

LIFE CONNECT CARPATHIANS



Enhancing landscape connectivity for brown bear and wolf through a regional network of NATURA 2000 sites in Romania

A2- Report on the cultural values of the Zarand landscape and its biodiversity

**A report on livelihoods and cultural values within three communes in the Apuseni
Link landscape**

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1 Introduction

The LIFE Connect Carpathians (LCC) project is engaging with local people and other stakeholders to enhance awareness and support for the conservation of bear and wolf, as well as Natura 2000 sites, within the Apuseni Link landscape.

In 2015, field work for a combined livelihoods and cultural values assessment (termed a socio-cultural assessment by the project team) was carried out for the project in order to gain a greater understanding of the livelihood strategies of local women and men, the connections and relationships between local women and men and nature, including how nature contributes to their wellbeing, and the cultural values that underpin these relationships¹.

The LCC project area is over 400,000 hectares and the human population is over 200,000. As the project does not have the resources or need to carry out an in depth assessment of the whole project area 3 'case study' sites, or communes, were chosen for the socio-cultural assessment, each in a different part of the project area. The sites were selected by the LCC project team to enable extrapolation across the whole project area, whilst bearing in mind the geographic and social differences between communities.

The assessment field work was carried out in 2015 by two consultants, Luminița Petrescu and Marius Cosmeanu. A first report was submitted in January 2016 followed by a revised draft in May 2016. This report is based on an interpretation of the results and discussion in the consultants' two reports.

2 Participants and methodology

The field work was undertaken between September 27th and October 31st 2015. The consultants spent one week in each of 3 communes - Densuș, Zam and Dezna - visiting 3 villages in each commune. In total, they carried out around 30 casual discussions and 46 direct interviews with 34 men and 12 women and 12 group discussions with a total of 15 women and 13 men. Respondents included villagers, shepherds, teachers, librarians, medical assistants, veterinarians, shopkeepers, entrepreneurs, local administration representatives, priests, farmers, agronomists, rangers, NGO staff, artists, and other 'key-informants'.

Qualitative methods were used as these are more appropriate to the subject matter, allowing for more in depth discussion and an exploration of issues with participants, rather than just extracting information. Two main complementary methods were proposed - facilitated group discussions and semi-structured interviews. In collaboration with the LCC project team, five main areas of questioning were proposed with suggested questions developed for each².

¹ The LCC project technical summary states that *'A socio-economic assessment of local stakeholders will be conducted ... in order to more fully understand socio-economic conditions and household livelihood strategies to gain a better understanding how the project might impact on these'* and *'This process will include an assessment of the cultural values held by the community that connect people to nature in general, to the Apuseni Link landscape and its biodiversity, and to large carnivores in particular.'*

² The objectives and key questions for the assessment are in Appendix 1. Detailed questions were prepared but are not included in this report as it is not clear which were used during the assessment field work.

- Livelihoods (resources, activities, shocks, etc.)
- General discussion of cultural connections with nature.
- Timeline - past, present and future connections with nature.
- Transect / location of specific sites, species etc.
- Calendar of socio-cultural events and practices.

3 Limitations

The consultants state that they captured a wide range of views, and spent a good amount of time and had friendly conversations with respondents. They did, however, experience challenges in some villages where people were less willing to engage with them (see more on this in 4.1 The consultants' experiences and perceptions of the sites).

Although the report submitted by the consultants includes details of tools and questions, based on the information presented it is not entirely clear whether or how these were used and/or adapted in the field. In addition to individual interviews and 'casual discussions', the consultants opted for group discussions with 2 or 3 people rather than small groups (5 – 10) of people as advised. Other than the obvious (e.g. age), there is very little disaggregation of the livelihoods and cultural values data (e.g. by gender and socio-economic status).

It is not always clear whether the information presented is from local respondents (unless it is a quote³) or is the consultant's interpretation. There are many unacknowledged gaps and statements made with no or very limited detail to support them and the structure of the report makes it difficult to pull out the most relevant information, particularly that on cultural values.

Cultural values can indeed be difficult to identify and articulate. Despite this, and the limitations outlined above, the assessment has yielded some interesting information which will be useful for the project going forwards.

4 The assessment sites: Densuş, Zam and Dezna

The 3 communes for the assessment were selected by the LCC project team to reflect the overall reality whilst highlighting potential differences between different geographic regions across the whole project area. It is not entirely clear how the villages were selected, other than that they are 'those we considered most fitting for the goals of our research' (according to the consultants).

Densuş is located in the Central Western part of Hunedoara County. The assessed villages in the commune were Densuş, Ştei and Poieni. A total of eleven interviews with 'key informants' and four group discussions (altogether, with ten persons) were held.

³ Quotes in this report that are not assigned to an individual (e.g. local woman, local man, hunter) are taken from the first draft of the consultants' report where all quotes are unassigned. Some of these were not included in the revised version of the report submitted by the consultants.

Zam lies in the western part of Hunedoara County. The three assessed villages were Cerbia, Pogănești and Almășel. A total of fifteen interviews with 'key informants' and four group discussions were carried out in the commune.

Dezna is in Arad County. The assessed villages in the commune were Dezna, Buhani and Slatina de Criș. Here, the consultants carried out twelve interviews with local 'key informants' and four group discussions.

4.1 The consultants' experiences and perceptions of the sites

Densuș

Significant differences were found between people's willingness to communicate or cooperate in the 3 villages visited in Densuș. There were two 'open' communities, Densuș and Poieni, where people were more interested and responsive and one 'closed' community, Ștei.

Densuș and Poieni were collectivised villages whilst Ștei was not. Collectivisation – the forced union of agricultural land and labour into collective farms - was a milestone in the history of many rural communities in the area, with long lasting consequences. According to the consultants, members of communities that experienced collectivisation seem to have strengthened their sense of solidarity and willingness to help others, even those from outside the community.

On the contrary those from un-collectivised communities, like Ștei, became more introverted and circumspect with individuals from 'outside', perceiving them as potential threats. The inhabitants of Ștei keep to themselves more, they communicate less with 'outsiders' including people from other villages, but they help each other more. These habits were part of people's survival strategies during communism. In addition, other local animosities (such as between the Orthodox and Greek Catholics) are believed to make people from Ștei more cautious or even suspicious of newcomers.

Generally, people in Densuș are considered to be conservative, particularly those from Ștei.

Zam

Zam is a complex commune, composed of 14 villages with distinctive cultural backgrounds. As in Densuș, the consultants found the same differences between collectivised and un-collectivised communities. However Zam is more culturally and socially heterogeneous with many newcomers, although those people with no local ancestors are less integrated and have a weaker local identity, marked by slow assimilation of local values and traditions. Although people are still conservative, social solidarity is stronger in Zam compared to Densuș and people have closer relationships.

A local teacher explained, *"A century ago copper and zinc mines functioned in the area. It was a small America, with workers from Moldova, with Russian prisoners, foreign architects and engineers, with a little train that used to go along the valley..."* At that time, the population was even more heterogeneous than now. Many ethnic groups lived here, a diversity that makes Zam more 'colourful' compared to the other rural communities from the region.

Dezna

In all 3 villages in Dezna people were more reluctant to engage with the consultants than those in Densuș or Zam. One possible explanation could be that, according to locals, during the communist

period the area was strictly controlled by Securitate (communist intelligence services) as a border zone. Another explanation is the bad experience local people had with a group of archaeologists who found precious relics in Dezna and left with them overnight to Bucharest. It seems that even now local people distrust newcomers.

