional construction, biodiversity preservation, water level regulation, etc. In 2006, the Public Institute for Managing Protected Natural Resources of Brod-Posavina County began its operations and – with the cooperation of BED and consultations with the local population (although informal) – worked on the management plan, which was certified by the relevant Ministry in 2009. Since 2007, BED has been co-funding the Gajna guardian with the Public Institution for Managing Protected Natural Resources of Brod-Posavina; working professionally and raising funds; and organizing infrastructure works (corals, roads, instructive paths, etc.). BED has passed agreements with the Water Management company, the Public Institution for Managing Protected Natural Resources of Brod-Posavina and the municipality; but none of these gives the full management rights to BED, according to the existing laws and regulations.

In 2007, a local cooperative was founded in an attempt to organize the little remaining cattle holders still present on Gajna, serving as predecessor to the Pasturing Communities (see 4.1.).

There is also an initiative for the foundation of a Cooperation Council that would encompass all individuals, groups and organizations concerned by Gajna. Apart from previously-mentioned BED, cattle owners and Public Institution for Managing Protected Natural Resources of Brod-Posavina, there would be other stakeholders such as fishermen and hunter associations, municipality and police representatives (Gajna is not only a protected area, but also a state border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Gajna is today characterized by the grazing of endangered old indigenous breeds (Slavonia-Srijem Podolian Cattle, Croatian Posavina Horse, Turopolje and Black Slavonian Pig) and the commitment of some of the institutional and non institutional players to keep these activities and provide the local population with options of sustainable economic activities.

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Traditional animal husbandry was the main economic activity of the population of this region. In winter the horses and cows were – and still are – taken into byres and stables, but for the rest of the year they were kept in open pasture. The livestock maintained the very rich biodiversity of the grassland vegetation and prevented the pastures being overgrown by highly invasive species like *Amorpha fruticosa* (false indigo).



Winter stable

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In order to preserve the area, important conservation measures have to be followed: ensure constant livestock grazing in pasture areas; keep 10-15% of the total area under water during non-flooding periods; keep 10% of the total area covered by indigenous forest vegetation (oak, willow, poplar and narrow-leaf ash); prohibit waste disposal in the area; prohibit removal of surface soils with grasses; favour traditional endangered breeds; etc. There was also reconstruction of a couple of old traditional wooden structures in the pasture.

Projects initiated by BED supported the ecological production of healthy food, sustainable development of local economy and – by foundation of the institute of Gajna Guardian (employed locally) – the institutional development of the protected area. Producing and maintaining basic infrastructure enabled conditions for controlled educational tourism, which helps in development of ecological awareness and gives invaluable experiences for new generations.

4. Recognition and support to ICCAs

4.1. Government recognition and support to ICCAs

Protection and conservation of all natural assets of the Republic of Croatia are guaranteed by the Constitution. The legislative framework of nature protection comprises the Nature Protection Act and implementing regulations adopted pursuant to the Act. With the overall aim of conserving biodiversity, general and special provisions and measures of the Nature Protection Act of 2005 – amended in 2008 – encourage integration of conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity into other sectors. The alignment of the legislation in the area of nature protection will be completed with the adoption of the Regulation on Internationally Important Ecological Areas (Natura 2000) by the date of accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union (expected in 2013).

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There are no provisions in the Croatian Nature Protection laws and regulations that would provide legal grounds for the classical ICCA. The closest substitutes, until year 2011, were two provisions in the Nature Protection Act, according to which Public Institutions for Nature Protection Management are able to give the usage rights to other subjects.

