

In situ conservation in CEE countries during the last 20 years

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Abstract

The fall of the Iron Curtain was a turning-point for the economic structures of the Eastern European countries and, of course, in agriculture. Whilst in the West the conservation of endangered livestock breeds as genetic resources and cultural heritage was mainly undertaken by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in Eastern Europe various state-level institutes had already carried out exemplarily work. However, after the structural changes, it was no longer possible for states to continue financing these projects. Many were discontinued, some started on a new basis (e.g. for grazing and as tourist attractions in national parks), others were aided by western NGOs. These NGOs, which had previously worked together informally, saw the need for a better, cross-border coordination of the work. This coordination needed to be institutionalised and with a broad European basis. Thus the European SAVE Network began in 1993 with the SAVE Foundation acting as an effective core (SAVE is the acronym of "Safeguard for Agricultural Varieties in Europe")

The task of SAVE Foundation was, and remains to this day, to promote or build up national organisations at the grass-roots level. These organisations should be competent and effective in securing conservation. As long as such organisations are missing or are not able to run projects alone, SAVE Foundation should run projects itself. Because of this, many of the early projects were rescue activities, such as the live conservation of the last Polish Red Cattle (Podgorska), the rescue of the Turopolje pigs from between the war-lines in what is now Croatia, the support of the Karakachan horses in Bulgaria, the combining of the last Valachian sheep into new breeding herds etc... Alongside this, extensive, cross-border monitoring activities were carried out, as had already been achieved in the Alpine area. SAVE Foundation and the, closely connected, Monitoring Institute for Rare Breeds and Seeds in Europe collected data from the whole of the Carpathian area and the Balkans together with local experts and using old literature resources where the breeds and varieties were still listed. The conservation needs were derived from this method of Mapping-Watching-Alarming. For the Balkan countries a Breed-Atlas was created and made available online.

In order to place conservation activities on a sustainable basis it was and still is important to network and organise all the stakeholders involved. With numerous workshops in various countries it has been possible to build national and cross-border networks, which have led to long-term projects and conservation organisations. This work will carry on into the future. The Carpathian Network and Balkan Network together cover a large part of the CEE-countries. Also of great importance are the Topics Networks for Shorthorn Cattle, Water Buffalo etc. Within the European Ark Network "Arca-Net" the CEE-countries are represented by many farms and other institutions that open their doors to the public to promote old, autochthonous breeds and varieties.

In the conservation work, the "3 pillar principle" is always maintained. This refers to the division of tasks between the State, the universities and civil society. All three pillars are represented and active in the SAVE networks in order to achieve a sustainable conservation effort. We are particularly proud of the Balkan Network where, alongside the concrete engagement of individuals, it also acts as a participatory contribution to understanding between peoples.