4.2 Commune profiles

The following profiles were developed by the consultants with information collected from the General Agricultural Register (2010), supplemented with information from their discussions with both local and non-local people.

Table 1: Profiles of Densuș, Zam and Dezna communes

Year of dating [A.D.]	Densuș: 1360, Zam: 1407, Dezna: 1318.
Altitude and total area	Densuș: 381 m/ 13610 ha Zam: 243 m/ 16188 ha Dezna: 230 m/ 8331 ha.
Closest urban area/city	Densuș: 18 km, Zam: 46 km, Dezna: 15 km.
Population	Densuș: 1577 people, 764 households (756 owned) Zam: 1875 people, 782 households (781 owned) Dezna: 1198 people, 586 households (572 owned)
Number of units/villages	Densuș: 7, Zam: 14, Dezna: 5.
Ethnic and religious groups	Densuș: Romanian (97,85%), Hungarian, German, Other (1,65%). Orthodox (82,43%), Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (3,94%), Protestant, Baptist (1,61%), Pentecostal (11,48%), Adventist of Seventh Day. Zam: Romanian (94,08%), Hungarian (0,5%), Roma, Ukrainian (1%), Slovak, Other (4,16%). Orthodox (90,5%), Roman Catholic (1%), Protestant, Baptist, Pentecostal (4,4), Adventist of Seventh Day, Undeclared or Without Religion (1%) and Other. Dezna: Romanian (97,91), Hungarian, Other (1,83%). Orthodox (83,88%), Baptist (9,35%) and Pentecostal (4,92%) and Other.
Local institutions and organisations	Densuș: Local government offices, public library, the Forest District, the hunting ground, three kindergartens and four schools, churches of various denominations , an information centre (recently established but still unused), an active NGO involved in local environmental projects (Dor de Hațeg). Zam: Local government offices, gendarmerie, public library, hunting ground, churches of different denominations (some old, wood churches with unique architecture), three kindergarten, four schools, local hunters' association, Deva Credit Cooperative. Dezna: Government offices, churches, public library, one school and one kindergarten, an information centre, one camping place.
Infrastructure and services	All three communes have electricity and water supply. People use gas bottles for cooking and wood for heating. There are about ten shops and kiosks in the three communes. Each commune has veterinary services. In the three communes there are more than 400 tractors (Densuș: 124 + Zam: 81 + Dezna: 207), 80 cultivators (22 + 10 + 48), 142 harvesters (27 +7 +108). Densuș. Access roads to the three assessed villages are good, but public transportation doesn't exist anymore. Those who have no car are obliged to hitchhike, ride a bike or walk. More than 75% of the population has access to telephony and Internet. Zam. The infrastructure is weak and some villages are isolated. The commune has no sanitation. Public transportation doesn't exist anymore in Pogănești, Cerbia and Almășel. In the commune there is a psychiatric rehabilitation

	<p>centre, which is well known in the region.</p> <p>Dezna. There are sewers and there is wastewater treatment. Between 1975 and 1980, a few flats were constructed in the centre of Dezna for the specialists who were assigned to the commune. All apartments were sold after 1990. There is also a psychomotor recovery hospital well known in the area.</p>
Land and natural resources	<p>Densuş: The main natural resources are forests (provide wood, berries, mushrooms, rosehip, medicinal plants), meadows (for hay), house gardens (for vegetables and fruits) and land (for cereal and potatoes).</p> <p>Zam: On hill areas there are pastures and beech, oak and hornbeam forests. Plum tree orchards and predominant crops are wheat, corn and barley. There is also bamboo (probably one of the rare places in Romania where it grows naturally) and truffles (1kilo = 50-100 euro). Wild animals in the area include deer (high number), pheasants, foxes, rabbits, boars, mountain jays, squirrels, dormice. The place is also rich in snails.</p> <p>Dezna: The main natural resource in the area is the forest (highly exploited), predominantly beech and oak. After the WWII conifers were planted (larch and Douglas fir). There are also linden, cherry and maple trees. Less than 10% is cultivable land, the rest of it being forest. The place is known for its old and tall apple trees (exported in the past to Vienna) and is rich in medicinal plants. Fauna of the area includes wild boars, foxes, deer, wolves, squirrels, pheasants, rabbits, wildcats, lynxes, martens, bears, grouse, crows, hawks. There are also thermal springs in Dezna and on the Zugău Valley. There are copper, zinc, lead deposits, but the main extraction is of iron.</p>
Livelihood activities	<p>Densuş <i>Main activities:</i> farming (poultry, cattle and pigs breeding), production of agricultural goods and plum brandy (both mainly for home consumption), logging. <i>Side Activities:</i> trade, small maintenance workshops built around the house (construction, welding, carpentry, metalwork), cultivating fruit trees (apple, plum, pear, walnut), bakery, (cultural) tourism, beekeeping. There are some public servants (work at the City Hall, school and public library) and a small number of people who own a small business locally or in one of the nearby towns.</p> <p>Zam <i>Main activities:</i> livestock (poultry, pigs, cattle, rabbits), wood processing, health (at a Psychiatric Rehabilitation Centre), lime and stone quarry, tourism, beekeeping (700 hives, producing mainly acacia, linden and mountain flowers honey), grapevines. There is also some horse breeding.</p> <p>Dezna <i>Main activities:</i> farming (poultry, pigs and cattle breeding), wood processing, marble exploitation, medical assistance, commerce, tourism, beekeeping. Many locals are working in a Psychomotor Recovery Hospital.</p>

4.3 Levels of development

The consultants' report included the following table showing the level of development of the assessed villages, drawn from a World Bank study and considering education, employment, population of working age, mobility experience of the population and housing. The scale ranges from 'villages with maximum level of development' to 'very poor villages'. Unfortunately the full scale is not included so it is not possible to judge how these villages compare with other villages

both across and outside of the project area⁴, but the table does show that all but one of the 9 villages show a mid to low level of development

Table 2: Level of development of villages in Densuș, Zam and Dezna

County	Commune	Village	Level of development
Hunedoara	Densuș	Densuș	mid-developed
Hunedoara	Densuș	Poieni	undeveloped
Hunedoara	Densuș	Ștei	undeveloped
Hunedoara	Zam	Cerbia	undeveloped
Hunedoara	Zam	Pogănești	undeveloped
Hunedoara	Zam	Almășel	undeveloped
Arad	Dezna	Dezna	developed
Arad	Dezna	Buhani	mid-developed
Arad	Dezna	Slatina de Criș	mid-developed

According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), poverty holds a firm grip in rural Romania. Following the collapse of communism many industrial workers and (formerly collectivised) farmers reverted to subsistence farming but productivity and incomes remain low. Small scale subsistence farmers do not have the means to invest in equipment or technology and have limited access to capital and markets. The situation is compounded by few formal job opportunities and limited social services.⁵

5 Livelihood strategies

In all three communes the main livelihood activity is farming. Even if they are commuters or work as public servants or in public health facilities (e.g. Zam and Dezna) and they have a regular income, people also do some sort of farming. Even if they are eager to sell their products on the local market, most people apparently don't have the skills, or infrastructure is lacking, or prices are low and they don't get any profit to reinvest.

Besides farming, almost each family has a small maintenance workshop built around the house to do repair work and in each commune there are local workshops specialised in welding, carpentry, metalwork and construction.