The first provision is contracts between protected areas and companies or individuals (and communities represented as legal institutions), enabling those companies or individuals to operate within a protected area and to use certain of its land or facilities, for a specified period, in exchange for making payments to the protected area, and subject to compliance with protected area regulations. Revenues from concession approvals (i.e. non-extractive commercial activities) are the income of the public institution and are designated for nature protection activities. Public institutions may grant concession approvals for a period of three years to legal or natural persons registered for “*craft trade for the economic use of natural resources or exercising other activities in a protected area*”. Revenues from concessions (i.e. for extractive uses such as mining and forestry) go to the State Budget or County Budget. Concessions can be granted for a period of four to thirty years and provide the “*right to economic use of natural resources or the right to exercising activities of interest for the Republic of Croatia, as well as the right to constructing and using installations and plants necessary for exercising such activities in protected areas*”.

The other provision is ‘Custodian Contracts’, contracts of custody over natural assets. Custodian contracts can be made between County Public Institutions for Nature Protection and temporary custodians of different natural elements (e.g. water surface, woods, soils, etc.). The Ministry does not keep record of such contracts and in the last four years only one was identified, between a fishing society and one Nature Park Administration. It lasted one year and was not prolonged.

Both provisions could provide some opportunities for ICCAs but in reality they serve the much more limited interests of certain groups on protected areas and are not used by and for local communities.

In Croatia, ICCAs cannot be separated from agriculture practices, as they have kept the common management customs (in certain cases due to the pasturing traditions). This applies to the previous commons and – during socialism – state-owned land not suitable for agricultural intensification but favourable for extensive grazing and rich in biodiversity. Therefore, the management by and support for such communities cannot be looked upon separately from the coordination between the communities, agriculture and the nature protection authorities.

As a matter of fact, most sectorial regulations address issues of conservation and management of biodiversity. One example is the Agricultural Land Act which prescribes that state-owned grassland and meadows located within National and Nature Parks are to be managed by the respective protected area authorities, while state-owned agricultural land in other protected areas are to be managed based on approval of the central government authority in charge of nature protection. But due to a lack of such coordination in practice, areas with extensive grazing were discriminated upon in comparison to intensive and commercial breeding for many years.

Thanks to Croatian legislation revision, positive evolutions can be seen in the future participatory management models and the introduction of ‘Pasturing Communities’ – PCs

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(Amendments on Agricultural Land Act, 2011). PCs are a type of participatory mechanism in the form of a cooperative designed to allow producers grazing cattle in protected pastures on common grounds to organize themselves locally and influence the management decisions. PCs are the ones carrying out management decisions and programs, and they are responsible for their implementation on their territory. It is a big step forward, but the already-recognized weakness of the concept is the demanding administrative procedure in which several ministries, public bodies and institutions are involved. On top of this, PCs' organizational structure only recognizes cattle owners as members and do not take into account other interested stakeholders. Every local self-government in every county must, according to the Law, have a separate Pasturing Community. Although the formal framework has been passed in 2011, no successful foundation of such communities are to be recorded yet. One of the reasons is certainly the change in political power following the Parliamentary elections in November 2011, which halted the processes in national, regional and local levels due to shifts in administration leadership.

There is no direct state funding scheme for community conserved areas, but several options available through few Ministries could fit the purpose of ICCAs support: subsidies for Native and Protected Breeds and Varieties of Domestic Animals through Ministry of Agriculture; funds for tourism in less favoured areas including funds for preservation of cultural heritage through Ministry of Tourism; funds for biodiversity protection through the Environment Protection Fund. However these funds are all available on paper but none were allocated in the last five years.

4.2. Civil Society recognition and support to ICCAs

Civil society organizations – CSOs – directly involved in ICCAs are spread across three main groups:

- Environmental organizations under the umbrella of 'Green forum' (a network of CSOs fostering public participation in decision-making processes). Most influential Green forum members are predominately urban and focus more on general environmental than on issues combining rural landscape and nature protection.
- Associations of agricultural producers and breeders dedicated to sustainable agriculture practices often connected with traditional communal practices (e.g. common grazing).
- Custodians of local small-scale naturally rich areas (small lakes, orchards, parks, sanctuaries etc.) in the local arena.

