



MOVING
MOUNTAIN VALORISATION THROUGH
INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND GREEN GROWTH

Policy Brief

ŠUMAVA - CESKY LES | High quality beef production



Photo credit: Jakub Husák



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Šumava – Cesky Les: High quality beef production

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Summary

Historically the natural resources of the Šumava been used in agriculture and forestry. The agricultural sector in the region has undergone a transition in the last 30 years, after the collapse of the socialist regime. The region includes unique natural ecosystems that are protected under the status of Natural Park. One of the key challenges is finding a balance between ecology and economic activities. The local ecosystems are currently experiencing new pressures associated with global climate change (such as outbreaks of bark beetle and extreme weather events). It is a priority to create holistic policies that can respond to emerging challenges, to protect and enhance cultural and natural heritage of the Šumava region.

Know more about the Šumava – Cesky Les Reference Region, its selected value chain and the regional multi-actor platform (MAP), [here](#).

Key policy messages

- Create holistic policy regulation.
- Support activities that positively impact on water retention in the landscape.
- Create new opportunities for farmers to valorise food production on farms.

1. The Mountain Reference Region (MRR)

The Šumava Mountains are among the oldest mountains in Central Europe. Their peaks reach from 700 to 1 400 metres above sea level. The mountains are spread across the Czech and German borders.

Historically the natural resources of the region have been used in agricultural and forestry activities. German and Czech people sparsely populated the mountain region, but after WWII the German population was displaced. Due to this, the region lost most of its traditional population. During the socialist era (1948-1988) the region suffered from economic decline. Industrialised agriculture operated by socialist collective farms paid very little respect to natural conditions. On the other hand, during this time, large areas of the mountain region were closed (due to strictly controlled borders with West Germany), which left unique ecosystems undisturbed and these are now considered the most valuable natural heritage of the region.



The agricultural sector in the region has undergone a transition in the last 30 years (after the collapse of the socialist regime in 1989). The socialist farms were privatised and their production was transformed. The current approach to farming is based on extensive use of natural resources that emphasise the high nature value of the mountain region.

National Park Šumava (covering approx. 68 300 ha) is surrounded by a Nature Protected Area (covering approx. 99 500 ha). All economic activities in the mountain region are therefore constrained by regulations aimed at the protection of natural ecosystems. The mountain region has been traditionally used also for forestry, mostly plantations of spruce trees (and to a lesser extent fir trees and pines). Forestry has recently struggled with new challenges, such as outbreaks of bark beetle, strong winds and droughts that have raised questions about the sustainability of the local forest ecosystems and the impacts of forestry.

2. Cattle farms on Šumava – back to tradition?

Farming in the Šumava Mountains has undergone a significant transformation in the last three decades. Most local farms have successfully profited from new trends in agricultural policy on one side and new consumer preferences on the other. The local farms have been positively motivated by agri-environmental measures to balance their farming methods with the interests of nature protection. Extensive farming in this way has become not only accepted, but also a desired method of protecting the region's natural resources.

Most farms in the Šumava Mountains therefore provide several functions – from landscape maintenance, provision of ecosystem services, to food production. Since the Šumava Mountains are a very popular destination for tourists in winter and summer, a lot of farms offer accommodation to guests. These farms are further motivated to extend their range of services and products. It is therefore common to see farms that produce meat (mostly beef or sheep), eggs, honey, vegetables, and herbs that are processed on the farm and sold to their guests.

The extensive approach to farming accords with organic methods, that are typically implemented on farms. Some areas of the Šumava Mountains only include organic farms. However, successful farms in the region are far from using purely 'traditional' methods; they implement progressive methods in cattle breeding, grazing management and meat processing. Their production has been recently supported by rising consumer interest in directly purchasing farm products. Direct marketing has therefore become a new source of income for many small farms in the region.

3. Value chain contribution to sustainability and resilience of the MRR

Currently there are more than 60 farms in treeless areas of the National Park. This area covers approximately 10 000 ha; however, the farms use less than 50% of the land. The ongoing discussion suggests that this area might be enlarged in future. Increasing farming activity in the



high-nature value areas – using a sustainable approach that would protect and enhance the natural heritage of the region – is one of the key opportunities.

Since agriculture deeply impacts on local ecosystems, one of the main challenges is to find a balance between agricultural activities and nature protection. The strategy of nature protection currently clashes with forestry. It is not clear to what extent the areas of Natural Park shall be left ‘untouched’ when forests are devastated by bark beetle.

Nowadays, it is becoming clearer that the mountain ecosystems are very sensitive to global climate changes. Further usage of the natural resources, with respect to the natural and cultural heritage, will require a sensitive and thoughtful regulation to balance the needs of engaged stakeholders in different areas.

4. Policy relevant considerations

The general challenge for policy implemented in the Šumava region is to find a balance between economy and ecology to create resilient systems of farming. The new policy should consider expected changes and the associated sustainable challenges, particularly related to global climate change and the ageing population of farmers.

It is desirable to generate policy actions that respond to these challenges in a holistic way. For this, it is important to implement measures that would motivate farmers to carry out farming activities in areas with high nature value, protect ecosystems and at the same time increase biodiversity. Specific attention needs to be given to water in the landscape. Hydrological conditions are severely changing under climate change, to create new threats to the region in the form of extreme weather events and long-term negative impacts. It is also important to generate policy actions that enable farmers to make their farms more attractive for tourists, and to valorise their production on farms to increase the economic performance of their enterprises.

Reference

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