Youth generally are not interested in agriculture and they look for paid jobs in the cities or abroad, and those working abroad send money home to help their families. Incomes are small. People who worked in the Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CAP) have a pension and have better living standards than those who don't.

Shocks mentioned include wars (unspecified), accidents, drought, and floods, as well as the impacts of communism (see below). It is clear that older people have suffered some hardships. These people now tend to overproduce. According to one woman from Densuș, *"During the winter, they preserve much more goods than they need. It's because of bad memories. In the spring you can see in many households that people are dropping potatoes, onions and other goods from*

⁴ World Bank (2013) *Competitive Cities: Reshaping the Economic Geography of Romania*. At the time of writing the website page for this report appears to be unavailable.

⁵ <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/romania>

their cellar. Is the result of the hard times they live in the past. They are afraid that something very bad could anytime occur and they have to be safe."

Another coping strategy implied in the consultant's report is alcohol consumption, mainly of plum brandy, which is high among men and apparently a constant of the last decades. *"Here, among local people from the area, Densuș is more famous for the Mara wine cellar than for the stone church!"* a local man said.

Details of specific livelihood activities reported for each commune are as follows.

Densuș

The main activity here is farming (poultry, cattle and pig breeding) with some shepherding. The production of agricultural goods, including plum brandy, is mainly for home consumption. There are 785 women and 863 male who work in agriculture.

Other activities include logging, trade, small maintenance workshops (construction, welding, carpentry, metalwork), cultivating fruit trees (apple, plum, pear, walnut), bakery, (cultural) tourism, and beekeeping. In the past women worked more in and around the household, but at present roles are to some extent overlapping.

Revenues are small, even compared to the minimum wage in Romania (236 euro on July 1st, 2015). The exception may regard the inhabitants of Densuș commune who are public servants (working at the City Hall, school and public library) or the small number of people who own a small business locally or in one of the nearby towns. Many respondents consider a decent monthly income to be 1,500 lei (approx. 330 euro). Older people who have worked during the communist period in the Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CAP) now have a pension. Those who have no pension from the CAP, like those in Ștei, live on the edge of poverty.

During the communist period people in Densuș used to raise silkworms and make pumpkin and gourd oil. A sawmill was here in the 1970s and at one time iron ore was exploited in the area (- at the exit of the commune there is a valley called The Iron Valley). Shepherding was also more prevalent in the past.

Zam

In Zam, the main activities include livestock (poultry, pigs, cattle, rabbits), wood processing, health (75% of the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Centre's staff are from the commune), lime and stone quarrying, and tourism. There are 650 women and 705 men who work in agriculture.

Some people also own horses. Although important in the past, horse breeding has decreased drastically in the last two decades (from approximately 200 in 1997 to 50 horses now). Beekeeping is popular (700 hives, producing mainly acacia, linden and mountain flowers honey) and local honey is famous in the area. The production of plum brandy is a long tradition and of good quality.

People who work in the nearby urban areas are reported to live a more 'decent life' than those working in the commune. The local job market is very weak. According to one local entrepreneur *"People are more entrepreneurial here but business ethics are not a priority. When I started my business we couldn't find workers. They asked for very high salaries, plus food and alcohol. I had to*

bring workers from another village." The commune has limited infrastructure and services, for example there is no public transport, and *"People try to manage as well as they can."*

One new livelihood activity in Zam was goat breeding but people struggled to find a market for weanlings. *"From Deva to Lipova there isn't even one dairy factory and even if there was one, it would be very difficult to go and collect the milk, due to lack of personnel and access roads to the villages. The number of horses decreased as a result of tractors' use. In the next 5-6 years the number of cows will drop too. The State awards grants only to farmers who have at least three cows. We keep pigs but only for family use, because the price is down and is not worthwhile to sell them"*, said a local veterinarian.

Zam was in the past somewhat more bustling. Natural resources of the region (salt, wood, copper and iron) were exported to Vienna. A copper foundry and an iron mine were located in Zam, operated by foreign workers. A rail road made by World War I Russian prisoners connected the mine to the village. Zam was also a former custom point during the Principality of Transylvania and a harbour on the Mureş River. It was a wood and salt trade centre, the two products being exported.

Dezna

Here, the main activities include farming (poultry, pigs and cattle breeding), wood processing, marble exploitation, medical assistance, commerce, tourism, and beekeeping (350 bee families). There are 498 women and 591 men who work in agriculture.

There are at least six sawmills and a wood reception centre in the commune. Many locals are working in the Psychomotor Recovery Hospital, known both in Romania and abroad. Dezna commune has a stud with award winning race horses, a successful project belonging to a businessman from Arad who is a former resident. In the past, many people used to make wine for sale but whilst wine production still exists it is mostly for home consumption. Dezna was formerly a site of iron mining but a train line built for this purpose was shut in 1968 leading to the disappearance of a number of villages (Răschirata, Zugău and Grajduri).

6 Cultural values and connections to nature

For the purposes of this report, cultural values are understood to be the cultural perspectives, understandings and beliefs that give importance to an aspect or product of nature that individuals of societies recognise as a benefit and hold to be important.⁶

According to Infield et al (2015), *"Culture, associated values and their connections to ecosystems and nature are complex and can be hard to describe, define or even think about, presenting challenges for their assessment"*⁷. This has certainly proved to be so in this case. The report submitted by the consultants does not clearly identify or articulate the cultural values that connect people to nature in the assessment sites. There are a number of values specifically mentioned in the report, but there is no elaboration or explanation of these, as per the following extracts.

⁶ Infield, M, Morse-Jones, S and Anthem, H (2015) *Guidance for the Rapid Assessment of Cultural Ecosystem Services* http://www.fauna-flora.org/wp-content/uploads/grace_report_final.pdf

⁷ Ibid.

- The main values attached to nature by women and men of Dezna are freshness and wealth (a variety of good quality fruits, primarily apples, hot springs and iron deposits).
- In Zam, silence, charm and purity are the main values attached by locals to their natural environment.
- The most commonly associated value to nature by local people interviewed in Densuş is richness.

It is clear that the way in which men and women in the three communes connect to nature has weakened considerably over recent decades, and the identification and articulation of cultural values or benefits associated with nature was challenging. However the assessment did result in a considerable amount of qualitative data which is of great interest and relevance to the project. The consultants organised their data by commune but did not categorise it in any way. The following information has been gleaned from a review of the information presented by the consultants and subsequently categorised i.e. organised by theme.

It must be noted that cultural values, and the cultural benefits associated with nature, may be closely linked and there is a great deal of overlap between some of the categories. In cultural ecosystem services terms, they are experienced 'bundled' together⁸. It is thus not possible or appropriate to place firm boundaries between the following categories, and overlap between them must be appreciated.

6.1 Spiritual/religious

Many religions attach spiritual and religious values to nature. Specific sites, features, species and practices can provide spiritual or religious benefits⁹.

Although the main religion in the communes is Orthodoxy there is no mention of practices or beliefs associated with nature or of any particularly important natural sites. Locals in Dezna have noticed that the discourse of Protestants is nature related. According to a teacher, "*The new protestant denominations have a better offer, which promotes closeness to nature and attracts young people. They know how to communicate and involve the young.*" Other than this, none of the respondents appeared to identify any religious or spiritual connections with nature.