Green forum has advocacy and lobbying capacities for addressing the ICCAs issues but is still largely unaware of the problems ICCAs are facing. The organized sustainable agricultural producers are in many cases directly affected by the loss of habitats and dependent on the conservation efforts, but disconnected from the old practices. From all the three groups, the last one is the one giving the strongest support to ICCAs, being in many cases CSOs founded as an organizational tool for the local community already maintaining a certain area.

4.3. Key issues for the recognition and support to ICCAs

Connection between agriculture, nature protection and ICCAs to enable rural land to be used in extensive and nature-friendly ways would help to achieve many important nature protection targets (for example, to halt biodiversity decline). A key action for achieving this target is to maintain the types of farming that continue to harbour a wide range of wildlife,

because they have not been intensified to the degree of mainstream ‘industrialised’ farming. This corresponds to the EU concept of High Nature Value (HNV) farming. While there are very significant regional differences, the HNV farming systems in the Western Balkans share many common features such as transhumance and nomadic herding, common grazing and forest grazing, making best use of the adapted local breeds and plant varieties, as well as – unfortunately – depopulation and land abandonment. The HNV farming concept emphasises that biodiversity conservation goals in Europe cannot be met only by protecting particular habitats or species, or designating certain areas, such as Natura 2000 sites. In Croatia, there have been frequent changes in the administration of pastures, all of which ignoring the traditional grazing rights. Harmonization of national legislation with the EU Acquis while reflecting the national conditions and needs is a multi-dimensional task⁸.

In the EU accession process, Croatian legal system was subjected to unprecedented changes. The harmonization with the Acquis forced the state administration to produce unusually high number of new policies, laws and following regulations. Some CSOs’ reports for the 2010 show that around 70% of all laws were passed under the ‘urgent procedure’ in the Parliament, which – with the fact that drafts were not publicized in majority of cases – additionally impedes already weak participation of the public in the policy making. It was – and still is – extremely hard to follow up on all the changes, and in many cases impossible to exercise the rights from the Aarhus convention. As a consequence, the large public and CSOs tend to remain excluded from policy-making process in most cases. This is particularly evident in sectors that by definition encompass civil initiatives from rural areas. CSOs are not rare in the sustainable agriculture and rural development sector but they significantly differ in their internal organization, membership and type of activism from the urban green CSOs. With their limited capacities, local governments and self-governments experience the difficulty in the implementation of new laws and regulations, and in giving the expected support for the population. Because CSOs have often less bureaucratic organisational structures and management processes than governments, they can have the flexibility necessary to adapt to changing conditions.

5. The Future

5.1. Future activities planned by the communities, the government, and the civil society; especially in relation to issues of recognition and support

There is no mention of ICCAs or any similar concepts in any of the strategic documents of the Government of Croatia. ICCAs and related issues have yet to become visible in the general public, political and social arena.

Several laws, programs, local strategies and action plans that could influence profoundly the nature protection and agricultural sectors – possibly the two most important for ICCAs management – are currently being revised. Unfortunately, foreseen changes are known only by the limited circle of people involved in the process, while the wider public and most CSOs have no means to follow such changes or participate in the process, despite the stipulations of the Aarhus convention⁹. In this context, CSOs’ biggest contribution is not only to enable the

⁸ See High Nature Value Farming in the Western Balkans: Current Status and Key Challenges – a Scoping Document - Kazakova and Stefanova, EFNCP Bulgaria, 2010 for further information.

⁹ The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, usually known as the Aarhus Convention, was signed on June 25, 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus. It entered into force on 30

articulation of the problems through the participatory mechanisms but also the possibility for advocacy and lobbying for the otherwise marginal groups (rural CSOs, PCs, rural municipalities) mostly affected by new legislation. Only with laws, strategies and incentives better tailored for the community and their specific problems, the rural population has a chance for the survival, evolution and preservation of traditional ways of nature management.