The following example of parables on human-nature relation is quoted from a local Baptist church service, again in Dezna. "*There are four kinds of soils which can be compared to people: Hard, in which one cannot dig to plant seeds (people with stone-heart, which can barely be attracted to faith); Glassy, with a thin, very hard rock beneath it (people who might be convinced, but is very challenging); Fallow, full of thistles (people who come to church, but they don't have faith); Fruitful (people who hear the word of God, understand it and bear fruits of it).*"

6.2 Use

Use values are often associated with economic benefits but often there are also cultural values associated with resource use. For example, the activity of hunting can bring economic reward to the hunter but may also be a traditional cultural practice as well as providing social and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

recreational benefits. In ecosystem services terms, it can be difficult to separate cultural ecosystem services from provisioning services.

As noted above, many traditional livelihood activities are no longer carried out or are changing, so the cultural values associated with the use of natural resources must also have changed. In Dezna, and presumably other communes, activities popular before WWII and which almost disappeared during communism or after it, include those of shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, blacksmiths, furriers (a very profitable job then), wheelwrights, stonemasons, foresters. Another activity widespread among the people in the region was the collection, storage and use of medicinal herbs. Locals learned from their elders how to collect and preserve healing herbs and many still prepare herbal medicines for their family use. Medicinal herbs collected in Dezna are also used for health treatments in Moneasa spa.

The consultants found that the most commonly associated value ascribed to nature by local people in Densuş is richness, although what is understood by this is not explained. The report refers to a popular Romanian proverb which states that the country is rich and beautiful but unfortunately inhabited. According to the consultants Densuş is indeed a rich and attractive place but lacks solutions to exploit its natural abundance to the benefit of the community. It is seen to have great potential for development, but know-how and investment is missing. The cultural aspects of the use value or richness of nature are not clear – the emphasis here seems to be on productivity for economic gain rather than the fulfilment of cultural practices or an aesthetic appreciation of nature, although this may be the consultants own interpretation of ‘richness’.

6.3 Lifestyle

As noted above, the values or benefits associated with or provided by nature and ecosystems can be ‘bundled’ and it can be challenging to identify and assess them. It is clear that many traditional and even current livelihood activities within these communities take place in nature or make use of natural resources, and many of these will have been as much a ‘way of life’ as a means of making a living. The report mentions traditional cuisine, as well as jam and plum brandy produced primarily for subsistence use. All of these dishes or products are likely to be culturally significant.

One craft that was wide spread in Zam, for example, but has now disappeared is hemp processing. People used to cultivate hemp and manually do all the processing from planting, harvesting, scathing, spinning, dying to weaving and making cloth. Since the 1960s/1970s people have preferred to buy cotton and linen from the store instead of making hemp cloth at home. According to local women clothes made from hemp fabric were very heavy to wear compared to other materials and they now prefer clothes made from other natural or even synthetic fibres.

6.4 Place/identity/heritage

It is clear that older people in particular feel a strong sense of place and heritage, and possibly a sense of identity associated with these, although these values are not articulated clearly in the reports.

Young people spend less time in and around nature and apparently show little interest in preserving local cultural heritage and traditions, including those related to nature. Their identity with the villages and communes in which they were born and/or raised, and their ‘sense of place’, as well as other forms of connection to nature, are different or weaker than that of older people.

6.5 Aesthetic

People may value nature for aesthetic reasons, gaining pleasure from its beauty or benefiting from feeling, seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling and touching nature.

According to a local resident of Zam, *"People who come here never leave the place. They enjoy the charm of the landscape. There is a local saying: if you drink water from Zam [river], you remain here and do not leave anymore."* In Zam, silence, charm and purity are reported as the main values attached by locals to their natural environment. They are said to love the nature and the landscapes of the place, but there are few natural areas which have a religious, spiritual or historical value. It is thus assumed that the benefits or values being expressed here are aesthetic; that pleasure is associated with Zam's natural beauty.

6.6 Health

A number of respondents indicated that being close to nature contributes to good physical and mental health. According to a local man in Densuş, *"A good relationship with nature makes people live longer: many of the locals are over 80 years old. There is no cancer among the older generation and this is because we live close to nature. Children grow up nowadays with antibiotics, fake juices and junk food. We live better lives now than in communism, but I do not know what they do to food nowadays, because everyone is ill. They are sick because of the food and because of the air."*

Because of their closeness to nature people from Zam are perceived to feel healthier than those from the cities. *"People used to live up to 80 years and more, because they lived within nature. They used to make hay, work in the woods..."* However, these connections are seen to be loosening. In the past, people respected the natural rhythms, like day and night or the seasons. *"Our grandparents did not commute, had no stress, worked only here in the village and they didn't have deadlines. They would work more, but at a slower pace. Sometimes they would even forget the date. They knew which days were celebrated holidays without checking the calendar. They could read the signs of heaven and know the time according to the rooster's singing. But now, even the rooster doesn't sing as he used to, at five a.m. sharp, but at half past four!"* said a villager.

6.7 Recreation

Opportunities for recreational activities valued by both locals and tourists can be provided by nature. All 3 communes are said to have touristic potential, particularly Densuş and Zam. However, lack of marketing means that they have maintained their anonymity. There are few hostels in the area, although there is a lot of traffic and interesting places tourists might visit (and potentially bring trade to the local farmers and shopkeepers). People stop in Zam either on their way home (Romanians who live in the South and Eastern region of the country and who return from Western Europe) or to admire the wild places of the region. *"Lately most tourists are from Northern Europe, such as Norwegian and Danish people"* according to a local guesthouse owner.

Dezna is assumed to be appropriate for tourism all year around, but 'touristic offer' is very poor even though Moneasa, the 'touristic pearl' of the region renowned for its health spa, is just 18 km away. Trout Valley, in the foothills of Moma Mountains, is also a local touristic attraction, with new villas built in the recent past by people from nearby cities. "Hanul cu peşte" ("The tavern with fishes"), once a famous local resort, is closed and the new Tourist Information Centre doesn't open

anymore. Dezna is however the location for an international summer camp for young Pentecostals, with a lot of outdoor events, sports and pro-nature activities.

Whilst local residents may value nature for recreational purposes, the emphasis in the information above is on the values of non-residents. However, it is stated in the report that locals in Dezna are connected to their natural environment mostly by leisure and recreation, spending time at picnics and other outdoor events with friends and relatives. One respondent in Densuș noted that young people spend less time in nature, but when they do it is *"more for fun, leisure or entertainment, less for the nature."*

6.8 Other values

There are other values, or benefits, provided by nature that are not apparent from the information currently available but that might be relevant to the project area. These include the following.

- **Existence values** - the sense of satisfaction and enjoyment gained from the knowledge that nature, including specific plants and animals, exists. This may be irrespective of any personal experience of them or plans to visit them. Some respondents mentioned charm, purity and freshness and older people appear to lament changes in the natural environment as well as the fact that younger people have a looser connection with nature than their generation. It may be that the very existence of nature, both within their communes and across the broader landscape, is of value to them.
- **Bequest values** - valuing the fact that nature is preserved for the experience, use and enjoyment of future generations. As above, many older people noted the changing relationships with nature and appear to regret that this is the case, possibly worrying or at least wondering about the implications of this for future generations.
- **Ecological knowledge** - the opportunities provided by nature for both formal and informal learning and cognitive development, including personal enrichment through direct and indirect experience of nature and intergenerational knowledge exchange. The consultants do mention that the current time is the first time in recent history when traditional knowledge is not being transmitted to the younger generation. Whilst this point was not made in relation to ecological knowledge specifically, it will certainly apply, and many traditional practices do no doubt rely on a good knowledge of nature.

6.9 Sites, species, practices, events and beliefs that link people to nature

6.9.1 Sites

The assessment identified few specific sites within the landscapes of these communes with a cultural meaning or a special resonance for the surrounding community, although it is likely that they do exist.

The hillock and the swamp of Peșteana are two examples given in Densuș. The first is a knoll in the middle of the plain where local people say there is hidden treasure. The second is a natural botanical sanctuary included in The Hațeg County Dinosaur Park. With an area of two hectares, the sanctuary is one of the most southern swamps with oligotrophic characteristics in Romania, which hosts the carnivorous plant *Drosera rotundifolia* (Dew of Heaven) - a pristine glacial relict.

Zam contains a 6 hectare 'Godinești limestone' protected area, established in the year 2000. The

Godinești archaeological site, represented by 'The Great Cave' or 'The Upper Cave', has a specific protection status as an area used for scientific research. Zam also contains the Pojoga forest, a 20 hectare protected area that hosts a variety of tree species including the *Ruscus aculeatus* shrubs, bearing the common name of "thorn".

Horkan's two oaks are located at the outskirts of Zam. Horkan was a local Hungarian aristocrat who left Zam more than a century ago and hid his treasure under the two oak trees. The place is apparently still visited occasionally by people interested to find the treasure.

None of these natural areas or species are thought to be highly valued in the community.

All three communes also have significant man-made features of interest including a stone church and wooden churches in Densuș, László Nopcsa's castle and a ship-shaped wooden church in Zam, and in Dezna the ruins of a citadel which is said to be connected to the church and village by underground tunnels. The connections between these features and nature are not obvious, other than they are made of natural materials.

6.9.2 Species

There is no mention of any species of flora or fauna that holds significance for people in any of the three communes. It is reported that the presence of large carnivores (wolves, bears) is not keenly cared for but is tolerated. They are perceived and accepted as part of 'the picture' (the landscape).

6.9.3 Traditional practices

As noted above, many traditional livelihood activities in the communes take place in or make use of nature and its resources but the report contains little evidence of any other nature based or nature related practices, ceremonies or rituals.

In Zam, in the past the most important local events and traditions related to nature were 'Cutting the Fern' and 'Chasing the Wood Evil Spirits'. The first one was a pagan celebration in which women took off their clothes and went out to cut the fern which invaded the pasture. The belief was that if a naked woman cut the plant it would never reappear in that area. Women also had an important role in driving away the bad spirits according to the tradition of "Chasing the Wood Evil Spirits". People believed that if a woman broke wood the evil spirit living inside would run away. It is not clear when these practices ceased to exist.

In Dezna, and presumably the other communes too, local traditional costumes have many motifs inspired by nature. It can also be assumed that other forms of art, including song, are inspired by nature, but there is no mention of these in the report.

6.9.4 Events and holidays

According to the consultants there were several local customs, but most of them are rarely respected nowadays or they are now being presented in a different way, tailored to the present times. One example is Densuș Day, *"a popular celebration when those who left the commune, come back and participate in folk shows, eat traditional dishes and drink plum-brandy"* as a local woman presented it.

Nevertheless, many secular or new holidays appear to be named after or linked to natural resources, primarily produce or animals, for example, Shooting the Rooster, The Onion Calendar, The Bear Holiday and The Wolf Holiday. No details on these were provided.

In Dezna, celebrations and holidays related to nature are few. In Zam, Leuca is a celebration in which people get rid of evil and it takes place the last Sunday before Lent when people push large balls of shrubs down the hills.

6.9.5 Beliefs and sayings

Some of the values above indicate some beliefs around nature, for example that being close to nature makes you healthier and increases your longevity. However, very few explicit beliefs or sayings are identified other than *"If you took hazelnuts from the forest, the Old Hag who lives in the forest would kidnap you!"* from a respondent in Zam. There is no further information around the context of this quote but presumably it is from the past, perhaps a tale told to children.

Zam is apparently abundant in legends related to nature and with characters that make local history rich, for example Horkan and his treasure. Presumably, these legends are of some cultural relevance to the people of Zam.

7 Major changes and trends

The most striking theme throughout the information collected by the consultants is the significant amount of change that these communities have experienced over the last half century, and especially since 1989 with the ending of Ceauşescu's communist regime. These changes have undoubtedly influenced and weakened people's connections with nature. Overall, there is a sense of decline and depression, with an increasingly ageing population and land, buildings and even whole villages being abandoned, allowing nature to recolonise. There have been many changes and trends, the majority of which are interlinked. The most significant are as follows.

7.1 Communism

In the early years of the communist regime the collectivisation of agriculture took place. Collectivisation appears to have had 'dividing' effects in Densuş, Zam and Dezna. *"Collectivisation was a nuisance, it divided the community."* It was a crucial change in the life of affected communities and at the end of the process (1989), two distinct types of villages emerged with distinct 'mentalities': the collectivised and those who 'escaped' from collectivisation. According to the consultants, members of communities that experienced collectivisation have strengthened their sense of solidarity with each other and their openness to outsiders, whilst those from un-collectivised communities tend to keep to themselves and are more suspicious of outsiders.

Another significant process during the communist period began in 1975 when people, mainly men, started to commute to their workplaces which were located outside their rural communities, according to Nicolae Ceauşescu's policy of industrialisation. This contributed significantly to their weakened connection with nature.

7.2 Post communism

The results of the transition from a centralised socialist economy to capitalism are said to be dysfunctional and poorly managed. The main impacts mentioned include the following.

7.2.1 Fewer employment opportunities

After 1989, factories in Dezna were closed and no new ones were built and no new businesses that could have provided employment were developed. Many locals left to look for work in the construction or wood industry. This situation was replicated elsewhere. State owned enterprises were closed and people left their communities to look for jobs in other regions of Romania, or abroad. Lack of jobs is identified as the main change that people faced after the fall of communism.

7.2.2 Poor environmental management

Many factors in the post-communist era affected nature and its management including chaotic land restitution processes, massive deforestation, a lack of pro-nature education, and changes in lifestyle. Specific impacts identified include:

- **Increase in wild boar numbers**

The increase in the number of wild boar was mentioned frequently. During the communist regime the state was involved in regulating their numbers and they did little damage, but now many people complain of crop damage due to wild boar. This is a 'dis-benefit' or cost of living so close to nature.

The high number of wild boar is apparently an issue along the whole Mureş Valley and creates tension among people. According to a hunter *"Insurance companies know this problem, they don't insure locals and people do not receive compensations for damages because they have no insurance."*

It was reported that during the period of 1980-1985 bears would also be seen in Zam, but no further information is given.

- **Uncontrolled hunting**

According to a hunter *"Starting from 1989, hunting has been out of control. In the past there were strict rules and very little poaching. Nowadays, there are no rules anymore."* Given the problem of wild boar, it is not entirely clear how this negatively impacts local communities (which is the context it was presented in) but presumably it is because there are 'no rules' and both community members and hunters feel they have little control. In addition, as noted below, relations between local communities and hunting associations are generally not good.

- **Over exploitation of natural resources**

In Densuş, it was reported that natural resources are much more exploited at present than 25 years ago. According to the consultants' report the main natural resource in Dezna is the forest, but it is savagely exploited. Apart from the 'out of control' hunting mentioned above, there is no further information.