In the first glance, it seems EU legislation will be detrimental for community conserved areas, with inflexible sanitary and veterinarian rules and land eligibility rules for CAP support in particular¹⁰. This is a critical issue for extensive use of pastures, common grazing and forest grazing, areas where most ICCAs are to be found in Croatia. Grasslands with a high proportion of shrub and/or trees are of particular biodiversity value and their continued sustainable grazing is especially important. Yet in many countries such land is excluded from CAP support, because of CAP rules and their interpretation. Furthermore, Croatia is lacking an organizational structure that could administer the agri-environment measures and payments to farmers, a clear monitoring program to monitor the success of the measures, and well-defined measures that farmers can apply to support achieving the goals of the Natura 2000 sites. On top of that, there is a lack of awareness and knowledge about agri-environment and what agri-environment measures can mean for farmers. Considering Croatia's imminent accession to the EU, it is of the utmost importance to tackle these problems in the very short term, otherwise Croatia – and especially Croatian farmers – will miss the possibility to benefit from entering the EU. Like elsewhere in Europe, too often the role of farmers and farming in protecting and managing biodiversity is not fully recognised.

Nevertheless, a recent interesting phenomenon is the emergence of social movements and ideas opposed to dominant urbanization, thanks to young people returning to the countryside, preservation of small rural communities, development of eco-villages as self-preserving entities, revaluation of traditional knowledge and local cultures, etc. In the last decade, 4-5 such micro social communities have started specific endeavours in different parts of Croatia with the will to create sustainable communities (e.g. Blatuša, Eko selo Rovinj, Vukomerić). There are currently from 10 to 30 individuals in each of them – and they are growing – gathered under the common goals of three types of sustainability: ecological, socio-political and economical. Although striving for independence, they put extensive effort in connecting with the local community and using and respecting their traditional knowledge. As young, educated people driven by common goals are rare in these depopulated areas, the author feels it might be an opportunity for quality support to the ICCAs in the vicinity.

5.2. Recommendations

(i) Legal Recognition and Support

On the national level, Croatia should pass and incorporate legislation enabling ICCAs to preserve landscapes, particularly in areas of nature protection and agricultural operations. The revision of the Nature Protection Act is on the way and efforts have been made to lobby for solutions suitable for the co-management and the sole management of the local initiatives.

October 2001. As of 23 November 2011, there were 45 Parties to the Convention, (primarily European and Central Asian). The Aarhus Convention grants the public rights regarding access to information, public participation and access to justice, in governmental decision-making processes on matters concerning the local, national and transboundary environment. It focuses on interactions between the public and public authorities.

¹⁰ CAP – EU Common Agricultural Policy – the reformed Common Agricultural Policy is due to come into force after 2013.

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On the EU level, the new ‘greener’ Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) is currently being elaborated (for the 2013-2020 period), which means that the current harmonization process with the EU Acquis ongoing in Croatia will be ‘overridden’ with the new stipulations from CAP in the next period. Problems currently hampering ICCAs survival should be communicated through available channels to the policy makers and strengthened by the involvement in regional and European networks (e.g EFNCP, CEEweb for the Biodiversity, etc.). Recognition and integration of ICCAs in national, regional and European policies and legal frameworks is essential for their conservation.

Efforts should also be made to strengthen CSOs’ capacity to recognize ICCAs and to act jointly in campaigns and actions for ICCAs support and recognition. The current EU accession process brings the risk of changes demanded in the legislation, and the capacity of the society to accept and implement such stipulations. It is therefore crucial that non-institutional bodies can be made institutional, through increased awareness on the changes and education on how to influence their creation and the implementation of such measures. If capacitated, CSOs can contribute to better understanding of the association process, public debates, providing information on the EU and on technical aspects of the process, monitoring the progress, etc. Although challenging, this can also be perceived as an opportunity to penetrate the armour of current legislation not favourable to ICCAs and advocate on their behalf.