7.3 Loss of traditional crafts and skills

The consultants refer to the almost complete disappearance of a number of traditional crafts over the last 50 years. This includes the craft of shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, blacksmiths, furriers, and wheelwrights. Also, only a few people still collect and store medicinal herbs, primarily older people who still use them for treatment. This decline in traditional crafts and associated skills is seen as an indicator of the weakened relationship between people and nature but it could also be a cause.

In Dezna, the skilled local workforce from manufacturing and light industries (woodworking, footwear, apparel and handicraft), some of which may be linked to natural resources, are suffering from a lack of market for their products.

7.4 Changing agricultural practices

These are only a few specific references to changing agricultural practices in the consultants' report but it can be assumed that there have been widespread changes, not only due to migration out of the communities but also due to changing practices (such as increased mechanisation, increased use of artificial fertilisers, and so on) of those who are still farming.

In 1960 there were three watermills in Dezna but all of them have stopped working and are no longer operational. In the valley (also in Dezna) the Colorado beetle appeared in 1955 and herbicides started to be used on a large scale.

According to a villager in Densuș "During the 1950s there were orchards of apple trees, plum trees and pear trees in the commune. After 1990, the villagers took out the trees and planted corn. The corn has not grown because of the soil - the region has yellow soil. Those trees could better fight diseases and were acclimated to the soil here."

7.5 Changing culinary practices

Dezna, due to its 'multi-ethnic' past, has a diverse local cuisine which is said to be of very good quality. However, 'external' catering is a new trend that is endangering local food traditions. An old villager joked *"I also have cats, but they are no longer as they were once. Now they eat dried food from the store, they do not catch mice anymore."* The older generation tries to keep and eat traditional products, but people do not sell their products due to lack of market access.

The popularity of catering companies was also referred to in Zam. People apparently prefer to use them for events and functions instead of preparing food themselves using vegetables and meat from animals, grown and reared in their homesteads as they did in the past.

7.6 Depopulation and an ageing population

Depopulation is a major issue in all 3 communes, and particularly in Zam. Here, the birth rate is decreasing and young people are leaving the villages primarily for Banat (in the western region of Romania) to live in town where they (presumably young men) work in construction or mining. Schools in Zam are disappearing. It is reported that there will be no future generations in this place and that villages like Cerbia and Almășel will likely disappear in the next 10-15 years.

According to a woman from Pogănești (Zam), "In order to maintain local traditions, people would have to stay here. Pogănești is a depopulated village, where tradition cannot survive. You cannot find traditional clothing anymore. The traditional embroidered blouses are worn only in church for different ceremonies. Here are only 20 households. For a community to be viable, it should include more than one hundred households. This is a dead village that cuts off your enthusiasm. Almășel is in the same situation: there are only ten inhabitants.... If I knew that my children would get good money selling this house after I die, maybe I'll do some construction improvement, but my son is not interested in it."

According to a local leader from Densuș *"The traditional households with two or three cows will disappear. Only people who get European funds will remain here. Perhaps there will be no school in Densuș. Probably they will go to school in Hațeg, the nearby city, and there they will also buy what they need from the pharmacy or the health store like Plafar."* The population is aging, there are no marriages, and the birth rate is very low. The consultants conclude that in the long run, only Densuș village (where the public administration structure is located) is likely to survive. Ștei and Poieni will be depopulated and will likely disappear in the next one or two decades, or will be comprised mainly of vacation houses. Nature has already started to 'invade' the place.

Similarly, according to an older man in Dezna *"Only the old people remain in the villages. Look at Laz, a village where the population decreased to 20-30 people. Life for them became harder and harder. It's almost an abandoned village, socially desolate, with sad old people."* Here, the consultants anticipate that Dezna and Buhani will survive, but probably the remaining villages including Slatina de Criș will disappear. One village in the commune, Laz, is already almost deserted.

Apparently the village of Dezna is more urban like in nature, with a mostly 'urban pattern' to follow especially among the younger generation. Unemployment is low, but there are very few who work the land or breed animals traditionally. Although there is a local success story, a well-known cattle farm owned by a young family, most youth have other concerns today. They leave the place to study or to work. Only a few of them return, bringing back the know-how they acquired elsewhere.

7.7 Differences between generations

The consultants write that the most palpable social tension, and one that affects the quality of local communities' benefits from nature (although how and in what ways is not specified), is the conflict or clash between generations. The older generation grew up with a different approach towards the natural environment. They are reported to feel closer to it or part of it and they adapt easily to all its 'caprices'; they take nature as it is - *"Nature takes its right!"*. They depend more on nature for their everyday lives and they pay more attention to their relationship with nature than the younger generation.

Evidence for this is given primarily from Densuș and Dezna. *"Young people believe they know everything, that everything is possible, everything is allowed. They have a totally changed lifestyle. They don't have patience and respect for others anymore. Everyone wants to be a landlord, they don't want to do physical work, or to work, they are free"* explained a woman from Densuș.

Youth from Densuș are reported to be more urban oriented, socially mobile and with a stronger sense of freedom than their ancestors. They are open to challenges and risks and are very familiar with new technologies, which has radically changed their social and cultural life and created a rift between them and old people. Older people do not appear to like new technologies - *"The young ostentatiously display them with an air of superiority."*

According to the consultants, the contrast between the younger and older generations is striking. Young people behave like a counterculture, 'always connected' and influenced by global cultural trends. In this way they are deconstructing the old habits. *"In the past, girls did not go out at night. You could not see them on the street. At the age of 16 they used to get married and a year*

later would have a baby. Now, girls are going out on the street mostly when it gets dark", a local Dezna woman said.

Unlike the 50+ generation, young people spend less time in nature and show little interest in preserving local cultural heritage, traditions or beliefs related to nature. Their local identity, sense of place and other forms of connection to nature are different or weaker than of elders and their focus is outside of their community. According to one young woman from Densuș *"We just follow the trends for a better life. We want to live better than our ancestors. It's just so simple."*

The situation is similar in Dezna where, according to the consultants, people do not think too much of nature. The traditions are disappearing as well as the passion for work and the love of nature. *"All these values are dying. Young people do not realise the importance of natural health products. Old people drink tea instead of water, but young people do not know what's healthy. They follow the fast-food culture. They don't have such contact with nature as in the past",* complained a local parent.

7.8 Loss of 'community'

There appears to be a lost sense of community particularly in Densuș and Dezna. In Densuș local women and men pointed out that transition has altered important social bonding agents in the community like solidarity, trust and mutual understanding. Here, a European funded project was apparently not granted because the applicants could not gather the required number of volunteers. A local leader reported *"There is no community in Densuș. Nothing unites them, neither the church nor the school."*

Relations between households are described as awkward. People do not help each other as they used to; they only help when major events occur (weddings, funerals). *"I don't know, but people have become worse. In the past, people would interact more, they would work together, would party together. Now they are more egoistical, envious, they do not communicate, neighbours don't help each other. Ok, people were more primitive in the past, but they used to eat healthier food, had more fun in a different way than today. They were more open and less suspicious with each other",* said a local women. The exception appears to be the inhabitants of Ștei, who didn't experience collectivisation, communicate less with 'outsiders' and are readily stigmatised by people from other villages, but help each other more.

An elderly woman from Dezna describes a similar situation. *"People are worse and more selfish today. They don't help each other, do not visit their neighbours. Șezători [traditional gatherings] died a half century ago. People now go out just to picnic. In the past we were more united and helped one another more. Today, people are indifferent and individualist."*

The makeup of some of the villages is changing, with people from towns buying vacant houses and land. These people do not apparently interact with local people, or vice versa.

7.9 Social tension and control

This loss of community is believed to be contributing to increasing social division. Over time, gaps between different social groups have been created or deepened and, according to the consultants, there are several latent 'local battles': elders vs. youth, local government vs. citizens, Orthodox vs. Catholics, wealthy vs. poor, liberal worldview vs. conservative worldview or even village X vs.

village Y. For example, there is apparently a sense of 'cultural superiority' among people from Densuș village towards other locals of the commune.

In Densuș, and perhaps elsewhere, there is a lack of communication between formal and informal leaders of the community. Informal groups are seen to be more progressive, but their ideas do not resonate with decision makers. Local administration representatives are reluctant to change, wishing to maintain the status quo. The school is viewed as an institution with a coherent vision but the main local institutions - local administration, Orthodox Church and the Forest District (Ocolul Silivic) - are apparently 'petrified and cumbersome'.

According to the consultants, citizens generally do not discuss community problems and do not participate in debates. They are described as frustrated but also indifferent and expect things to change by themselves, whilst leaders focus on their own wellbeing.

The wider community, in Densuș, is reported to perceive local administrative leadership to be soft and inefficient. Many people don't consider local government as one of them; they do not identify with it. The Mayor is seen as a well-intended person but also as a controversial one. Local government decisions are not discussed with the community, which does not participate in the Local Council meetings.

In Zam, power relations are reported to be oligarchic rather than democratic, with a small group of people making decisions without consultation. In Dezna, social control and conformism are described as strong and political leaders are often perceived as corrupt and individualistic. In Dezna, there is apparently also rivalry between people from Buhani, the former centre of the commune, and Dezna, rebranded by and more active during communism.

Local people certainly seem to have very little control. A man from Zam told the consultants about an off road driving competition held in the commune. *"I was stunned how many strangers came. The organisers charged entry fees and got several thousand of Euro. It was a way to promote the region. But cars made a lot of dust. All vegetable crops on each side of the road were covered with dust over a 10-15 metres broad area. The Environment Department representatives came and forbade the competition. I had mixed feelings. I wish to promote the area, but I also wish to lay asphalt on the road. The off road participants camped in the area and brought their own outdoor portable toilets. For one week there were 20-30 cars from Europe which covered 100-125 km. The Environmental Department representatives made tests in the region and concluded that the competition had a negative impact on nature."*

Another major problem, in Densuș and likely elsewhere, is the dysfunctional relationship between local community members and the Hunting Area (Fondul de Vânătoare). There is much potential for conflict since most households have land on which hunting sessions are organised. Hunting Area people are perceived as 'arrogant' and 'very well connected'. They also avoid communication with the community and do not let anyone near them. According to a man from Densuș, *"They live like in a forbidden city. [...] The hunting ground is sold to people from Bucharest who do not take interest in what happens to us. The wild animals come and damage people's land. They eat their crops. The City Hall cannot compensate them because lack of money."* The consultants tried to contact Hunting Area representatives but were unsuccessful.

7.10 Poor image of environmentalists and lack of environmental discourse

The consultants' report that there are few projects related to nature and, according to locals in Densuş, the natural environment is on the 'hidden agenda' and there are no public debates on the topic. It is not entirely clear whether they mean it is not on the agenda at all, or whether they (locals) are just not party to, or even actively excluded from, discussions on the environment. According to one man *"Wildlife or environmental issues have never been topics of debate during electoral campaigns. We discuss about them only in spring when government subsidies are given, but mostly in private or informal groups."* People are reportedly not familiar or don't really know how to deal with nature conservation - they are apparently 'illiterate and confused' on such issues.

People are mostly negative about wild boar and other wildlife, although which species and in what ways is not stated and – as noted earlier – it is reported that whilst people do not care for large carnivores they accept them as part of the landscape. People are, however, angry about poaching and the activities of Hunting Areas.

Environmentalism and environmentalists have a 'spoiled' image in the communities (although the LCC project specifically is unknown) and nature related issues are frequently subjects of indifference. A few people apparently feel that animals are more protected and draw more attention than local men and women. According to a local from Zam, *"Fauna is not affected! We don't even have dogs! There is a hunting ground and they have a good harvest of wild boar and deer. Hunters are the luckiest. They come from Deva and the nearby communes. People abandoned the cornfields on the hills because wild boars destroyed them. The forest has invaded the area. The State protects the wild boars, not the farmer!"*

Environmental discourse is reported to be perceived by most as a foreign language, and they don't have credible and appropriate sources of information to clarify their questions on the topic. Many locals agree that, from this point of view, they are exposed to misinformation and manipulation. Environmental issues, like any other, are subject to the impacts of social division and dysfunctional relationships mentioned above.

7.11 Weakening connections to nature

The changes and trends mentioned above have all to a greater or lesser extent contributed to, and / or are a consequence of, a considerable weakening of people's connections with nature over the past quarter of a century and longer. According to a respondent from Dezna, *"People do not think of nature. Money talks. The traditions are disappearing as well."*

Both the young and old in these communities live in proximity to nature but, as the consultants' report, the older generation seem to look at it whilst the young have turned their backs to it. The contrast between the aspirations of young people and traditional local culture is marked. Households strongly dependent or linked to nature are becoming, little by little, history. Most young people want to leave their place of birth and move to urban areas or overseas. The few who return [to Densuş] are changed and see things and those who never left follow the new trends.

7.12 The ebb and flow of nature

Changing agricultural practices, depopulation, and the abandonment of land in villages has led to nature recolonising some areas, particularly in the more remote villages. As a local leader in Densuş explained *"Nature is pulsating and conquers deserted places. People draw away and*

nature comes back. People go away from Cliva to Densuş, from Densuş to Haşeg, from Haşeg to Deva, from Deva to Timişoara and from Timişoara to abroad. There is new dynamic, which is leading to new mental geography and space perceptions. There is a continuous struggle between humans and nature. There are epochs and eras when humans extend on nature and vice versa. Now we are in an expansion phase of nature."

An increasingly ageing population is believed to be contributing to this. According to the consultants, in some of the villages in Zam the population is so aged that they practically cannot damage nature.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

Despite a number of limitations the assessment has provided much useful information for the LCC project. Whilst it is important to recognise the differences between villages and to seek to understand the specific context in which activities are implemented, there are clearly many similarities between villages and how they are responding to the challenges and opportunities presented by the changes they are undergoing.

It is obvious that the project area has a very rich history, with many livelihood and cultural practices linking people directly to its landscapes and nature. It is still a region rich in biodiversity and natural resources but peoples relationship with nature, as well as with their history, are becoming increasingly distant. The information gathered during the assessment presents a rather bleak picture for the future of many villages in the project area. However, despite the rather depressing outlook there are some glimmers of hope which could be potential opportunities for the project to build upon.