Drawing from the current legal framework, all stakeholders of nature protection and related agricultural activities – institutional, public and civil – have to be included in consultations to provide local communities with tools for management of former common lands. Only with cooperation of all, nature can be preserved in protected areas. Tools for monitoring, advocacy actions and joint innovative mechanisms for public participation should also be investigated. The communities are unfortunately weak and poorly organized and need assistance from the civil sector. Also, much-mentioned agriculture sector is traditionally way more politically influential than nature protection sector, and it is crucial that ICCAs are visible in that sector too, otherwise they will not receive the adequate protection and support.

It is also important that better organized CSOs help local communities to set up Pasturing Communities (see section 4.1.), follow up on the future management plan procedures, stay alert and inform ICCAs on land grabbing pressures (golf courses, building sites and tourism – representing just some of the pressures in Croatia). Efforts should be made to establish some sort of participatory body for every area and engage local communities in the management plans of Natura 2000 sites, and in their actual management.

(ii) Financial Support

It is important to secure funds for the most vulnerable ICCAs. Due to the nature of the ICCAs (aging population, economic crisis), economic sustainability is crucial and institutions managing available national funds dedicated to biodiversity protection and rural development should be approached and informed on the values of the ICCAs and their contribution to several national strategy documents’ goals.

Some of the economic activities (eco-tourism, ecological agriculture, healthy food production, etc.) could be the foundation for the economic development of such communities.

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Possible financial sources available for Croatia:

- International instruments available in the region (e.g. World Bank, GEF);
- EU funds (e.g. LIFE);
- Other EU Funds currently available for Croatia (e.g. Pre-accession Instrument – IPA, Transition and Institution Building, Cross-border cooperation, Regional Development, Human Resources Development, Rural Development);
- EU Funds after the accession (e.g. Structural Funds Regional fund – ERDF and Social Fund – ESF);
- EU accession also opens possibilities for several grant programs under the broad umbrella of Rural Development in the future (e.g. Natura 2000 payments, Leader+, Agri-environmental schemes);
- Other sources (e.g. local revenue generation, companies/CSOs contributions, privately funded payments, etc.).

(iii) Administrative/Organizational Support

There is a tendency that the more dynamic and enthusiastic parts of communities organize in CSOs in order to keep the traditions and the values of once common grounds. An effort should be made to find the most suitable way to include also the hard-to-reach and passive parts of what was once a unified community. It is important to evaluate the capacities of the ICCAs, their motivation to participate in policy questions, their will to be included in networks on a national and international level, and their current organizational and administrative skills; and to offer them assistance, know-how exchange and capacity building with other similar ICCAs in the region.

The communities currently settled within protected areas whose activities are crucial for the preservation of habitats, species and eco-systems should be included in protected areas management through innovative means of co-management (cooperation councils, cooperatives, consultative meetings, etc.). It could also be investigated whether ICCAs could exclude themselves from the existing PAs and function independently.

(iv) Social Recognition and Support

Cases of existing positive partnerships between local communities, CSOs and public institutions in nature protection and management in ICCAs should be encouraged and disseminated as efficient models that could be transferred to other areas, naturally taking into account specific local contexts. The cooperation can be triggered either from the inside (by the community with the enthusiasm of a few leaders necessary for galvanising change), or from the outside (government, CSOs and nature conservationists).

Also, proof of demonstrated successful conservation in some ICCAs needs to be communicated strongly, in local, regional and national context.

(v) Research

Joint efforts with the experts would be welcome to record and keep the history of such places in local and national archives.

(vi) Networking

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ICCAs should connect with already existing and widely publicized initiatives aimed at preservation of tradition through promoting language, food, customs, old breeds, etc., through festivals and media events.

Problems currently hampering ICCAs survival should be communicated through available channels to the policy makers, and strengthened by the involvement in regional and European networks (EFNCP, CEEweb for the Biodiversity, etc.).

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