The consultants identify a few 'success stories' of younger people who are not migrating for work to urban areas but remain in their villages and are maintaining more traditional livelihood activities. For example in Densuş there is the case of a 23-year-old man who is a nature lover and who two years ago became a shepherd. He sees his profession as an alternative to the lack of opportunity in the labour market for young people. He has good revenues, invests money and passion in his business, participates in workshops to learn to volunteer (presumably on environmental issues, although this is not stated) and takes part in agricultural shows and sheep fairs where he presents his sheep. Similarly in Dezna, there is well known cattle farm owned by a young family. The project team could make contact with people like this throughout the project area and facilitate their engagement both with the project and with others, either in their own communities or elsewhere, to share their experience and learning to try and encourage other younger people to consider remaining in their home area and building a farming-based livelihood.

According to local people in Dezna, priorities for investment related to nature are farming, ecological agriculture, beekeeping, snail farms, mushrooms, berries, medicinal plants, bottled spring water, wind turbines and tourism. The context in which these priorities were raised or discussed is not clear, and whilst many of these may be beyond the scope of the project it is perhaps encouraging that people do actually see the need for investment in these activities rather than in totally non nature related or urban based activities.

One respondent in Zam stated *"If anyone could give us an example of ecologically sustainable exploitation, we could live better. We need to have a better relationship with nature than we have*

at present." This presents a clear opportunity for the project - there are people who want to rekindle or improve their relationship with nature but they need support in doing so.

The consultants' refer to a new trend in Densuş and other rural areas towards a 'mystical-nationalist revival', to recover national identity as a response to globalisation and western culture. There is no detail beyond this but it is worth exploring because, presumably, this indicates an interest in reconnecting with nature and with cultural values that are being or have been eroded in recent decades.

It is reported that older people feel vulnerable. They are reportedly willing to preserve their traditions and their products but they perceive EU policies and globalisation as threats to their cultural heritage. They don't fully understand the meanings of the changes they have experienced and are witnessing, which are thus sources of tensions in the community. The consultants state that among the older generation, women seem to be more open to the challenges of current economic and social values than men, but no detail is given. Whilst the future of these communities is largely in the hands of younger people, any revival must be informed by the knowledge and experiences of older people. The project could potentially contribute to building bridges between the generations, encouraging them to listen to their different perspectives and learn from each other.

It is encouraging that the LCC project is already addressing many of the issues that are of concern to men and women living in the project area. Similarly, although the identification and articulation of cultural values connecting men and women to their natural environment was apparently challenging and those connections are weakening, it is clear that the project, along with associated projects implemented by Asociatia Zarand (AZ), is already working to develop and revitalise these.

For example, AZ has taken on the management (custodianship) of a key Natura 2000 site (Zarandul de Est) within the landscape and is using this to demonstrate good practice through engagement across all 17 Natura 2000 sites and wider stakeholders. The LCC project is supporting the development of Regional Species Action Plans for bear and wolf and is working with appropriate government agencies to improve forestry and hunting management within the landscape, including assessing and modifying forestry and hunting management plans to ensure harmonisation with conservation.

Hunting was identified as a key issue during the assessment, with a perception that it is 'out of control' with very poor relations between hunting associations and local community members. Although hunting is a traditional activity in the region, it does not appear to have been identified as such during the discussions. The LCC project is working to improve hunting practice (through hunting area management planning) and the project rangers in particular are acting as the interface between community members and hunters, trying to facilitate and improve these relationships. The project could explore further how to increase the transparency of hunting associations, particularly in relation to how hunting revenue is used and how this benefits communities. It may also be worth gaining a greater understanding of hunting association membership and scope for increasing the representation of local people among this.

The project has established a Human Wildlife Conflict Intervention Team and their regular and visible presence in the area, and interactions with community members, has been welcomed. Mitigation measures are being trialled, including the deployment of repellents to deter wild boar from potato crops and the project is increasing awareness of compensation processes, informing

affected parties of their rights and steps needed to make and follow through a claim. The HWC work also includes engaging with regional and national policy makers to develop a long-term and national strategy for dealing with human-wildlife conflict. It will be important to ensure that the views of local people are considered in any such strategy, and the project can play a key role in ensuring this.

That people living in villages in the project area feel they have little control over what happens in their villages was another key theme from the assessment, as well as poor relationships between different groups including local leaders and people in the communities they are meant to represent. AZ is facilitating the inclusion of community perspectives into local development strategies, having been approached by two local councils from Petris and Zam to support them to develop the strategies. In addition, the organisation is supporting the enhancement and diversification of livelihood activities around Zarand, primarily through a milk collection facility and supporting the production of traditional products (including honey, jams, cordials and syrups, compote, breads and alcoholic liqueurs). Through such work, and the wider LCC interventions, the current poor image of conservationists and lack of environmental discourse can begin to be addressed.

AZ already has a work component on 'revitalising local culture, traditions and heritage' which is trying to address the increasing disconnect with nature and cultural values that prevailed in the past, and the associated changes in agricultural and culinary practices as well as the loss of community. This work has included the restoration of a number of buildings and equipment (e.g. water mill, fruit dryer, barn and oil press), attendance at festivals and promoting products, song and dance, and traditional skills, and establishing a local museum and visitor information point.

The LCC project, as well as AZ, produces a range of communications materials including leaflets, calendars, t-shirts, pens, notebooks and roll-ups, which are disseminated to stakeholders during meetings and events. It is recommended that these, along with the LCC project and AZ's communications strategies, are reviewed and refined as appropriate based on the results of this assessment.

In addition, the project could consider carrying out a number of facilitated discussions within its key/target sites. Deliberative approaches have been used to great effect, for example during an ecosystem services assessment in the Solomon Isles where – as in the LCC project area - traditional customs and values, and social cohesion, have come under pressure from the drive for monetary wealth. This approach resulted in significant learning for participants, including the development of a more sophisticated view of ecological-cultural linkages, greater recognition of deeper held values, and increased awareness of the consequences of human actions for the environment¹⁰. The assessment thus became an intervention in itself. Even a relatively small number of focused and informed discussions could provide the project with additional information to inform ongoing interventions and communications, as well as mobilise support for reconnecting with nature, including the cultural values that underpin these connections.

Many of the values identified during the assessment appear to be linked to the landscape, its qualities (such as charm, freshness, purity and abundance) and the feelings that it evokes, rather than specific sites and species. Although this presents difficulties in terms of how to integrate and promote such values within the project, it is actually very appropriate given the scale of the

¹⁰ Kenter J et al (2011) *The importance of deliberation in valuing ecosystem services – evidence from the Solomon Islands*. *Global Environmental Change* 21: 505-521

project and its focus on habitat connectivity and movement of species at a landscape level. The priority now is thus to more clearly articulate these values and the linkages between them, the wellbeing of local women and men, and the landscape, to inform the projects communications with key stakeholders throughout the project area.

Appendix 1: Assessment objectives and key questions

Objectives

- To increase our knowledge of the socio-cultural context in which we are working
- To increase our knowledge and understanding of the contribution of biodiversity and ecosystem services to local people's well-being
- To explore the values underlying people's perceptions of nature, their well-being, and the connections between them.
- To use this knowledge to inform our programme decision making and implementation

Key questions

- What aspects of nature do people benefit from and in what ways?
- What are the sites, species, practices, beliefs and institutions that link people to nature?
- How does nature and the benefits it provides contribute to wellbeing, including the maintenance of cultural values, practices and identity?
- What are the livelihood strategies of different socio-economic groups within the community?
- What factors influence these livelihood strategies?
- What changes, shocks, and trends have households experienced, including those relating to nature, and how have they responded to these?